

## When the Pharisees Refused to Put God First

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### AUDIO

Putting God first can be difficult. **What can we learn from the Pharisees**, who refused to put God first?

Pharisees and teachers of the law were among the most respected people in Israel in the early first century. Most could recite the Torah by heart and tried to follow each of its precepts with extreme precision, giving them a sense of safety and pride. Actually, they were almost perfect! ... Almost...!!

Hmm, but there was a new preacher around... Maybe a prophet! And He took the law to a whole new level! It went from something difficult to follow to... something,.. impossible to follow!!!

sc. 01

He said, for instance, that God expects us to exceed that pattern of the Pharisees. Have you heard exceed?? The Pharisees were believed to be the perfect law keepers!

But the preacher taught that we become like God when, in addition to doing what is right, which is external obedience, we also LOVE to do what is right, which is internal obedience. And to be perfect, we still need to love and show mercy toward those who do not deserve it or do not perform like us.

Even if you are a sinner, you may sometimes chose to do what is right, even though you don't like it. But in order to think, feel, and take pleasure in what is good and right, you need a miracle from above, worked by the Holy Spirit! And this was exactly what that preacher came to offer!

On one occasion, He addressed the Pharisees directly:

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Images related to text and animation.

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“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. . .!” (Matthew 23:23, 24).

The Pharisees would go to the extreme of counting how many new leaves of mint grew in their garden and would take the 10th leaf to the temple. Jesus was clear: continue counting the leaves of mint but seek justice, mercy, and faith.

So, it is not surprising that the Pharisees were the main force behind killing Jesus.

But at the same time, many marginalized people learned through Jesus that believing that you are not good enough is the very condition to be accepted by God and then, to be transformed by His power!

Jesus taught that putting God first means that we still should count our mint leaves. But more than that is necessary for salvation! By regularly spending time with Him every day, we open our minds for the Holy Spirit to change us, from the inside to the outside, in His likeness, leading us to mingle our **mint leaves** with love, mercy, and compassion.

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Images related to text and animation.

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The Pharisees refused to put God first. The consequences were terrible for them and the people around them. God’s love compels us to put His Kingdom first, while the Pharisees’ example is a warning for us today. As we return our tithe and Promise, we are challenged to put God first.

Text animation.