



## **Encountering the Pharisees**

Come Fill Your Cup  
Virtual Retreat 2022

# Speaker Bios

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**Kristy Huntsman** is the Editor-in-Chief for ComeFillYourCup.com and the author of three books in the Finer Grounds Bible Study series, available from Kaio Publications. She and her husband Lance attend the Stonewall Church of Christ in Stonewall, OK, where Lance is the minister. They live on a little homestead in Happyland, OK where Kristy homeschools their two girls, Taylor (12) and Makayla (10). She holds a master's degree in Biblical Studies from Bear Valley Bible Institute as well as bachelor's and master's degrees in Music Performance. Kristy hobbies include drawing, gardening, and raising chickens.

**Lacy Crowell** has been married to the love of her life, Jonathan, for 20 years. They are blessed with four amazing kiddos whom Lacy has had the privilege of homeschooling, and they worship with the Garriott Rd church of Christ in Enid, OK as Jonathan works as a missionary for the World Bible Institute. Lacy loves to read, eat ice cream, and play Catan with her family (especially when she wins.) She is a graduate of the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver and is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. Her great joy is working to strengthen families, starting with her own, and helping her sisters in Christ become excited about their service to the Lord and study of His word. She is the author of two Bible study books for women: Proclaimed – Jesus the Messiah which is a study of the Gospel of Mark, and Pursued – God's Design for Intimacy in Marriage: a study of Song of Solomon.

**Erynn Sprouse** is the author of Perfected: God's Best Reserved For You (A Study of Hebrews). Erynn has been married to Jeremy since 1999. She earned her Associates from Adams State University and her Bachelor of Arts from Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver. She is the creator of Come Fill Your Cup women's ministry, including website and retreats. She has enjoyed speaking for ladies' days and retreats in several states. She is a stay home, homeschooling mom to five boys and one girl in Dublin, Texas where Jeremy serves as the pulpit minister.

## Introduction and Matthew 23

Kristy Huntsman

- I. Pharisees
  - a. Jewish party that exercised strict piety according to the Mosaic law
  - b. Largest and most influential religious-political party in New Testament times
  - c. They were lay people who were thought to be experts in the law.
  - d. In a sociological sense they brokered power between the aristocracy and the masses
  - e. Became active around 150BC
  - f. The term “Pharisee” comes from the Aramaic word PRSH which means “to separate, divide, or distinguish” (Lexham Bible Dictionary)
  - g. Paired with other groups: the Sadducees, the scribes, the chief priests
- II. Pharisees in Matthew → Hypocrites
  - a. Hypocrite = an actor in a play or pretender
  - b. The Gospel of Matthew contains the highest frequency of the word hypocrite/hypocrisy (14 total, 7 of these are found in Matthew 23 alone).
  - c. The first 3 uses of the word hypocrite in Matthew occur in Matthew 6 during the Sermon on the Mount.
    - i. The overarching theme of this passage is Matthew 6:1- “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise, you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.”

- ii. The hypocrite is painted as one who does things only for the praise and honor of others.
    - iii. Jesus warns that this praise and honor will be where their reward ends, they have no reward with our Heavenly Father.
  - d. Matthew 7
    - i. In this passage, the hypocrite is described as one who focuses their judgement on other people without examining their own life.
    - ii. Jesus does not condemn helping others with the sin in their life; however, he does condemn those that do this while still living a life steeped in sin.
  - e. Other instances of hypocrites are seen when the Pharisees are purposefully trying to trap Jesus and his apostles by asking trick questions or condemning them for not adhering to tradition.

### III. Matthew 23:13-36

- a. Context
  - i. Jesus is speaking to the crowds and His disciples
  - ii. Throughout the previous chapter the Pharisees and Sadducees had been trying to trap Him by asking questions that they thought were unanswerable. Jesus's wise answers silenced them immediately.
  - iii. After these confrontations, Jesus turned and addressed the crowds, who had been listening to this confrontation.
  - iv. In Matthew 23:3, Jesus implies that these men are teaching some correct things about the law, but they are unwilling to follow it themselves.

- b. This section is referred to as the “seven woes of Jesus”
  - i. because of the formula that Jesus used throughout the passage:  
“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”
  - ii. The exact phrase is used in Matthew 23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, and 29  
(verse 14 does not appear in earliest manuscripts)
  - iii. The other “woe” appears in Matthew 23:16, but diverges slightly in  
the exact pattern
  - iv. Pronouncement of “woe” would have been familiar to this crowd  
because of the teachings of the prophets (cf. Is 5:8-22; Jer 13:27;  
Ezek 13:3; Hos 7:13; Am 6:1; Mic 2:1; Na 3:1; Hab 2:6; Zeph 2:5;  
Zech 11:17, etc). →mostly indicated judgement on particular people  
for wrongdoing
  - v. Jesus Himself issues woes in other places (Matthew 11:21, Matthew  
18:1-7, Matthew 26:24)
  - vi. Pay attention to the accusatory language of this section, in just 14  
verses “you” and its various forms are used 36 times.

**IV. Matthew 23:13- But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees,  
hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of  
heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you  
allow those who are entering to go in.**

- a. A considerable amount of this gospel is devoted to Jesus’s teaching about  
the kingdom; in Matthew alone the word kingdom (BASILEIA) is used 162  
times.

- b. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus was doing everything He could to point people toward the kingdom
  - c. Because the religious leaders of the day were threatened by Him, they tried to thwart His influence in any way they could.
  - d. By doing this, they were estranged from the kingdom of God and their guidance would bar others from the kingdom as well
- V. Matthew 23:15- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.**
- a. Jesus chastises the scribes and Pharisees for going to great lengths to bring people to God; however, because of their blindness, their converts will share their same condemnation.
  - b. Jesus's language here is intentionally shocking. He calls them "sons of hell."
  - c. Throughout Matthew hell (GEHENNA) has been used by Jesus to depict the fiery judgement that awaits those that do not enter His kingdom (cf Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15).
  - d. This is their final sentence and they will be guilty of bringing many along with them.
- VI. Matthew 23:16- Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.'**
- a. Jesus diverges from his typical formula

- b. Throughout Matthew Jesus has been depicted as one who gives sight to the blind (cf. Matt 9:27-30; 12:22; 15:30; 20:30-34; 21:14).
- c. While these religious leaders were not blind in the literal sense, it was their unwillingness to accept Jesus that caused them to earn this comical label of “blind guides.” In the next seven verses, Jesus deals with the specific issue of the oaths that these men were swearing.
- d. In the next seven verses, Jesus deals with the specific issue of the oaths that these men were swearing. They were willfully being deceptive and approving of that deception if it followed specific guidelines. If one swore by the temple it meant nothing to them, while swearing on the gold in the temple was binding. According to this passage they also did this with the altar, gifts on the altar, heaven, the throne of God, and the One who sits on the throne.
- e. Jesus poses the question in verse seventeen: “You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?” This theme of which or who is greater is common throughout Matthew, beginning in Matthew 18:1 with the disciples approaching Jesus to ask “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus responds by stating that the greatest is the one that humbles himself like a child. This theme continues throughout the following chapters with Jesus encouraging those who wish to become great to consider themselves servants (cf Matt 20:26; 23:11). He also answers the question of which is the greatest of the commands. Quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5, He states, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind

(Matthew 22:36).” Here in Matthew 23:17, Jesus is the one asking the question, “Which is more important?” or literally “Which is greater?” Once again, they had a misguided scale of the importance of things, the gold is not more important than the temple itself.

- f. Not only were their perspectives skewed in this matter, their hearts were so hardened that they were unable to simply see the fact that they were being dishonest at the root of it all. This passage is reminiscent of Matthew 5:33-37, in which Jesus also addresses the issue of oaths. He makes the case that there should be no reason to swear by things in the first place. He commands, “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No;’ anything more than this comes from evil.” The scribes and Pharisees were so caught up in the traditions and teachings of men on this matter, that they neglected the simplicity of stating the truth without pretense or manipulation.

**VII. Mathew 23:23-24- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!**

- a. This is a play on words since dill, mint and cummin weigh very little.
- b. These “weightier provisions” that they were ignoring were justice (KRISIS), mercy (ELEOS), and faith (PISTIS)
  - i. Justice



1. Matthew states that Jesus is the one prophesied who will bring KRISIS (justice) to the Gentiles and will lead KRISIS to victory
2. The Pharisees were certainly masters at condemnation but they were not judicial in any sense of the word.

ii. Mercy

1. Having mercy on someone is equivalent to showing compassion or clemency
2. Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6 on two occasions (Matthew 9:13 and 12:17).
3. In each of these instances, the Pharisees were completely focused on their scale of right and wrong based on traditions.
4. While Jesus had his eyes focused on the souls around Him, the Pharisees could only focus on themselves and how everything reflected on them.
5. True mercy upholds God's law while showing compassion for the souls of others.

iii. Faithfulness

1. Faithfulness (PISTIS) carries with it the idea of trusting in, relying on, and believing.
2. Throughout the gospel of Matthew, faithful people believed so fully that Jesus was the answer to their physical deficiencies that they sought Him out, sometimes with great effort and difficulty.

3. The Pharisees were anything but faithful. If something did not add to their public persona, then there was no reason to pursue it.
  4. Their religion had become one of checklists and impossible rules; reliance and trust had completely fallen off of their radar.
- c. Notice that Jesus does not say that they should not have been concerned with every small aspect of the law, in fact He states they should have been tithing dill, mint, and cumin; however, they should have been doing it without forgetting about the unseen portions of the Law.

**VIII. Matthew 23:25- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!**

**For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.**

- a. Jesus once again emphasizes the idea that the Pharisees only care about those things that can be seen by men.
- b. Jesus does not hesitate to point out the greedy actions of the Pharisees. In Matthew 15:5, Jesus rebukes them for holding back from giving to their parents by designating their wealth “given to God.”
- c. They were skilled at finding the loopholes that would allow them to bypass the Law for their own selfish purposes.
- d. The person who is full of self-indulgence cannot control their inner urges. They let their selfish desires rule their actions.

- e. This lack of self-control only serves to fuel the greed found within these leaders.
- f. Jesus admonishes them to focus first on these inward qualities and the outward actions will follow suit

**IX. Matthew 23:27- Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.**

- a. The imagery is meant to be vivid and cause an unpleasant reaction to those who were listening.
- b. The idea of uncleanness would have been incredibly insulting to these men who put such a heavy emphasis on being ceremonially clean and not associating with anything that would taint their purity.
- c. The accusation of lawlessness would have been highly offensive to these men who considered themselves experts in the law

X. The final “woe” section in Matthew 23 is laid out in a chiasmic structure:

**A. “For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous (Matt 23:29).”**

**B. “and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets’ (Matt 23:30).”**

**C. “So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers (Matt 23:31-32).”**

**D. “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell (Matt 23:33)?”**

**C’. “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city (Matt 23:34).”**

**B’. “so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar (Matt 23:35).”**

**A’. “Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation (Matt 23:36).”**

- a. Jesus spends the first half of the chiasm reminding them of their disdain for their forefathers who murdered the prophets.
- b. In the parallel second half of the chiasm, Jesus declares that they will be guilty of this same sin.
- c. The central point of the chiasm usually indicates the main idea of the passage. In this case it is Jesus’s accusation that they are a “brood of vipers” and His statement that they will not “escape the sentence of hell.”
- d. The idea of shedding righteous blood is emphasized throughout this passage. It was their fathers who shed the blood of the righteous prophets

that they now honor. However, it would be them that would spill the blood of the prophets who Christ would send.

- e. Jesus makes a familiar accusation, calling the Scribes and Pharisees a “brood of vipers” characterizing them as a family of venomous snakes, dangerous and toxic to all those around (cf Matthew 3:8, 12:34)
- f. Jesus makes the statement that they would be guilty of all of the righteous blood shed from Abel to Zechariah. Abel being the first righteous blood shed (Genesis 4) and Zechariah being the last righteous blood shed in the Hebrew Bible (2 Chronicles 24:20-21). By referencing the bookends Jesus implies guilt for all of the murders throughout Scripture.

#### XI. Conclusion

- a. While this passage seems harsh, Jesus shows his tender love for their souls in the following verses.
- b. He compares Himself to a mother hen who wants nothing more than to gather her babies under her wing; however, these children are unwilling to be cared for and loved.
- c. The sadness and finality of these words can be felt as he declares that they will not hear from Him in this way again until His return

## Mark 7

Katy Ballance

### The Pharisees Found in Mark's Gospel:

#### **Chapter 2: The Pharisees Questioning Jesus**

- 2:7 - *"Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"*
- 2:16 - *"Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?"*
- 2:18 - *"Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"*
- 2:24 - *"Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"*

#### **Chapter 3: The Pharisees Conspiring Against Jesus**

- 3:6 - *"The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him."*
- 3:22 - *"The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and 'He casts out the demons by the ruler of demons.'"*
- Jesus refutes them and in vs. 34-35 draws a line by saying *"whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."* Jesus is showing the difference in who is working with Him and those who are working against Him.

#### **Chapter 4: Jesus' Parable in Response to the Pharisees**

- When you get to chapter 4, Jesus gives the parable of the sower. It's important for us to remember that when Jesus tells a parable it isn't a stand-alone teaching, but it falls within a context and series of events taking place. So, when Jesus gives this parable, we have to ask, what provoked Him to teach this parable? Everything seen in the previous chapters; the questioning of Jesus, the accusing Him of working for Satan, the trying to destroy His reputation, all of that led up to Jesus giving this parable.
- 4:3-4 - *"Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up."*
- 4:15 - *"These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word, which has been sown in them."*
- In this whole context, we can see the Pharisees are the one's who are "the bird" taking the word from people's lives (3:6,22).

- It is ironic how they have been accusing Jesus of working for Satan and then Jesus teaches this parable about Satan taking away the word. The Pharisees are all working to take away the word from the people. Therefore, the Pharisees are doing the work of Satan.

**We don't see the Pharisees again until chapter 7, which is where our focus will be.**

### **After chapter 7: The Pharisees Plot to Kill Jesus**

- 8:31; 9:31; 10:33 - Mark reveals the true intentions of this group. These will be the people who deliver Jesus to be killed.
- Throughout the rest of the book this group is seeking how to kill Him and are able to completely turn the people away from Jesus (15:11-15).

**So, Mark presents the Pharisees as a group of people who not only question Jesus and accuse Him, but eventually deliver Him to be killed. They are men who claim to be Jewish leaders devoted to God. In reality they are men directly working for Satan in their pursuit to destroy Jesus. Jesus even describes them as Satan taking the word out of people's lives like a bird picks up seed off the sidewalk. Their goal, in the book of Mark, is to take this movement out of the world and out of the lives of those trying to follow Jesus.**

### **Application:**

Do we see people like this today? Are there people around us trying to stomp out the word of God? A lot of us might be tempted to point fingers at those in the world and say, "Yes of course, there are unbelievers questioning our faith and trying to put an end to the Christian movement." But the direct application we see is that the Pharisees were Jewish brothers of Jesus, who served the same God, yet they worked to destroy His reputation and end His movement. So, we have to ask ourselves, do we see our Christian brothers and sisters today doing the same thing?

Believe it or not, there are those in Christ trying to stomp out other brothers and sisters in Christ. There are those who write articles and books, who post on social media, who preach sermons, and even those who host lectureships with the entire purpose of shutting down other Christians. Whether we see it or not, or have experienced it personally or not, there are many in our brotherhood who are trying to stomp out good Biblical Christianity just because it may look different than their traditions or what they have always done.

And the bigger question is, are we those people? We need to look at ourselves to be sure we aren't the modern-day Pharisee.

### **Our Focus:**

This all leads us to our discussion for this lesson. Jesus confronts this group in chapter 7 about one of their biggest problems, **the way they elevated their traditions over the word of God (7:8,9,13)**

### **I. The Scene (7:1-4):**

- In order to have the full setting we can begin at Mark 6:53.
- Jesus and his disciples made their way to the countryside of Gennesaret. Immediately as they came to land, people recognized Jesus and everyone was coming to Him to be healed. It is obvious at this point in Jesus' movement, He was known everywhere. We find crowds of people following Him and coming to Him constantly.
- The word crowd or people is found roughly 38 times in Mark. You see phrases like, "because of the crowd", "a large crowd", "all the people", "the whole crowd", throughout Mark. We see this crowd beginning to follow Jesus as early as chapter 2. In 2:4, there is a paralytic man who can't even reach Jesus because of the crowd, then the roof is removed, and they lower him down to be healed by Jesus.
- Jesus had gained popularity and a following. People were listening to Him and to His teachings. For the Pharisees and the leaders of the Jews, this would have posed a huge threat. In their eyes, this was a new preacher in town who was causing a fuss and disrupted normal business. Imagine the crowds and how it could have caused problems, not only for the Jews but for the Romans. The Romans would have surely noticed the commotion and were probably even pressing the Pharisees to get control of their people.
- All of these details help to set our scene where we find where the Pharisees come from Jerusalem to find this "problem maker preacher", Jesus.

### **Mark 7:1-4:**

***"The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed.(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)"***



## **Overview:**

- The Pharisees and the religious leaders had come all the way from Jerusalem to continue their pursuit in questioning Jesus, ultimately trying to trap Him in some way. They were watching Jesus and His disciples looking for something to find wrong. They saw that Jesus' disciples are eating with "impure hands" according to their traditions. They attempted to use against this against Jesus.
- Mark references where this teaching is coming from and the source of their accusation. The Pharisees and Jews strictly follow the tradition and teachings that have been passed down in their book of laws called the Mishnah. It's important to remember that these are man's teachings, not God's.
- Mark states that they "observe" the traditions of the elders. The original meaning of this word, is a lot stronger than just observing or noticing something, but it means, "to adhere strongly to, to hold, to remain firmly committed to" (BDAG). This wasn't just observing something passively but a strong commitment.
- It is interesting how this word is used throughout the book of Mark. It is also translated in some verses "to seize, to arrest, to take." "To observe" is strong language and gives the imagery as if you're 'grabbing to arrest'. That is how firm these Jewish leaders held to their traditions.

## **Details:**

- v. 1 - A quick observation to note is that these Pharisees were coming FROM Jerusalem. This would have been a special trip just for them to find another opportunity to question Jesus and accuse Him.
- v. 2 - Impure (Defile) - κοινός - "of that which is ceremonially impure" (BDAG). is found 7 times in chapter 7, also used as "defile". First, we see how they describe what the disciples are doing as impure, but then we see how Jesus uses the word later to describe what will truly defile a man.
- v. 3 - Observing - κρατέω - "to adhere strongly to, to hold" "to remain firmly committed to" (BDAG). - is found 3 times in chapter 7. The meaning of this word shows us how strongly they were committed to their traditions. It is interesting how this word is used throughout the book of Mark. It is also translated, "to seize, to arrest, to take". It also carries the idea "to possess power", "to hold in one's hand" (TDNT). The way the word is used, shows us the force this word has behind it. Mark is

using this strong language to give us the imagery of how binding these traditions were and how they were held onto as if grabbing to arrest someone.

- v. 3 - Traditions - παράδοσις - “the content of instruction that has been handed down” (BDAG). - is found 6 times in chapter 7. These were teachings that have been passed down by the elders and found in the Mishnah.
- v. 3-4 - Considering the explanation of the Jewish teachings Mark gives in verses 3-4, the audience would have included Gentiles. He references the teaching of the washing of hands. Teachings like this can be found in the Mishnah in the chapter titled “Yadayim” (Hands). The main idea is there is an entire section dedicated to these practices that were passed down from generation to generation. These traditions and practices were not commands given by God.

### **Application:**

Just like they had traditions that they wanted to uphold, we too have traditions that we like to uphold in the church. Don't we?

- We like to be sure that our congregations only use a specific Bible translation.
- We like to be sure we have our Sunday nights and Wednesday nights.
- We like to be sure our order of worship stays the same.
- We like to be sure we maintain the right dress code and “dress our best” for worship.
- We even like to stick to our “assigned seats” in worship.

We have traditions we like to cling to, things we've done for so long they become apart of our religion. We are a lot like the Jews in this way. Tradition's aren't always bad things, but what happens in the rest of the text really reveals the issue.

All of this introduces what the Pharisees do next: they come with a question.

## **II. The Pharisee's Question (7:5):**

***Mark 7:5***

***“The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?’”***

### **Overview:**

- After seeing that the disciples weren't following a Jewish tradition, they use it against Jesus and began to question Him.

- They used the phrase “with impure hands”, because in the Jewish teaching (from the Mishnah) if they did not cleanse properly according to their laws, they were impure. This is not a teaching that came from God, but from their elders.
- They are asking almost with the attitude of “why do your followers feel like they don’t have to follow our traditions”. You can tell by their questions that they are threatened and questioning Jesus’ authority.

### **Details:**

- Tradition - παράδοσις - “the content of instruction that has been handed down” (BDAG).
- Impure - κοινός - “of that which is ceremonially impure” (BDAG).

### **Application:**

This is the same question modern day Pharisees are asking today, “Why are you not doing what we are doing?” They aren’t asking a genuine question but they’re asking with an attitude of, “do you think you’re too good to do things the way we do them? And if you are, that is sin.” Examples of this today are abundant:

- “Why don’t you have a second worship service on Sunday? Do you not want to come together more?”
- “Why do you use the NIV? Don’t you know that has false teaching in it?”
- “Why don’t you dress nicer for worship? Don’t you want to give your best to the Lord?”
- “Why aren’t you at church every time the doors are open? Don’t you know you’re supposed to spend time with Christians?”
- “Why do you let your kids go to public school? Don’t you know they’re going to corrupt your kids?”

These are just a few examples. We ask the same questions today sometimes without even realizing that we’re pressing our traditions on people, when God never pressed those things on them.

### **III. Jesus’ Response (7:6-13):**

#### **A. Jesus Addresses the Problem (7:6-9) —**

#### ***Mark 7:6-9***

***“And He said to them, ‘Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:***

***This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.***

***But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. '***

***'Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.' He was also saying to them, 'You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.'"***

### **Overview:**

- Jesus responds to their question with a Scripture they should be familiar with.
- Jesus referred back to when Isaiah was talking about the wicked Jews who were sent in Babylonian captivity and related that same situation to the Pharisees. But after years and years of traditions and manmade laws building up, Jesus said they had become just like their forefathers that Isaiah spoke of...hypocrites. They created these rules and laws to prevent themselves from even coming close to breaking God's laws, but over time their traditions became elevated over God's laws.
- Their laws were no longer to honor God, but as Paul said in Colossians 2, they were more like 'self-made religion.'
- Jesus said that these people honored God with their lips but their heart was far from Him. That really gets to the heart of the Greek word "hypocrite" which means to be an actor or role player (BDAG). They were acting like they were honoring God but they spoke empty words, they didn't have a pure heart for God.
- Jesus said they did two things to the commandment of God: 1. They neglected the commandment of God. 2. They were experts of setting aside the commandment of God. All to hold on to their traditions.
- So what Jesus was saying is, 'you are just like your forefathers who were wicked and sent into captivity, you are a people who honor God with your lips but you don't have a heart for Him, because you've left behind God's commandments in order to hold to your traditions.'

### **Details:**

- v. 6 - Prophecy - it does not directly mean that Isaiah predicted this to happen, it simply means he spoke for God. A prophet was simply a communicator of God's message to men. Isaiah was the messenger of what God wanted to communicate. Prophecy includes but is not limited to predicting future events. The point Jesus is asking here is that what Isaiah said back then about the forefathers, is still true of the Pharisees today.
- v. 6 - Hypocrites - ὑποκριτής - "play-actor, role player." (BDAG). "One who wears a mask" as in greek theatre (TDNT). This gives us the image that Jesus is calling them

actors. They have disguised themselves and put on the mask of spiritual leaders and teachers who elevate themselves; when in reality, behind the mask they had a heart problem.

- Isaiah 29:13 - *Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,*
  - Before going into captivity, the forefathers were drawing near to worship God as if they were actually pure, God-fearing people, but Isaiah said it was just lip service and their hearts were far from Him. Then he said the only reverence they actually had for God wasn't in what God told them to have reverence in, but it was in what they decided to have reverence in, their own traditions.
  - "Learned by rote" - learned by teaching. This was just an orally passed on tradition, learned by a repetitive nature of doing things. They 'memorized' what they were supposed to be doing and saying, but it wasn't actually in their hearts.
  - Jesus said, just like the forefathers who were sent into captivity were that way, you today are still the exact same way!
- v. 8 - Neglect - ἀφίημι - "to cause a separation, to leave behind" (BDAG). When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, Mark 1:18 says they left their nets behind to follow Him, which uses the same Greek word. So what Jesus is saying here, you 'left behind' the commandment of God to hold to your tradition.
- v. 8 - Hold to - κρατέω - this is the same word as "observe" from verse 3 and 4. To seize, control, to adhere strongly to, to hold, to remain firmly committed (BDAG). It is also used in verses as "to seize, arrest, take." (TDNT). In the whole book it is used as taking hold, in the hand, seizing! This is strong language and gives the imagery as if you're grabbing as if to arrest something.
- v. 9 - Experts - καλῶς - "to maintain a high standard of excellence" (BDAG). This makes me think of a sales pitch. Someone can be a car salesman who maintains a high standard of excellence. Jesus says the Pharisees have maintained a high standard of excellence, but not in God's Word, in their traditions

#### **B. Jesus Gives an Example of the Problem (7:10-13) —**

##### ***Mark 7:10-13***

***"For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death'; but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God), 'you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother; thus invalidating the word of God***

***by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”***

### **Overview:**

- Jesus continues his response by giving an example of the kind of laws they created that were directly violating God’s laws. He shows them how selfish their laws had become and how they had twisted the laws of God and created generations that were no longer honoring God, but generations that were clinging to man made traditions and rules.
- Jesus shows the clear difference in the two teachings. The first, is a direct, simple commandment from God. The second, is how they had added to the command and given themselves a way out of having to keep the command. They said, if you keep money aside and say it is “Corban”, given to God, then you are no longer required to use that money to help your father and mother. Jesus clearly rejects the practice of letting ‘Corban’ take precedence over the duty of caring for one’s parents.
- Jesus goes on to say, “you do many things such as that”, showing us that this is just one example of how they have gone beyond God’s commandments and made their own.

### **Details:**

- You can find the reference to this commandment from God in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16.
- v. 11 Corban - “a Hebrew word that refers to anything brought near the alter as an offering” (Lexham Theological Workbook). The reason Jesus rebukes them for this is because they would use it as an excuse to not take care of their parents the way the Law said to. They would say, “I would help my parents but all of my money is dedicated to God” (Corban), therefore, I can’t help them.” (The New Manners and Customs of the Bible, “Corban”).

### **Application:**

- The Pharisees would never connect themselves to the wicked forefathers who were sent into captivity, but that’s exactly who Jesus said they were. We would never connect ourselves with the wicked Pharisees or the wicked people who were sent into captivity, but sometimes that’s exactly who we are. Sometimes we put our self-made religious mask on thinking that’s how we draw near to God and look the part.
- Sometimes we’re the kind of people who have ‘learned by rote’ and memorized the right things.

- We know the acts of worship but we just go through the motions.
- We know the 5 steps of salvation but we don't actually share them with anyone.
- We know our books of the Bible and can even sing them in a song, but we still treat people poorly, gossip, and bad-mouth others.
- We make it a point to put our contribution in every Sunday, but we aren't willing to take the homeless guy on the corner out for dinner and talk about his soul.
- We trick ourselves into thinking we're really on the right track because we know the right things, but we're just wearing a mask. We aren't actually trying to BE Godly, we're just trying to LOOK Godly.
- This is one of the biggest plagues in our churches today. We have pews full of people wearing masks thinking they're okay because they've memorized some Bible facts, while their heart is somewhere else.
- And the worst part is, many of those who are wearing the mask are trying to force that mask on other people. That was the problem with the Pharisees. They weren't even Godly themselves and they were trying to fit everyone into their ungodly mold.
- We can't be the hypocrite. We can't be the actor. We can't wear the mask. And we certainly can't force others to wear the mask. We have to be real with God. We have to be genuine and authentic, not merely religious.

This all leads up to Jesus turning and teaching the crowd a lesson from this scene...

#### **IV. Jesus Teaches a Lesson to the Crowd (7:14-23):**

##### **A. The Lesson (7:14-16) —**

##### ***Mark 7:14-16***

***“After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, ‘Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.’”***

##### **Overview:**

- At this point, Jesus was no longer speaking directly to the Pharisees, but He began speaking to the crowd. He was trying to explain and help them to see the greater meaning of His response to the Pharisees.
- The Pharisees were just accusing the disciples of eating with impure, defiled hands, but Jesus is trying to teach them the greater meaning of what it means to be defiled.

The Jews had made it more about the physical but Jesus is showing them the spiritual.

- Jesus is trying to explain to them that it is not about the repetitive cleansing of the physical body that will keep you clean, but it is about your heart and spiritual purity. It is what comes from your heart that will defile you. If your heart is full of impure thoughts and motives, that will reflect in your actions. You cannot disguise that and it will reveal itself. You can't just put a mask over it - that's being a hypocrite.
- The Pharisees have become hypocrites and tried to disguise themselves as pure but what has come from them reveals their true identity and heart.

### **Details:**

- v. 14 - Understand - συνι̅ημι - "to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one's thinking or practice, understand, comprehend" (BDAG).
- v. 15 - Defile - κοινώω - "make common or impure, defile" (BDAG).

### **B. The Explanation of the Lesson (7:17-23) —**

#### ***Mark 7:17-23***

***“When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. And He said to them, ‘Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?’ (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, ‘That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.’”***

### **Overview:**

- Jesus was then speaking directly to the disciples who were continuing to ask about the parable He just gave to the crowd.
- Jesus was basically saying the same thing again but then gave exact examples of spiritual impurities. Whatever goes into the man from outside isn't what defiles him, but whatever comes out of the man, that is what comes from his heart and defiles the man. For example, eating without doing the ritualistic washing isn't going to defile a man, but what comes from within, their heart, is what will defile a man.



- The simple point here is this: Food goes in and out of our body. It means nothing. But what comes out of a person through their actions reveals a person's true heart.
- Jesus then gives a list of things that come from within and defile a person. Each of these things come from the heart and are revealed in actions.

### **Details:**

- v. 19 - Heart - καρδία - "seat of physical, spiritual and mental life" (BDAG). - is found 3 times in chapter 7.

### **Application:**

- When Jesus turned and addressed the crowds, He identified the real problem; the heart.
- Many times we come to church with our hair done, makeup on, Sunday's best dress, Bible in hand, and religious mask put on tight. We may look on the outside like we are the star Christian but in our heart, we are far away from where we need to be. The heart in this passage is defined as our inner-most being, the core of who we truly are as a person, physically, spiritually, and mentally. The heart is what defines us, and as Jesus says, is what can also defile us if we're not careful.
- Jesus illustrated this in Matthew 23, where He said the Pharisees were like white-washed tombs, where they were beautiful and ornate on the outside, but on the inside were still full of dead men's bones. Doesn't that paint the picture of who these people were? It's easy for us to see that when we are looking at the Pharisees, but it's always harder to see these things in ourselves. Sometimes we put on the best front, the prettiest mask, but on the inside we are rotten, mean, bitter, and angry. The worst about it is the Pharisees never even thought they were those people, because they had convinced themselves that they were actually the religious godly person they were pretending to be.
- You may be sitting here today thinking... "Oh I know someone like that", "that reminds me of that person", when we really need to be looking at our own heart and ask "Am I that person?" "Am I pretending to be something that I'm not?" "Am I actually trying to BE godly, or just LOOK godly?" Because there is a difference.
- We have to have a heart that is right with God. Our innermost being, the core who we are as people needs to be inline with who God wants us to be. That's true Christianity, and it requires us to take off the mask.

### **Final Thoughts:**

The Pharisees were people just like you and me. They were people who had traditions that they loved. They were people who were religious and learned so much from their parents and grandparents and didn't want to let that go. But the problem was, all of the things they learned about their religion became more important than what God actually wanted from them. Jesus said this was a problem that stemmed from the heart. Deep down their heart was actually in this fake persona they had created to look religious, and not with God, where it should be. Sometimes we do the same thing, we play the part but we never actually get where we need to be. We show up, we dress up, we sing, we pray, we memorize, but it's just a mask. Together, let's take the mask off and go to God.

### **Pray this prayer -**

“Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation And sustain me with a willing spirit.” (Psalm 51:10-12)

## Luke 7:18-50 – Simon the Pharisee

Lacy Crowell

Things to be mindful of throughout this study:

- Look for “speech” language such as: say, heard, tell, answered, etc. These terms are found approximately 30 times in these 32 verses.
- Look for “sight” language such as: look, blind, see, sight, etc. These terms are found approximately 14 times in these 32 verses.
- As we go through the text be mindful of the similarities and differences in John the Baptist’s interaction and Simon’s.
- Note the three different interactions with Jesus: John the Baptist, Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman.

In this section of Scripture we see two very different, yet prominent men asking the same vital question, “Who is Jesus?”

**7:18-20** – “All these things” would refer to the miracles Jesus has been doing, specifically in Luke’s account healing the centurion’s servant and raising the widow’s son from the dead.

- Keep in mind John’s disciples are having to report what’s happening to him because he is already imprisoned (Luke 3:20) and would in fact soon be killed (Luke 9:7). While John prepared the way for Jesus (Luke 3:16) it is doubtful that he would have seen much of Jesus’ ministry for himself.
- There are many theories about why John would question Jesus, although from a human standpoint it makes sense: John has devoted his life to preparing the way for Jesus, and now that his death is near he is needing reassurance that it was worth it. However there are some other things to keep in mind:
  - o Even after the resurrection the apostles were still expecting the physical restoration of Jerusalem, it is logical that John the Baptizer would have expected the same thing. Jesus’ teachings of mercy and love would not have fit with this expectation and could have led to doubts.
  - o We approach Scripture with a birds-eye view of God’s plan, however John would not have had any comprehension of the “second coming of Christ.” It is likely he would have expected Jesus’ eternal reign, which from his perspective would have included the fall of Rome, to be beginning, yet Jesus was upsetting the Jewish leaders while not focusing on the Roman leadership at all. In fact, in Luke 20:25 Jesus would publicly teach to, “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s.”

**Luke 7:21-23** – Note that Jesus does *not* condemn John for questioning!

- Jesus responds by providing the needed proof through his miracles and the fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 35:5-6).

- By ending with, “The poor have good news preached to them,” Jesus emphasizes that what He says is just as important as what He does.
- “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me,” is understood in many different ways. However in keeping with the context of John’s question, it is likely that Jesus is saying blessed will be the man who accepts Jesus as He is, in comparison with the Scribes and Pharisees who refused to accept Him.
- Many want to argue that John wasn’t actually questioning, but rather he was asking on behalf of others. This is doubtful as Jesus specifically addresses his answer to John.

**Luke 7:24-26** – Some believe that in this section Jesus is making a comparison between John and Herod: one bends to pressure and one stands strong. One lives in splendor and comfort and one lives in the wilderness (Anguish 390). This section is also particularly ironic as John was currently in Herod’s temple, but as a prisoner while those who catered to political whims roamed the palace in splendor (Lenski 408).

**Luke 7:27-28** – Not only does Jesus *not* condemn John for questioning, He gives him incredible praise. Why then the statement, “Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he”? There are various thoughts on this verse, however two primary facts need to be considered:

- Once again, John was not going to be able to see the fruition of God’s plan. This could be referencing the blessing those who come after John will have due to being able to see God’s entire plan in a way John would not be able to.
- John was the final prophet under the old law. As such, he would not have been able to experience the tremendous blessings that come from the church such as having Jesus as our mediator (1 Timothy 2:5.)

**Luke 7:29-30** – These verses serve as a transition from Jesus’ interaction with John to His interaction with Simon. All who heard what Jesus had said and done responded with obedience through the act of baptism, including the tax collectors, with the glaring exception of the lawyers and the Pharisees. (“The lawyers” likely refers to the Scribes, those who were most knowledgeable in the Law of Moses.)

- Note also that not being baptized was seen as a rejection of what was being taught.

**Luke 7:31-32** – Jesus is using this illustration to demonstrate the attitudes of those who won’t listen. They are saying, “Hey! We have a game going, and you aren’t playing by our rules, so we don’t want to play any more!”

**Luke 7:33-35** – To further his point, Jesus points out the extent of their blindness in the accusations they have made against both John the Baptist and Himself.

**Luke 7:36-38** – In Jesus’ day etiquette demanded that the most authoritative Pharisee in an area would invite any prominent visiting Rabbi to dine with him (Barclay 94).

- A woman having her hair unbound in public was seen as immodest and shameful. This means that unbinding her hair to dry Jesus' feet was another way she was abnegating herself before Jesus (Lenski 433).
- It was customary for women to wear small flasks of perfume around their necks, so she would not necessarily have brought this specifically for Jesus, however she did not hesitate to use it to honor Him when the opportunity presented itself (Barclay 95).
- For formal meals it was customary to recline at a low table and lean on the left arm, leaving the right arm free to eat with. Additionally, during the meal the guest's sandals would be removed, and everyone would stretch their feet out behind them due to their unclean nature (Barclay 94).

**Luke 7:38-39** – Simon creates a false dichotomy in his mind: either Jesus is not really a prophet and does not know the sinful past of the woman who is touching him, or He isn't holy enough to care. (Imagine questioning the holiness of Jesus!)

- Note that Simon does not speak his concerns out loud, but rather all that follows is a result of Jesus knowing both his thoughts and his heart.
- "This man" would be a derogatory and disrespectful way of thinking of Jesus, which is quite contradictory to what he actually says out loud in verse 40 when Simon addresses Jesus as, "Teacher" or "Rabbi."
- Simon's thoughts regarding both the situation and Jesus are further evidence that Jesus was only invited out of a sense of duty (perhaps even an effort to "catch him out," rather than out of sincerity or faith.

**Luke 7:40-43** – Notice that Simon the Pharisee is named, however the sinful woman is not.

- A denarius would have been approximately one day's wage, and equal to \$.17 in American money. This means Jesus is comparing approximately \$85.00 (or 500 day's wages for the Jews) to \$8.50 (50 day's wages). Both would have been a very large amount, however 500 day's wages would have been an almost insurmountable amount for the average Jew.
- Once again note that Jesus is responding to Simon's thoughts, and in fact no one had said anything out loud before Jesus spoke up.
- Note that Simon answers almost begrudgingly, beginning with, "I suppose."

**Luke 7:44-48** – Jesus specifically calls Simon's attention to the woman, it is possible that up until this point Simon had been trying to avoid even looking at her. It is much easier to be moved with disgust rather than compassion when we don't take the time to look the lost in the eye.

- Here Jesus publicly calls attention to Simon's lack of hospitality and respect:
  - o During Jesus' time it was customary for a host to greet his guests with a kiss of peace: a kiss on the cheek between equals, or a student would kiss the hand of his teacher as a sign of respect. Simon did neither (Barclay 95).

- Due to hot and dusty roads it was customary to pour cool water over the feet of guests for both cleanliness and comfort (Barclay 95).
- In lieu of indoor plumbing for showers it was customary to burn sweet-smelling incense or put a drop of perfumed oil on a guest's head (Barclay 95).
- Despite many assumptions that have been made over the years, Jesus does not call attention to nor specifically name this woman's sin. Instead, He calls attention to her forgiveness and her changed life.
- There is debate over whether Jesus is actually saying that Simon loves little, or if He is just further making His point. Notice, however, that sins and forgiveness are directly correlated. This demonstrates that God views sin much differently than we do. This woman's many sins were public. There was no denying or avoiding them. However, we know that all men are equally sinners and therefore equally guilty before God (Romans 3:23). Simon was not able/willing to extend grace or compassion on this woman because he did not view himself as needing either.
  - If we are completely honest with ourselves, who do we most resemble when we are dealing with someone from the world, or even brethren who are caught in sin? Do we empathize with their sin struggle, or do we shame them?
- Clearly this woman knows Jesus. Whether they have interacted previously or not is unclear, however she had seen enough to be brought to tears in His presence, and to lay herself humbly before Him and offer Him all that she had. What must it have been like for her to hear Jesus say that her many sins were forgiven?

**Luke 7:49-50** – This encounter ends much the same as the encounter with John's disciples, with people marveling at Jesus (7:29). Notice, however, these individuals (likely other Pharisees and prominent individuals) were only discussing Jesus among themselves, none of them actually approach the Messiah.

- Finally Jesus instructs the woman to go in peace. How long must it have been since she had felt at peace?

### **COMPARISONS BETWEEN JOHN AND SIMON'S INTERACTION WITH JESUS:**

<u><b>John</b></u>	<u><b>Simon</b></u>
Ministered to the lost (vs. 27)	Refused to look at the lost (vs. 44)
Questioned who Jesus was (vs. 19)	Questioned who Jesus was (vs. 39)
Jesus answered him with prophecy (vs. 22)	Jesus answered with a parable (vs. 48)
Jesus addressed the crowd (vs. 24)	The crowd marveled (vs. 49)
Jesus focused on hearts/actions (vs. 23)	Jesus focused on hearts/actions (vs. 47)
Died in his service to the Lord (Luke 9:7)	Is never mentioned again

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## John 3-Nicodemus Erynn Sprouse

### **1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;**

- **Pharisees**— in the book of John there is no question that the Pharisees are actively trying to stop people from believing in and/ or following Jesus.
- 7:48— The Pharisees and chief priests sent officers (according to Zodhiates, “the subordinate official who waits to accomplish the commands of his superior”) to seize Jesus, but they returned empty-handed. In correcting the officers, the leaders boast that none of the Pharisees or rulers have believed in Jesus.
- 9:16— after the healing of a man blind from birth, there is division (a schism) among the Pharisees as to whether or not Jesus was from God.
- 9:22— “the Jews” had decided any who confessed Jesus as the Christ would be put out of the synagogue (note that admitting the blind man had been healed by Jesus was viewed, at least by the parents, as tantamount to confessing Jesus as the Christ).
- 12:19— Seeing that many were following Jesus, the Pharisees lament “the good” they had not accomplished (in preventing the following).
- 12:42, 43— many even of the rulers did believe in Jesus, but they did not confess Him (as the Christ) because they feared being put out of the synagogue. John’s assessment is that they loved the approval (glory) of men rather than the approval (glory) of God.
- **Ruler of the Jews**— one of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body of the Jews.

### **2 this man came to Jesus at night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”**

- **Came to Jesus at night**
- It’s hard to know how big of a deal to make of Nicodemus’ timing in this encounter. Some see it as a mere footnote. Others see it as reflective of a deeper, unfavorable truth about Nicodemus.
- In the book of John, we see night and darkness used literally as well as figuratively to represent evil. Cf John 8:12; 12:35, 36; 46.
- In this very passage, Jesus says that men love darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil (3:19-21). He says that they do not come to the Light for fear of their evil deeds being exposed. Nicodemus’ deed is done in the night as if it were evil and he fears being exposed. His deed is, in fact, good, but perhaps Nicodemus has things upside down. Cf John 12:43
- **Rabbi**— “teacher,” a term of respect. Nicodemus is being humble in his approach.
- **We know**— “we” is not specified, but must refer to at least a portion of the Sanhedrin.
- **Come from God as a teacher**
- Nicodemus has seen the signs Jesus has performed and drawn the correct conclusion that God is behind Jesus.
- Nicodemus acknowledges Jesus as a prophet. Consider that the time of 400 years’ silence only just ended with John the Baptizer. Nicodemus recognizing



Jesus as a prophet is no small thing... but it falls far short of reality, and far short of His own claims.

**3 Jesus responded and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

- **Responded—**
- Jesus is more concerned with Nicodemus than in defending or explaining Himself. He answers the question that Nicodemus has not yet even asked.
- John asserted in 2:24, 25 that Jesus knew all men, and what is in man. Jesus knows what questions Nicodemus comes to Him with.
- **Truly, truly, I say to you**—the phrase occurs 25x in the book. It is literally, “Amen, amen.” He is essentially saying that what He is about to say is absolutely true and can be depended upon.
- **born**— cf John 1:13
- **Born again**— re-created, re-born. Literally “from above.”
- **Kingdom of God**— cf John 18:35

**4 Nicodemus \*said to Him, “How can a person be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born, can he?”**

- Nicodemus sees only the physical.

**5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”**

- Jesus clarifies and expands on His earlier statement. The birth He speaks of is of water and spirit; seeing the kingdom is equated with entering the kingdom.
- **born of**—this is a singular birth. Some have proposed that this refers to two births: one the physical birth, and the other a spiritual birth. This is illogical (why would Jesus tell Nicodemus that physical birth is required? Nicodemus has already been born, as indeed have all others capable of heeding these instructions) and impossible with the grammar of the original language. “The fact that one preposition (*ex*) is used with both nouns shows that only one act is in mind, thus any attempt to apply this to a physical birth and then a spiritual birth (Holy Spirit baptism) will not stand” (Petrillo 34).
- **water and the Spirit**— Jesus differentiates the birth He speaks of from the physical birth Nicodemus is thinking of. This birth is of water as well as the spirit, done in the will of God (1:13).
  - Ezekiel 36:25-27
  - Ephesians 5:26
  - Titus 3:5

**6 That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’**

- Principle of reaping & sowing— if I sow corn, I expect to reap corn. Cf. Galatians 6:7,8
- It seems Jesus thought this should have been obvious, not something to marvel at, to this learned man.

- Note the shift from “someone” to “you.” This is truth for Nicodemus, not just for the masses.

**8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it is coming from and where it is going; so is everyone who has been born of the Spirit.”**

The wind is something you can’t see, but you can see its effects. Likewise, the Spirit is not seen, but its effects on someone are. Cf. Acts 4:13, Galatians 5:22.

**9 Nicodemus responded and said to Him, “How can these things be?”**

- Nicodemus is confused, but willing to ask the questions.

**10 Jesus answered and said to him, “You are the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”**

- This discussion of spiritual rebirth is meant to be basic, yet Nicodemus does not understand. This mild chastisement perhaps expresses Jesus’ frustration. He gives a similar statement in 16:31 when the apostles, within hours of Jesus’ crucifixion, finally confess that they see Jesus knows all things.
- Hebrews 5:12-6:2, written to Christians, talks about maturity. At some point, one ought to be able to teach, but prerequisite to teaching is a firm understanding of the elementary principles. In 6:1, “washings” is listed among the elementary teachings.

**11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you people do not accept our testimony.**

- **We**— This is confusing. Who is Jesus referring to? Without context to tell us, we are largely guessing. As such, one ought not bind any particular interpretation. It could be he is referring to Himself and the Spirit testifying with Him via the signs He performs. Some have proposed that John adds Himself to Jesus’ testimony.
- **Testify/ testimony**—
- This is a key word/ concept in the book of John. One who gives testimony is a “witness.” The root word occurs 47 times in the gospel of John.
- In a sense, Nicodemus himself is a witness of Jesus as he has come to recognize Jesus as a prophet.
- **You people**— plural in the original text
- **accept**— receive, take hold of

**12 If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?**

- **Earthly things**— this discussion has centered on things pertaining to the earthly realm. Much like one must understand the basic physical aspects of a parable in order to understand it, one must understand these earthly ideas in order to understand the heavenly.
- **you**—plural

**13 No one has ascended into heaven, except He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.**

- **Descended from heaven**— Jesus came to earth for the purpose of declaring God to mankind. He is the Word, the LOGOS, of God.

- **Son of Man**— a term Jesus uses in John 13x. It reflects His humanity. Coupled with Jesus' many declarations of Deity in the book, the term helps to explain Who Jesus is.

**14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes will have eternal life in Him.**

- **Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness**— Numbers 21:5-9
- “One must believe in Jesus to receive eternal life. What does believing in Jesus mean?
  1. Receiving Him— 1:12;
  2. Obeying Him— 3:36;
  3. Coming to Him— 6:35;
  4. Eating His words/flesh— 6:63ff?” (Petrillo 37)
- **Lifted up**— idiomatic of crucifixion, cf 12:32, 33

**16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.”**

- **World**— in the book of John, the world represents not only all of creation, but specifically the people, and often those who have rejected Jesus. (John 1:10, 29; 3:17; 12:31; 15:19)
- **Only Son**— MONOGENEIS HO UIOS—
  - this is a complex term that means more than simply “only begotten.” It incorporates the idea of uniqueness, specialness.
  - It indicates His source in the same way that the phrase “noble birth” indicates one comes from a so-called noble blood line. Jesus' source is God Himself.
  - “Because He alone was God's Son before the foundation of the world, because the whole love of the Father is for Him alone, because He alone is one with God, because the title God may be ascribed to Him alone, He is the only-begotten Son of God” (Büchsel 741)
  - cf. Luke 7:12; Luke 8:42; Luke 9:38; John 1:14, 1:18, 3:18; Hebrews 11:17; 1 John 4:9
- **Everyone**—
  - significant change from previous covenants! The blessing of eternal life is available to everyone, none excluded.
  - Contrary to many doctrines taught today, there is not a small, pre-selected group to whom salvation is exclusively available; it is for everyone who chooses to believe.
  - Contrary to what Nicodemus likely believed, salvation was for more than just the Jewish nation.
  - Such a precious gift as God's only begotten Son should have maximum impact.
- **Believes**— not mere mental ascent. See discussion in previous verse.
- **Perish**— lose, destroy; cf. Matthew 10:28, 2 Thess 1:7-10. This is the opposite of eternal life; it is eternal destruction.
- **Eternal life**— significant concept in John. Indicates a high quality of life, not simply an immortal life.

**17 For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.**

- **World**— see discussion in previous verse
- **Judge**— evaluation and condemnation. There will come a time for evaluation and either salvation or condemnation, but Jesus was sent into the world to lay down the path of life in His name, and to become the author and perfecter of the faith (Hebrews 12:2). cf. John 12:46, 47
- **saved**—not necessarily contrasted with judgment, but more a statement of mission. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:9).

**18 The one who believes in Him is not judged; the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

- The actual plan of salvation has been in place since before time began, and it was determined that those who do not believe on the Son of God would be condemned. The one who does not believe has sealed their own judgment/ condemnation (cf. Ephesians 1:4,5).

**19 And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil.**

**20 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, so that his deeds will not be exposed. 21 But the one who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds will be revealed as having been performed in God.”**

- On what basis is the condemnation of 1:18 given? The Light (Jesus) has come, and humanity divided itself into two groups: those who love darkness (whose deeds are evil), and those who practice the truth (whose deeds are in God).
- Cf 1:9-11
- Nicodemus has come to Jesus in the dark of night, as though he has something to be ashamed of, some deed he fears exposing. If this is indeed his reasoning, his priorities are topsy turvy.

### **John 7:50, 51**

Our next encounter with Nicodemus finds him in a discussion with the chief priests and Pharisees. It has reached their ears that “many of the crowd believed [Jesus]” because of His many signs, so they send officers to seize Him (7:31, 32). In 7:45, the officers sent return without having carried out their orders. They report that none has ever spoken as Jesus does. The Pharisees chide them, asking if they have been led astray as the crowds have been. They boast that none of the Pharisees or rulers has believed, but only this ignorant, accursed (condemned) crowd. Nicodemus speaks up with a question. “Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?” (7:51).

The Pharisees had pronounced judgment on the entire crowd, calling them EPARATOS. This is the sole appearance of this word in the New Testament. Nicodemus essentially asks them to withhold judgment until they have heard from Jesus. We know, though,

that Nicodemus and at least some of the other rulers of the Jews have had sufficient chance to hear and see Jesus, and that they have (correctly) determined that He is from God.

### **John 19:38-42**

Our final encounter with Nicodemus comes after Jesus' death. Another man, another "secret disciple," named Joseph went to Pilate and requested the body of Jesus. Pilate granted the request. Joseph and Nicodemus took the body down, and prepared the body. Nicodemus' contribution was a costly one. He provided 100 litras (litra= 12 oz) of myrrh and aloes (about 75 lbs).

"In the Jewish context, the mixture was intended to overcome the smell of putrefaction. From the narrative, it appears that Joseph took care of legal matters, while Nicodemus brought the spices. Very possibly, servants were used to carry the aromatic mixture, take Jesus' body down from the cross and transport it to the burial place, and prepare it for burial... Apparently, spices were spread along the linen wrappings... as well as underneath and perhaps around Jesus' body. Then the strips were wound around the corpse. Additional spices may have been spread near the entrance of the tomb (Köstenberger).

It is likely that servants/ slaves helped in all these preparations, esp considering that Joseph and Nicodemus would surely have wanted to avoid becoming ceremonially unclean before the Passover.

The monetary cost of the aloes and myrrh seems to be largely unknown (perhaps if Judas had been on hand, he could have given the value, ha!), but this action would unquestionably have cost Nicodemus his position in the Sanhedrin as well as his temple privileges. cf Matthew 10:34

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