

The Sadducees and the Pharisees

Message 1 of 6 in the series: "Brought to Life"

A. Three important definitions:

Sanhedrin - the 70-member high council/supreme court of Israel. The Sanhedrin was made up of both Sadducees and Pharisees.

Sadducees – a powerful religious/political group composed of wealthy, elitist, aristocrats. The chief priests and high priest were Sadducees. They held the majority of seats in the Sanhedrin, and although they controlled the temple in Jerusalem, they seem to have been more concerned with maintaining their wealth and political power than religion. The Sadducees worked hard to keep their wealth and status by compromising with the Roman empire. The Sadducees accepted only the first five books of the Bible as Holy Scripture. They didn't believe in heaven or hell, angels or demons, life after death, or God's involvement in the affairs of everyday life.

Pharisees – a powerful religious/political group composed of middle-class businessmen and leaders of the synagogues throughout Israel. Although they held a minority of seats, they greatly influenced decisions in the Sanhedrin because they had strong popular support among the people. The Pharisees accepted the entire Old Testament as Holy Scripture and believed in heaven and hell, angels and demons, life after death, and God's involvement in the affairs of everyday life. They strictly practiced personal piety ("*Pharisee*" means "separated") and required all Jews to observe the 600-plus laws in the Torah according to their traditions. The Pharisees hated the Romans and had nothing to do with Gentiles (non-Jews).

B. The Sadducees wanted Jesus dead because they feared He would upset the status quo.

"Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. 'What are we going to do?' they asked each other. 'This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.' Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, 'You don't know what you're talking about! You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.'" John 11:47-50 (NLT)

Life Application: Following Jesus means becoming a servant. "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:25-28 (NLT)

Life Application: Following Jesus means surrendering everything. "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?" Luke 9:23-25 (NLT)

C. The Pharisees wanted Jesus dead because He exposed them as self-righteous hypocrites who knew how to keep religious rules but didn't know God.

"You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.'" Matthew 15:7-9 (NLT)

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. Blind guides! You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!"

Matthew 23:23-24 (NLT)

"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness." Matthew 23:27-28 (NLT)

Life Application: Following Jesus means accepting His salvation by grace and sharing His amazing love and grace with others. “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.” Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

“Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with such scum?’ When Jesus heard this, he said, ‘Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.’ Then he added, ‘Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: “I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.” For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.’” Matthew 9:10-13 (NLT)

Life Application: Following Jesus means coming to Him honestly with no pretense or pride. “Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: ‘Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: “I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.” But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, “O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.” I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’” Luke 18:9-14 (NLT)

D. The Sadducees and Pharisees couldn’t stand each other, but they were willing to work together to crucify Jesus because both groups hated Him so much.

“After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice... The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. ‘Look at you now!’ they yelled at him... The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. ‘He saved others,’ they scoffed, ‘but he can’t save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, “I am the Son of God.”’” Matthew 27:35-43 (NLT)

Life Application: Following Jesus means insert my name will face hatred and rejection. “If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you. They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me.” John 15:18-21 (NLT)

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Connect Group Questions:

1. Share a favorite Easter memory.
2. Read the account of Lazarus’ resurrection and the Pharisee’s reaction in John 11:38-50. Why would raising a dead man to life make the Sadducees and Pharisees want to kill Jesus?
3. Read Matthew 20:20-28. Contrast Jesus’ ambitions with those of the Pharisees. Whose ambitions most closely mirror yours?
4. Read Luke 18:9-14. Why did Jesus tell this story? What does authentic prayer look like?
5. Read Mark 3:1-6. Why was Jesus so angry at the reaction of the Pharisees? What are some man-made religious rules people get in fights over today?
6. Read Matthew 9:10-13. Why did Jesus hang out with so many low-life people? Is Centerpoint Fellowship Church a welcoming place for lost sinners?
7. Discuss the following quotes:
“Legalism says God will love us if we change. The gospel says God will change us because He loves us.” Tullian Tchividjian

“Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.” 1 John 2:15 (NLT)

“But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. ‘You brood of snakes!’ he exclaimed. ‘Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, “We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.” That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.’” Matthew 3:7-9 (NLT)