
Knowing Jesus

The Rebuke of Christ

Luke 11:37-54

3/3/2019

Main Idea: Jesus confronted the religious leaders with their hypocrisy.

Lesson Objective: Submit to the Lordship of Christ.

Introduction

As your class time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Brian Hickey, with PhillyVoice, reports on the strange case of a Mr. Black, who required two obituaries.

In the first obit, his “loving wife, Bearetta Harrison Black” gets top survivor billing. In the second, however, Bearetta is nowhere to be found, but “his long-time (sic) girlfriend, Princess Hall” appears in her place.

A man answering the phone at Greenidge Funeral Homes told PhillyVoice that the obituaries were placed separately because “the wife wanted it one way, and the girlfriend wanted it another way.” But he did not anticipate any problems because everybody knew it was happening.¹

Mr. Black had lived two separate lives, acknowledged in two separate obituaries. How about you? How many lives do you live? Do you present one persona to one group of friends and something quite different to another? If an honest report were given, would you require one obit or two?

In our passage for today, we will see that the Pharisees were repelled because Jesus did not follow their rules. Jesus pointed out that they in fact had not been following God’s will. Our challenge as we go through this text is will we listen and learn from Jesus? Will we receive His instruction, or will we reject it? Are we willing to submit to His authority over our lives, even if it costs us everything?

¹ “‘Loving wife’ and ‘longtime girlfriend’ place dueling obituaries after N.J. man’s death,” by Brian Hickey, PhillyVoice Staff, August 5th, 2016

The Pharisaism Problem

Luke 11:37-44

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so He went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that He did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

⁴² “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.” [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#).

This is the second of three occasions in which Jesus eats with Pharisees in Luke’s Gospel. As we discussed several lessons ago, sitting at the table had huge implications in that culture. On the surface it would appear that Jesus and the religious leaders were friends. However, it wouldn’t take long for the Pharisees to find a reason to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing. Notice the irony in the situation; the Pharisees are the ones who invited Jesus to the table, and they were the ones accusing Him of neglecting the law.

During the meal, they would have **reclined** (on one elbow, eating with the other hand at the low table), as would have been expected at a relaxed Sabbath meal or at a banquet. Even though the Law of Moses did not require that all Jews do so, the Pharisees were bound by their tradition to **wash before** meals. This had nothing to do with hygiene. It was done in order to meet the guidelines for ceremonial purity demanded of priests, the assumption being that it would be

best for all to maintain the higher purity standards demanded of priests. The fact that the Pharisee was **astonished** suggests that Jesus was regarded as somewhat like a respected Pharisee training his disciples.

Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees' cleaning **the outside of the cup and dish** is not actually about dishwashing, but about cleanliness or purity of the heart. Jesus' harsh criticism towards them was not a universal attack on all Pharisees. We know by our own experience that there will be some who are sincere and godly in their faith and those who are not so much. According to ancient writings, there were several condemnations aimed towards hypocritical Pharisees (*Şota* 22b). They identified seven types of Pharisees. The first five are hypocritical: (1) the "shoulder" Pharisee, who wore his good actions on his shoulder for all to see; (2) the "wait-a-little" Pharisee, who found excuses for putting off a good deed; (3) the "bruised" Pharisee, who to avoided looking at a woman but ran into walls; (4) the "pestle" or hunched-over Pharisee, who walked bent over in pretended humility; and (5) the "ever-reckoning" Pharisee, who was always weighing his good deeds against his bad. Also mentioned were (6) the "God-fearing" Pharisees, who lived in holy awe and the fear of God, and (7) the "God-loving" Pharisee, who loved God from his heart.²

Jesus illustrated the faulty Pharisaic attitude by depicting a practice which no one would have defended. Who in his right mind would wash only the outside of the cup when the inside remained filthy? Jesus went on to point out that His accusers were actually **full of greed and wickedness**. Their focus on the external actions of man revealed them to be **fools**, behaving as if God had made only **the outside** and was unconcerned with the **inside**. Since they were

² Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 339–341.

filled with “greed and wickedness” on the inside, Jesus suggests that they repent and “**give as alms those things that are within**” which suggested that they should not worry about (unnecessary) externals such as hand washing. They should instead be concerned with internals, such as concern for the poor.

Jesus then moved to point out other points of concern. In biblical literature, a **woe** would have been used on two occasions. One was a lament. The idea of shame falling on someone would cause them to cry out to God for help. The other was when someone should be warned. It had the same idea as “You should be ashamed of yourself!” In our context, this is the way Jesus was using it with the religious leaders. These Pharisees were determined to accomplish the minuscule task which frequently led them to neglect the more important matters. Jesus accused them of giving God a tenth of the smallest herbs but failing in their basic relationships with people and with God. Their neglect of **justice** referred to a lack of concern for the oppressed and powerless, and their neglect of the **love of God** suggested that their service to God is not based on love for Him.

Let’s take a few moments to consider what Jesus said. In our context, we must be careful not to neglect the ministry in which He has called us to serve. We can find it easier to do something that would not cost us much (time, money, effort) rather than doing what He has called us to do. When we look to the oppressed and powerless, we must not only look to the physical, but also to the spiritual conditions of people. We are seeking an increasing number of people who are held in bondage of sin, and we have the gospel that could free them, if we would love them as Christ. In the same way, we must never forfeit the doing of the little things in ministry while keeping a singular focus on the major ministries. Less importance does not mean no importance.

The second **woe** addressed the Pharisees' love of public recognition and their feelings of self-importance. Jesus called into account their practice of taking **the best seat in the synagogues**, where they could be seen with other important people. They also enjoyed the public approval with all of the formal **greetings in the marketplaces**. They desired to have all of the focus on them. There's an old wise saying that the ones who desire to be on the pedestal will be the ones who fall off. When we seek positions of recognition in order to stroke our egos, we are wanting people to follow us. The people who follow will get lost. We must never forget that we are saved by grace through faith, and it did not come from within ourselves. We are nothing without Christ!

The third woe compares the Pharisees to **unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it**. The verse is difficult because Jesus does not say *how* they are like unmarked graves. Since close contact with a dead body rendered a Jewish person unclean, unmarked graves were dangerous. A person could become unclean without even knowing it. Though the Pharisees avoided touching a grave for fear of ritual defilement, they themselves, through their own unrecognized corruption, were defiling those who came into contact with them. This would indicate that the Pharisees looked righteous on the outside but are in fact filled with evil on the inside. The people were innocently being led by these "unclean" people which would have rendered those around them "unclean."³

Have we written in our hearts a set of rules that must be accomplished before one might be saved?

If Jesus were sitting in our church, on what would His "woes" be focused?

³ Mark C. Black, *Luke*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press Pub., 1995), Lk 11:37–44.

Walter L. Liefeld, "*Luke*," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 955–956.

How can we keep from being like a “white washed tomb” of the faith?

Is there integrity between who I am on the outside and who I am on the inside? What is a way we can tell? V42 gives a clue

When you compare your outside to your inside where do you need more of the Gospel?

The Licentious Lawyers

Luke 11:45-52

⁴⁵ One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.” ⁴⁶ And he said, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.” [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

The lawyers were Pharisees, but they were considered to be better educated in the working of the Law, and the people felt they were better to interpret and impose laws for the people to follow. **One of the lawyers** who spoke up understood that Jesus’ condemnation of Pharisaic practice was also a judgment of his interpretation of the Law. When he challenged Jesus, **“You insult us also,”** he opened the door for Jesus to comment more specifically about matters of their legal interpretation. Jesus directed His woe at the lawyers because of their burdensome approach to the Law. These “self-proclaimed experts in the Law” offered their guidance in every possible circumstance of life, so that there were thousands of Pharisaic legal opinions for people to observe. Remember that the Pharisees sought to “build a fence” around the Law. That is,

they created rules which were more strict than the Law itself in order to keep people from getting so close to breaking the Law that they inadvertently broke it.

The unfortunate result of the Pharisees' well-meaning efforts created an impossible set of rules which **loaded people with burdens** that took all the joy out of doing God's will. Jesus criticized the lawyers because they would **not touch the burden with one of your fingers**. These men were unconcerned with the burden they had created and refused to make it simpler and lighter. As "experts," they found ways of circumventing the rules themselves.

The next **woe** that Jesus levied against the lawyers identified their hypocrisy in honoring the prophets by maintaining and adorning their **tombs** and at the same time refusing to listen to their message. Some lavish tombs were built for royalty and others before and during the time of Christ. It was all very well for the experts in the law to build new tombs for prophets long since martyred by their ancestors. Yet this very act ironically symbolized approval of their forefathers' crimes against God's messengers, and by their association with the silencing of the prophets they were guilty of the very sins which the prophets spoke against.⁴

Jesus, the personified **Wisdom of God**, linked the former rejection of the prophets of Israel to the present and future rejection of Jesus, the apostles, and other early church prophets. Because **this generation** was responsible for rejecting God's present-day prophets, it is guilty for not learning from the earlier generations' sins. It was therefore **the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation**. Abel was mentioned because he was the first innocent "prophet" killed in the Old

⁴ Liefeld, 956.

Testament, and **Zechariah** was the last to be martyred according to the Jewish arrangement of the Old Testament.

Jesus pronounces his third and final **woe** against the experts in the Law because they **have taken away the key to knowledge**. Not only have the lawyers themselves **not entered** into real knowledge about God, but they **have** also **hindered those** who would have discovered who God really is and what he wants. The “key to knowledge” is the ability to hear the word of God with open minds and hearts in order to know God. These lawyers’ false interpretation of Scripture and their many traditions deprived the people of the key to knowledge, i.e., God’s plan of salvation. This is evident by their rejection of John the Baptist and Jesus. They refused to enter and submit to the kingdom of God. Their “religion” was worse than neutral; it was hostile.⁵

Do we have unwritten rules in which many people believe must be followed before they could become a follower of Jesus Christ?

Attitudes and prejudices can cause us to make others stumble. What are some areas where we have hindered the work of God in our community?

⁵ Black, Lk 11:45-52. Stein, 341-343.

The Deliberate Descent

Luke 11:53-54

⁵³ As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say. [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#)

You would think that after Jesus' confrontation with the Scribes and Pharisees that they would have repented and followed them, but like many Sundays when people hear the preaching of God's word, they refuse to listen and continue to live in sin. Luke tells us that these guys became more aggressive in their opposition to Jesus. As we continue reading through the book of Luke, we see them as they **press him hard and to provoke him**, hoping he would say something which would bring condemnation from the people and officials with authority to stop Him. Luke makes us aware that the stakes have risen and because of Jesus' prediction of his coming suffering and death, the drama has heightened. Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem to die, and His enemies were beginning to organize against him. There can be no doubt about what lies ahead. There can be no doubt about what a Christian ought to do when faced with opposition.

Take time to pray for the spiritual condition of the lost community around you. Ask God to begin to soften their hearts so that the message of the Gospel can be heard and obeyed.

There are times when lost people will observe us in order to catch us sinning so that they can justify their own righteousness. What can we do in this situation?

When we fail, how can we use those moments to point others to Jesus Christ?