

Week #: 19 Text: _____ Title: Follow the Rabbi #9

Songs: _____

Audio: Ray Vander Laan – Follow the Rabbi teaching

Can be found online at: <https://oneinjesus.info/2008/10/ray-vander-laans-follow-the-rabbi-lectures/>

Pharisees:

- In Jesus' day there were 7 schools of Pharisees. The Pharisees were righteous people. Jesus said: "Unless your righteousness is greater than the Pharisees, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." – implying that they had a great righteousness. Basically it's like saying now, unless you are greater than the pope.
- Jesus said the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (in the Temple), and to do what they told you to do, just don't do what they do. He criticizes them for being hypocrites.
- Being like the rabbi is to live the text. There's a Jewish saying that the best disciple making is to be your message.
- A rabbi:
 - Lives the text
 - Teaches the text
 - Dies the text
- Parables are not an attempt to tell stories, or even to teach lessons. Parables interpret the text. If you don't know the text, you'll never get the point of the parable.
- The text is always the interpretation of the Old Testament, and so many Christians study the parables and never open the Old Testament. They get good Biblical information, but they often miss the main point.

A Little History:

The Pharisees descended from the *hasidim*, the 'pious ones' of the Galilee region in the hundred and fifty years prior to Jesus' birth. These intensely religious people returned to the land of Israel after 300+ years in Babylon, after the Seleucid Greeks were defeated in the Hasmonean (Macabee) Revolt, and settled in the relatively unpopulated region around the Sea of Galilee.

These intensely religious people differed greatly from the Judeans to the south, who were primarily of the Sadducee/Priestly persuasion and believed only in the Pentateuch as God's Word, and not the entire Tanach (which is our modern day Old Testament). The Pharisees, on the other hand, believed in all of the Tanach as God's inspired Word, and had a theology developed around the coming of a Messiah and the Kingdom of God. They also believed in the future resurrection of the dead, which the Sadducees denied.

In the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Jerusalem, there were 70 seats, of which 65 belonged to the Sadducee party and 5 belonged to the Pharisees. Interestingly, during the time of Jesus, 3 of the 5 Pharisees on the council were named in the New Testament, all three of whom were either followers of Christ – or at least sympathetic to His followers. These three were Nicodemus, Joseph of Aramathea, and Gamaliel (the grandson of the rabbi Hillel).

The Pharisees were also the first Jewish sect know to send out missionaries and to proselytize – which is how the Jews of the diaspora and the Jewish converts in Asia Minor had been restored to the Jewish faith

prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries in the first century. Their message was well accepted by many, though primarily by women (as men would have to be circumcised to become Jewish).

Additionally, like Jesus, the Pharisees were the most popular of the religious 'sects' among the common people. They brought the practice of worshipping in synagogue to Israel with them from their captivity in Babylon. The Sadducees taught that God could only properly be worshipped in the temple, whereas the Pharisee rabbis led the synagogue schools and taught that God could be worshipped wherever His people gathered.

- Seven schools of Pharisees:
 - Progressives are followers of Rabbi Hillel
 - Conservatives are followers of Rabbi Shammai
 - There are five grades of levels in between the two listed above.
- The argument between the groups was always how to interpret the Torah – what's the proper yoke?
 - This debate always revolved around: *"What is the greatest commandment?"*
 - The Jews say commandments contradict each other, and Christians don't get this.
 - Example: The Bible says not to work on the Sabbath day. The word for work in Hebrew doesn't just mean occupation, it means expending yourself physically. About 22 chapter later it says that if your neighbors animals falls into a pit, pull it out. God doesn't want animals to suffer. What if it falls in the pit on the Sabbath day – is it considered work? So the question is which of these two commandments is greater – to not work, or to rescue the animal? The greater commandment you keep – the lesser one you break.
- What is the greatest commandment?
 - Shammai said: the greatest commandment is *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might."*
 - Hillel said: the greatest commandment is *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might."*
 - Jesus said: the greatest commandment is *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might."*
- What is the second greatest commandment?
 - Shammai said: keep the Sabbath day holy.
 - Sabbath is about God, so it is above loving your neighbor – God first.
 - What if your neighbor is in trouble on the Sabbath? Feel bad for him, but you keep the Sabbath.
 - Hillel said: love your neighbor.
 - Break the Sabbath to love your neighbor? Absolutely. Your neighbor's in the image of God.
 - Jesus said: (same as Hillel) love your neighbor.
- Shammai said that loving your neighbor falls at #7 – there are 6 greater than it.
- The debate in Jesus' day was how to interpret the Torah by deciding the greater and lesser commandments.
- Jesus said, "Whoever breaks the least commandment can't get into my kingdom." – so he makes it clear there is greater and lesser as well.

- Then the next question is: Who is my neighbor?

	<u>Shammai</u>	<u>Hillel</u>	<u>Jesus</u>
Is a religious Jew my neighbor?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is a non-religious Jew my neighbor?	Maybe not	Yes	Yes
Is a pagan Jew my neighbor?	No	Yes	Yes
Is a Roman my neighbor?	No	Yes	Yes
Is a Samaritan my neighbor?	No	No	Yes

- Samaritans were considered to be half-breeds who were not in the image of God because they married into the pagan nations and took on their religious customs.
- The talmid asks Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?”
 - Jesus, in the tradition of the other Rabbis at the time, says, “Let me tell you a story.”
 - A certain guy went from Jerusalem to Jericho. He got beaten up and robbed, and was left nearly dead.
 - “Along came a priest” – he was a Sadducee. They had a totally different way of reading the Torah. And he walked by on the other side of the road.
 - This is a bit of a joke – most places on the Jericho Road it drops off 50, 100, 200, up to 800 feet. So you can’t go side by side too easily – it’s too narrow and steep.
 - Jericho is located northeast of Jerusalem just above the Dead Sea. Situated about 800 feet below sea level, Jericho is the lowest city in the world. Leaving Jericho, the ascent rises approximately 3200 feet towards Jerusalem. A robust traveler could complete the arduous 15-mile hike in about 8 hours.
 - Why did the priest go by on the other side?
 - The text says a priest may not touch a *dead or nearly dead person*, even if it’s his father, mother, brother, sister, wife, or children.
 - This priest kept the Torah. We all want to blast the priest, but he was following exactly what God had told him to do.
 - The priest had made the commandment of cleanliness greater than the commandment of loving his neighbor.
 - “Along came a Levite.”
 - He was also a Sadducee.
 - He walks by on the other side of the road – for the same reason as the first. He too keeps the Torah.
 - Because it is a common Jewish parable teaching style, what the talmid expected was for the next person to be a Pharisee. He thought he was going to look great in this story.
 - We always tend to think that the Pharisee would have been mean to the guy, but every Pharisee teacher, from Shammai to Hillel would have said the commandment of loving your neighbor was greater than the commandment of cleanliness. Every Pharisee in the world, if they followed their theology, would have helped the guy.
 - “Along came a Samaritan.”
 - Now the talmid knows he is going to look like an idiot.

- The Samaritan helped the guy. It could have been as much as 15 miles to the nearest hotel.
- What is the Samaritan's Bible? The same as the Pharisee's Bible – the Torah.
- What did the Samaritan decide about loving your neighbor? It was greater than the cleanliness laws.
- Jesus then asked: "Who was the neighbor?"
 - The neighbor was the one who helped him – the neighbor was the Samaritan. The neighbor wasn't the man who was beaten up – it was the man who the Jews shunned and thought weren't even in the image of God.
- Jesus turned to the talmid and said: "Then you go love your neighbor."
 - In other words, he says to this kid, if you can't love the most disgusting, despicable, despised, semi-human person you've ever met in your life, then you can't obey God.
- This parable is first of all about loving your enemy. It is interpreting the text to say that your neighbor is EVERYONE. I don't think we realize how radical Jesus was. He certainly didn't excuse sin, but we'd better be able to love the sinner. If we can't, we can't get into God's kingdom.
- Who is your neighbor? Everybody. There is no person alive who is not your neighbor.
- Notice that the parable interpreted the Old Testament. That's why you can't get into the deepest levels of parables without understanding what the culture was doing with the concepts.

Remez:

- The word "remez" means *hint* or *clue*.
- It is a teaching method in which, in the process of your lesson, you would assume your audience knows the text, and you would quote a verse, but your point is the verse before it or the verse after it. If you don't know the verse before or after, then you miss the point.
- Jesus uses this teaching technique over and over and over again, and if you don't know the text, you won't get the whole point of what he is saying.
- Example 1: Matthew 21 | Mark 11:18 | Luke 19:47-48 | Psalms 8
 - Jesus is in the temple. The kids are dancing around singing *Hoshanah, Hoshanah, Hoshanah, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*.
 - The Sadducees come and say, "Tell these kids to shut up!"
 - Jesus said, "Haven't you read the text?" – which is really sarcastic to a Jew. "It says, 'Out of the mouth of babies/infants you have caused/ordained/pushed praise.'"
 - It says they wanted to kill him. For what?
 - The previous verse in Psalms says, "'The leaders of my people have become my enemies,' declares the lord, 'I will destroy them and bring praise out of the mouth of babies.'"
 - Why did they want to kill him? He called the Sadducees enemies of God. Of course they wanted to kill him.
- You can't get remez if you don't know the text, because he plays this game where he quotes a verse, but that's not the point. The point is the verse before or the verse after.
- Example 2: Matthew 14 | Zechariah 9:9-11 | Isaiah 35:5-10 | Isaiah 42:6-7 | Isaiah 61:1 |
 - Jesus and John the Baptist play this game back and forth.
 - John is in Herod's jail because he has criticized Herod. John sent two of his talmidim to Jesus to ask of him, "Are you the *coming one*."

- Why did he say “*the coming one?*” Why not just say “Are you the *Messiah?*”
- Zechariah – the scripture we say on Palm Sunday: “Hear, O Jerusalem, your king, the coming one, comes to you meek and lowly, riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
- John is asking: “Are you the king the coming one?”
- Why doesn’t he ask if he is the messiah, or the off-shoot of David, or the son of Joseph – why the coming one?
- The next verse says: “...and he will set the prisoners free.”
- John isn’t questioning Jesus being the Messiah – he’s asking Jesus if he will be set free.
- Jesus answers in a very complicated remez in response. We would expect him to answer in a very Western way – “YES, I’m the coming one!” That’s not what he says though. Jesus said for them to go tell John, “The blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb begin to speak, the lame walk, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”
 - These are five phrases found in five different places in Isaiah. Jesus just puts them all together. What follows after each one though that Jesus leaves out is – “*and the prisoner is set free.*”
- Jesus is telling John that he is not going to be set free... he’s going to die in jail.
 - The blind see – but no prisoner. The deaf hear – but no prisoner. The mute speak – but no prisoner. The lame walk – but no prisoner. The poor hear the gospel – but no prisoner.
- If you don’t think this interpretation is right, go to the next verse. “Then Jesus said, ‘Of all born of a woman none has come greater than John. The least of you in the Kingdom of God is greater than John. Blessed are those who do not fall away because of my harsh words.’”
 - What hard words? His hard words are not the ones spoken, but the ones unspoken.
- Where do you start?
 - The verse you learn today, you never knew before. If you can, every day, say that you know one more thing from the text than you’re making progress. Don’t give up because you don’t know the Old Testament by memory. Rather ask – “Do I know one more thing than yesterday?”
 - John the Apostle is the pastor to Asia Minor. The three gods of Asia Minor are, in order from greatest to the least:
 - Dionysus: famous for turning water into wine. John’s first recorded miracle of Jesus’ was when he turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana.
 - Asclepius: famous for healing people with moving water. John’s second recorded miracle of Jesus’ was the man who was at the Pool of Bethesda and did not get healed by the moving water, but instead Jesus healed him.
 - Demeter: the goddess of groceries. John’s third recorded miracle of Jesus’ was the feeding of the 5,000.
 - What John is doing is he is picking out of Jesus’ life those events that his audience needed. Matthew, Mark, or Luke do not mention the Pool of Bethesda or the water to wine.
 - Here’s the point about memorization – how long was it from the time John saw the miracles and when he wrote about them? Most scholars think it was 40 years.

- What you read today might not be relevant to anything you need for years. If John had not paid attention though, then all those years later he would not have had something to tell those in Asia Minor who followed those false gods.
- That passage you read this morning you may not need for many years – but what if you didn't read it this morning?
- Rabbi Akiva said: When you read a passage and it says absolutely nothing, dance for joy, because god has prepared you for a day unseen.
- The Jews say – memorize today, and if you don't remember it tomorrow, that's God's problem. If you need it, He'll bring it back.
- Jesus said to his disciples at the last supper that he was going to send another comforter, and he will help you to remember everything I taught you when you need it.
- If you can't remember the verse you learned yesterday, then God doesn't think you need it. Let God worry about the verses you forgot – you worry about the verses you learn.