



The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced, wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. **TrailNotes** is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing.

ElderTalk: The Pharisees

MATT GODSIL

Welcome to the final installment of the five groups that Jesus encountered during His earthly ministry. My hope is that by looking at who these people were, and why they were the way they were, we could have a historical context of what Jesus was teaching, thus providing us with deeper insight into those groups as well as into the character and message of the Messiah.

We start with the concept that Jesus entered into a world beset with the clash of two fundamentally different philosophies, that of the Eastern world of Judaism and that of the civilized world of the Greeks and later of the Romans. In the West, Hellenism was introduced by Alexander the Great while the ancient Greeks brought a whole new perspective that had moved the gods out of the center of the human worldview and replaced them with man; man was the measure of all things. This directly conflicted with the monotheistic, God-centered universe of the children of Israel.

We have looked at four groups so far:

- First, we examined the Sadducees – a powerful priestly establishment, ordained by God yet corrupt.
- Second, we looked at the Herodians – affluent Jews that desired to embrace Hellenism while adapting their Judaism to the Greco-Roman world which had invaded their world.
- Third, we met the Essenes, who escaped into the desert to become a people who knew the Text and walked the Text. But their problem was that they separated themselves from the mission of God by removing themselves out into the middle of the desert.
- In the last installment, we learned about the Zealots, who obviously responded with zeal and passion, though their response to Rome would just be to overthrow them with military might and essentially kill off the Romans. The negative that they brought was that they

believed in the myth of redemptive violence. A positive is that they had the zeal that was going to be needed to actually get the job done.

And now the fifth and final group—the Pharisees

The Pharisees (literally “separated ones”) were a Jewish social movement and school of thought in the Levant during the time of Second Temple Judaism. Following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, Pharisaic beliefs became the foundational, liturgical, and ritualistic basis for Rabbinic Judaism.



Christ and the Pharisees
A painting by German artist Ernst Karl Georg Zimmermann (1852-1901).

The Temple vs. the Synagogue

The Temple was no longer the only institution for Jewish religious life. Judaism continued during the Babylonian exile in local meeting locations. Following the building of the Second Temple in the time of Ezra, such places of study and worship remained important institutions in Jewish life.

Outside Judea, the synagogue was often called a house of prayer. While most Jews could not regularly attend the Temple service, they could meet at the synagogue for morning, afternoon, and evening prayers. On Mondays, Thursdays and Shabbat, a weekly Torah portion was read publicly in the synagogues following the tradition of Torah readings instituted by Ezra. Although priests controlled the rituals of the Temple,

(Continued on p. 2)

The Pharisees *(Continued from p. 1)*

the scribes and sages, later called rabbis, (Hebrew for ‘Teacher/master’) dominated the study of the Torah. It is from these scribes and sages that the pious Pharisees emerged. These men maintained an oral tradition that they believed had originated at Mount Sinai alongside the Torah of Moses, a God-given interpretation.

The Zealots and the Pharisees together comprised the Hasidim, translated as the “Pious Ones.” With the rise of the Hasmonean Dynasty in Jerusalem, they migrated north to Galilee. They rejected the Jewish acceptance of Hellenism. They didn’t want to separate themselves and go off into the desert, but they did want to create a culture to which they could be totally devoted.

One of those groups was the Zealots. They wanted to be totally devoted to God and to the mission in a violent, militant way, but there was the other group of the Hasidim. The Pharisees were *not* going to respond with redemptive violence. They were *not* going to respond with military might. They *were* going to respond with an absolute commitment and devotion to the commands of God, to the way of God, to the Text of God. Both groups went and settled in Galilee in the same region where Jesus did most of His ministry.

Each of the groups that Jesus encountered dealt with the important question of the day and answered it in their own way.

What do we do about Rome?

If asked what to do about Rome, the response of the Sadducees would be “We partner with them.” The Herodians - “We get in and merge with them.” The Essenes - “We run away, get away, and stay away.” The Zealots - “We kill them.”

Instead of channeling their response into military action of redemptive violence, the Pharisees would approach this particular question differently. They would embrace the idea that God Himself would deal with Rome. What the Jewish people would have to focus on was absolute obedience and devotion to His commandments. When the Jewish people became who God asked them to be, then He would rescue them and redeem the world—just trust in God’s sovereignty, and as His people, remain faithful and obedient. To understand this commitment, one could see why the Pharisees were so hard on the sinners. It was not just because they were a group of grumpy old men. They were critically harsh when they saw a tax collector or a prostitute, because, in their worldview, the sinner was the reason that Rome was still in power over them. Jesus brought a

correction to that thinking, often in harsh terms. The Pharisees’ belief was that if the Jewish people would just be obedient enough, then God would save them. The Pharisees centered everything around the Text. That was the heartbeat of the Pharisaic world. In the center of every Jewish village in Galilee, one would find a synagogue. In the center of that synagogue one would find the “bema.” The bema was (and still is) the platform from which the Scriptures, the Torah, the Text was read. To the Pharisees that Text was central, and they were totally committed to it.



The ancient Great Synagogue at Capernaum, in Galilee.

Of all the groups we have studied over these past months, it is the Pharisees that Jesus worked with the most. He was very hard on them as individuals, but He often focused on the ordinary people in the world around them. For three years Jesus worked with the Pharisees because they had every piece that God’s people needed, except for the one that really mattered to Him as much as anything else. Jesus told everyone that if they lacked that one piece that mattered so much, its absence would ruin everything else.

Compassion

In Paul’s words, “...if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love (*compassion*), I am nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1 NIV)

This is the critique. Jesus says you may have the Text, you may have devotion, you may have obedience, you may have a passion for God. But if you are prideful, arrogant, and self-righteous, you don’t have compassion. It’s the one piece needed to do the work that Jesus calls us to do. The struggles within the Church today are the tendency to be cultural Herodians (*worldliness*) and religious Pharisees (*legalism*).

Jesus calls us to follow Him with zeal, but also to follow Him in the compassion He had for the outcast, the broken-hearted, and the sinner. I pray that during this season of Lent Jesus will grow each of us in the fullness of conforming us to His good and perfect character. A centerpiece of that character is being compassionate.

THE GOOD BOOK FOR BABY NAMES

DANIEL SILLIMAN

The influence of Christianity has declined in the United States. Yet in maternity wards across the country, when newborns scrunch up their tiny faces and fill their lungs with their first breath of air, parents regularly turn to Scripture. They give their children biblical names.

Some Bible names are more popular than ever. One hundred years ago, for example, Noah was popular. In the early 1990's, the number of babies named after the ark-building patriarch again rose rapidly. By 1996, Noah was the 50th most popular baby name for boys, and by 2009, it was in the top 10. For the past decade, Noah has been the No.1 or No. 2 name for boys.

A few names, such as Mary and Martha, have become less popular, but other Bible names appear resistant to cultural change. A girl born in America today is about as likely to be named Elizabeth as she would have been a century ago. David was the 28th most popular boy in 2001. It was 25th in 2020.

America has changed a lot in 100 years. But when it comes to naming babies, plenty of people still go back to the Bible.

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Jedaé Fox	
Lori Judd	Missions
Andy Heininger	Worship
Judy Nichols	Prayer Chain
Andy Anschutz	Sound/Power Point
John and Donna Kurtz	TrailNotes

“PAST” and “PRESENT”



REBEKAH STEFANIUK
(Coordinator of the program for sending American teachers to Japan to teach English)

February 5, 2009 [Ed. This first part is from her journal]

Leaving for Japan

So, we are leaving for Japan on March 29. We will be there for two years. For me, it is a dream that has truly been not only resurrected, but also redeemed. I lived in Funehiki for two years when I was single, and truly thought I would live there for the rest of my life. I decided to come back to Ohio to study education so that I could be a better asset to the program in Funehiki. Well, in that time I met Peter and got married. At the time, we did not think that was where God would lead us. Peter is a wonderful litigator and has a great love for the USA. Great love.

Well, five years and three kids later, we are headed to Japan! We have been thinking/praying about this decision for at least two years. It is time to go. More later...

April 1, 2025

Mrs. Maki

Dear GFC:



I want to thank you again for allowing me to come to the GFC worship recently and share a bit of what God is doing in Tamura, Japan. I also want to thank you for your prayers: for me, for the church in Tamura City, and for the completion of the new church building.

Most recently, you prayed for Mrs. Maki as she was in the hospital with pneumonia. She died on March 1. Her funeral will be April 12. I will be heading to Japan on April 10, so if any of you would like to give money for flowers, I could easily help with that. A comforting thought is that she was able to celebrate Mr. Maki's birthday with him in heaven on March 7. [Ed. Mr. Maki died on Feb. 19, 2023]

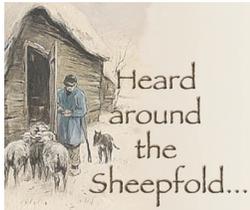
There will be 7 new teachers invading your space April 1-9. Please pray for the visas to be received by April 9.

Thank you all so much for opening your hearts and for your prayers and service to aiding in seeing Japanese folks come to know the freedom and joy and peace of Jesus.

Your sister,

REBEKAH STEFANIUK





Heard
around
the
Sheepfold...

Gleanings from or about our
brothers and sisters in the body of
Christ worldwide.

Turkey:

SAINT NICK’S TOMB IDENTIFIED

Archeologists believe they have discovered the burial site of Nicholas of Myra, the bishop who inspired the modern Santa Claus. His remains were stolen and taken to Italy in 1087.

A recent excavation uncovered a stone box that appears to have held Nicholas’ bones. There was also a marble floor tile with “Χάρις” (Charis), the Greek word for “grace,” on it along with a fresco depicting Jesus holding a Bible and making the sign of the cross. There are currently no Christians in the city that Nicholas shepherded, which is now called Demre.

Japan:

CHURCH HISTORY HELPS ASTRONOMERS

A Byzantine monk helped two astronomers and a librarian refine the modern understanding of the earth’s rotation. These Japanese scholars used Theophanes the Confessor’s account of an eclipse written by an unknown Arian in 346 AD.

United States:

CHRISTIAN BAKER WINS AGAIN

The Colorado Supreme Court dismissed another lawsuit against Christian baker Jack Phillips—12 years after he was first sued for refusing to make a cake for a same-sex wedding. Phillips won that case in 2018 when the Supreme Court ruled Colorado’s antidiscrimination law did not adequately protect his religious freedom. The attorney who sued Phillips requested another cake celebrating gender transition and a third, according to Phillips’ attorneys, depicting Satan smoking marijuana. Phillips declined these requests and was sued a second and then a third time. The state court rejected both of those cases against him in October 2024.

West and Central Africa:

PERSECUTION BY MUSLIM EXTREMISTS

Millions of our Christian brothers and sisters in Africa have suffered greatly, including tens of thousands who have been driven from their homes while watching their possessions and livelihoods disappear amid the Fulami Islamist dream of a global caliphate.

April 2025

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12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31				



- 1-9** Orientation at GFC for English teachers going to Japan.
- 2, 9, 16, 23, 30** Connect groups for all ages, 6:30-8:00 PM.
- 5** Games Reach Family Game Night, 6:30-8:30 PM, at GFC.
- 6** *Keys to Freedom: Healing Life’s Hurts* – Pastor Eric Byrom. Teen DTS planning meeting, 12:45 PM, GFC lobby. Members’ Meeting, 6:00-8:00 PM.
- 7, 14, 21, 28** *Keys to Freedom* studies for men and women, 7:00 PM.
- 10-12** *Table Fellowship Annual Conference* at GFC.
- 13** **PALM SUNDAY** – Tom Kelby, the president of Table Fellowship, preaching. 
- 18** GOOD FRIDAY
- 20** **RESURRECTION SUNDAY** Elder Jadaé Fox, preaching.
- 26** Prayer Walk for the women.
- 27** *Keys to Freedom: Choosing to Forgive* – Pastor Eric Byrom. 

◆◆◆Coming Events◆◆◆

Week of May 4 - GFC Rummage Sale.
May 24 - Women of Grace Tea.