



Bible Heroes

Religious Hypocrites

Teachers Story notes

Essential Teachers notes:

This passage is chock full of symbolism, cultural norms and is a potential minefield to understand as a modern adult let alone as a child. It's also pure teaching as apposed to a person based narrative so to make it more identifiable I've focused on how one Pharisee may have heard it. the word 'Hypocrite' is quite an adult term and it's worth spending a few minutes explaining the meaning to the kids. If you have a very young group then simply omit that one reference in the retelling below.

Tell this story or a similar one of your choice from a favourite bible translation or story book. This version is supplied for inspiration, feel free to omit or embellish to give it your personal voice.

Main Passage : Matthew 23:1-12

The Pharisee stood towards the back of the crowd, Jesus kind of fascinated him, but something about Jesus was dangerous. Now Jesus wasn't happy and he wasn't going to stay quiet.

"Just look at those men" said Jesus staring at the small crowd of religious leaders. "Look at how they are dressed, with the tassels on their prayer shawls super long, as if that makes them holy?"

The Pharisee looked at the long trailing threads that came from the four corners of his garment, they held the 5 religious knots. Pharisees would make the treads longer to show their importance, they didn't need to be long, they got dirty easily, but it was sort of like a uniform so people could see they were super religious.

Jesus was still talking "They take the place of Moses in the community, making laws, reading scripture, telling you how God wants you to live your life. They share God's truth but don't act on it. Instead they place the heavy load of keeping rules on Gods people and don't do anything to help them. They love the place of honour at banquets, the front seats in the synagogues, they demand to be called 'Rabbi' by people."

"Ha, Rabbi? - Don't call these men 'Rabbi' or 'teacher' or even 'instructor' - you only have one teacher, the Messiah, you are all brothers and sisters the same. And you all have just one father, your Father in Heaven."

The Pharisee felt like he'd been punched. God's people needed religious leaders, his world had just been declared wrong. He'd spent years training to be something Jesus was against. How could he take this man seriously?

"Do you want to know who will be the greatest among you?" said Jesus his voice calming. "The greatest will be the one who is a servant. Those who try and make themselves important will be made small, but those who are willing to serve even if it makes them look foolish, they will be praised and lifted high."

The crowd quite liked that bit but Jesus wasn't finished with the religious leaders yet. Jesus wasn't kind, he told them how they had got so many things wrong, he called them horrible names, he labelled them hypocrites. It was clear, whatever Jesus was planning, the Pharisees were going to lose if they didn't stop it.

Today's hero is the Pharisee because he shows us the gift of a hypocrite

