

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Luke 11:37-54
“Beware! Jesus Is Offensive”

April 27, 2014
(2nd Sunday of Easter)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

VIIIIF: LUKE 11:37-54 “BEWARE! JESUS IS OFFENSIVE”

For Lk.'s Own Audience/Leaders: Protreptic

1) vv.37-41 JESUS THE PROPHET AT A PHARISEE'S SYMPOSIUM.

Mk. 7:1-4 //Mt. 23:1-36

- 37 While he (Jesus) was speaking, See 11:14-36, INVITATION TO MEAL (A)
- a Pharisee asked him to dine with him; Many Diverse Jewish Groups (70), Reformers, Serious Laity, 7 Challenges
so he went in and sat (reclined) at table. **Washing Omitted, Eat With Pharisees // Lk. 7:36-50, 14:1-24 (// 5 Parts: A-E)**
Not Play By Standard Meal Rules! Rude! Strict Jewish Sect/ Oral Law For Torah
- 38 a The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash (immerse) before dinner. **OFFENSE(B) + RESPONSE©**
- 39 b And the LORD said to him, **m. Yadaim 4.6-8, m. Yoma 2.2, Ex. 30:19-21, Ceremonial Defilement, Lk.11:38**
- 1 “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, **Lev. 11:33, Focus On Externals/ Rituals (1)**
2 but inside you are full of extortion (greed) and wickedness. **11:29, Sees Within, No Integrity/ Vice**
- 40 1' You fools! Did not he who made the outside **Caustic! Visible To All, Lk. 12:20, Is. 1:16-17**
2' make the inside (lit. *your innards!*) also?! (Yes!) **What Is Invisible: Thoughts, Intentions**
Generosity = Spiritual Detergent, Alms/Tithes For The Poor
- 41 b' But give for alms (mercy) those things which are within; **Antidote, 16:14, Start At Center, Generosity To Poor**
- a' and behold, everything is clean for you. **Invitation: Clean/Holy/Pure/Undeified/Fit For God, Acts 10:15, 11:19**
Inner-Jewish Argument, Give Energy To The Care Of The Heart

2) vv.42-44 THREE WOES ON THE PHARISEES. 6:24-26 Woes = Warning Of Coming Doom!

- 42 (a) “But woe to you Pharisees! **Curse/Disaster/Doom/Lament, Convenient Priorities: Hypocrisy (1)**
1 for you tithe the mint and *rue* and every herb, **Seasonings Tithe: Dt. 14:22-29, 26:12-15, Lev. 27:30**
2 and neglect justice and the love of God; **Major/Minors, 10:27, Mic. 6:8, Neglect Justice/Love**
2' these you ought to have done, **Heartless Legalism, First Order Issues Are Primary Oughts**
1' without neglecting the others. **Jesus Was Not Against Tithing, Minutiae (a), Honor (b), Tomb ©**
- 43 (b) Woe to you Pharisees! **20:46-47, Men Pleasers/Honor, Pride/ Elitism, Not Service (2)**
for you love the best seat in the synagogues **//v.42c, Religious Show Of Piety: Deference/Privilege**
and salutations in the market places. **Status Seekers, Love Self-Glory More Than God**
- 44 Climax: (c) Woe to you! **Num. 11:19-22, 19:16, Lev. 21:1-4, Defiling Others/ Separation From God (3)**
for you are like **graves (tombs)** which are not seen, **Deliberately Hidden (Gk. *Adelos*), Deception**
Opposite Outcome and men walk over them without knowing it.” **Neg. Influence, You Are The Very Thing You Avoid**
Corpse Impurity, Destructive Of God's People

2') vv.45-52 THREE WOES ON THE LAWYERS (SCRIPTURE SCHOLARS). Acts 6:12

- 45 One of the lawyers (scribes) answered him, **Scholars, Aided Pharisees In Scripture, NEW AUDIENCE (D)**
“TEACHER, in saying this you reproach (insult) us also.” **Challenges Jesus' Rudeness! Is. 1:10-17, Libel Charge**
Attacks Their Theology/ World View, JESUS RESPONSE (E)
- 46 (a) And he said, “Woe to you lawyers also! **9:22, 22:1-2, Erroneous Interpreters Of Jewish Law**
for you load men with burdens hard to bear, **Religious Rules/Rituals As A Burden, Acts 15:10**
and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. **No Compassion, Modeling**
- 47 (c) Woe to you! **Maxim: The Son Is Like The Father**
1 for you build the **tombs** of the prophets **Agree With Ancestors: Celebrate Their Deaths**
2 whom your fathers killed. **Finish Their Work, Only Good Prophet = Dead Prophet!**
- 48 3 So you are witnesses and consent to the deeds of your fathers; **Now To Me!**
2' for they killed them, **With Murderous Hearts They Resist Jesus The Prophet**
1' and you build their **tombs**. **Acts 6:12, Collusion With Murder! Best Prophet Is A Dead Prophet!**
11:31, Not Scripture, Wisdom Personified // Holy Spirit
- 49 (Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, **7:35 (God), // Holy Spirit, Prov. 8, Sir. 21**
1 ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, **Jesus (I) Speaks For God**
some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ **//Jer. 7:25-26**
that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, **Accumulated Guilt**
- 50 2 _____ may be required of this generation, **Unattested In Scripture: Early Prophecy?**
51 1' from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, **Gen. 4:1-12 (First Righteous Man Killed)**
who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. **MT Last Book, 2 Chron. 24:19-24 (Last Death)**
2 Yes, I tell you, it shall be required of this generation.) **20:19-29, 2 Chron. Last Book In MT**
- 52 Climax: (b) Woe to you lawyers! **Jesus' Self-Definition = Says NO To Those Closest To Him**
for you have taken away the key of knowledge; **Access, Issue = Who Is The True Israel?**
you did not enter yourselves, **Not Know God, Not Teach/Model Truth**
Opposite Outcome and you hindered those who were entering.” **Challenges All They Have Built, Block Access To God!**
vv.53-54 = Conclusion, Alienation Grows

1') vv.53-54 PLOTTING AGAINST THE PROPHET JESUS. No Repentance! Proof Of Hate/Hostility

- 53 As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard, **Undermines Their Whole Life!**

Luke 11:37-54 3

54

and to provoke him to speak of many things,

Sin = Neglect Poor + Oppose Prophets, Not Like Being Exposed

lying in wait for him, to *catch* at something he might say.

7:30 Refused John, 7:39, 10:25, 2 Hunting Terms

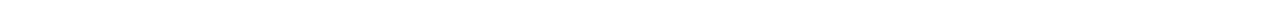
A Brief Treatment Of VIII F, Luke 11:37-54

This is the sixth unit of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:23) and stands in parallel to 16:14-17:10 involving further conflicts with the Pharisees and a comment on God knowing the heart (11:38-41 // 16:15). Inclusions are *speaking/ speak* (v.37 // v.53b), *Pharisee(s)* (v.37b // v.53a), *went in/ went away* (v.37c // v.53a). This controversy at a symposium includes three *woes* against the Pharisees (2. vv.42-44) and scribes (2' vv.45-52). When the verbal attack of vv.38-41 is added, it brings the total to seven separate criticisms by Jesus of his opponents. What began in hospitality (a. vv.39-41) ends in hostility (a' vv.53-54). The structure is a 4:2 concentric pattern (1-2 // 2'-1').

After the exorcism and crowds of 11:14-36 which exposed Jesus to ceremonial defilement, he accepts an invite to dine and dialog with a Pharisee and his colleagues, “so we went in and reclined at table.” But he, as a provocation, did not engage in the washing of hands to cleanse away ritual impurity. Ex. 30:19-21 applied such washings to priests; the Pharisees applied it to themselves under the idea that all Israel must be holy. The offense is noted (v.38), and since Jesus knows the thoughts of the heart, he breaks the code of hospitality and bluntly addresses the false piety of his hosts. They are meticulous about the ceremonial washing of vessels, but their interiors are filled with greed and vice. Superficial rituals do not go to the heart, which God also made (v.40). They are out of touch with what God wants, thus *fools* (v.40). If they address interior greed through the repentance of *almsgiving*, their eyes will be opened by fresh grace. In Mark 7:14-23 Jesus undermines the entire system by declaring that what makes us unfit for God comes from the center of the self, the heart, not from what goes in the mouth and out. The system of clean/unclean as an identity marker for Jews and a boundary with Gentiles is cancelled. Holiness is heart-level.

What follows in vv.42-44 are three warnings which present Jesus as God’s agent and prophet. The Pharisees tithe seasonings so the food on which they’re sprinkled isn’t rendered unclean but neglect the love of neighbor (justice) and God. They major in less-demanding minors. Secondaries matter, but not as primaries. The next woe (v.43) evinces how they play to the crowds to accumulate honor, another symptom they do not know God. In the third (v.44), the direct address is omitted, which enables the *lawyers* (i.e. scholars) to feel the pinch. To touch the dead or graves was a long defilement (Num. 19:16) and avoided by whitewashing tombs. But *the dead* Jesus addresses are not so marked and spread defilement to all. We communicate what we are; what’s in our hearts infects others. Jesus was not mannerly! The love of God and neighbor matter. Anything less is ridiculed.

That the theologians get the point is clear in v.45, “Teacher, in saying this you insult us also.” Jesus’ answer in three woes, is *Yes*. As before (v.42) his first attack is on their preference for religious minutiae, for multiplying religious rules that weigh people down. What is needed are broad guidelines and merciful help from true shepherds. The second woe rests on the truism *like father, like son*. Their religious ancestors resisted God’s address and killed the messengers; a fearful weight of judgment will soon fall (vv.50b, 51c). While they honor dead prophets with elaborate tombs, they do not listen to Jesus. The effect is that neither they nor their hearers go through the door of life for which they hold the keys. To defile others (v.44) and hinder their knowledge of God



(v.52) are damnable. The last two verses verify Jesus' diagnosis of his audience. These men are blind, deceived, vicious. When the preachers miss God, everyone suffers.

BEWARE! JESUS IS OFFENSIVE

"Woe to you, Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues...."

Certain doom for those who play to the wrong audience and do not repent

Next to the Bible, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* may be the best read religious book of all time. Time was when nearly every English household had a copy of this allegory in which everything stands for something else. Here's a scene on the vice of hypocrisy, the gap between outward appearance and inner reality:

"The Interpreter took Mercy and Christiana into a garden and a tree whose inside was all rotten and gone, and yet it grew and had leaves. Then Mercy said, 'What is the meaning of this?'

'This tree,' said Interpreter, 'whose outside is fair, and whose inside is rotten, is what may be compared to who are in God's garden. With their mouths, they speak high about God, but indeed will do nothing for him; whose leaves are fair, but their heart is good for nothing but to be tinder for the devil's tinder-box.'"¹

Lush foliage and a rotten heart: that is Bunyan's image for hypocrisy. From the Greek word for actors wearing a mask, hypocrisy is to say one thing and do another. It's the gap between *talk* and *walk*. Synonyms are *fraud*, *liar*, *fake*, *pretender*. Hypocrisy prefers appearances over substance, the observable outside to the hidden inside; it is the opposite of *integrity* - which is to be one thing throughout.

Time was when *hypocrisy* was such an inflammatory word it was banned from debate in the British House of Commons; it caused too many fights and too much

¹ Robert Backhouse, *The Ultimate Speaker's Handbook* (London, England: Marshall Pickering, 1997), 91.

bitterness. Even today, to say to someone, “You are nothing but a *hypocrite*,” is to risk an angry, if not violent, response. Karl Rahner, the Catholic theologian of the last generation, once admitted that “The number one cause of atheism is Christians. Those who proclaim God with their mouths and deny him with their lifestyles is what an unbelieving world finds simply unbelievable.”² *Hypocrisy* is being two-faced, wanting to look better than you are. It was a vice Jesus’ couldn’t overlook, particularly in the religious leaders and their scholars to whom the Jewish people looked for guidance; too much was at stake because these men had influence. If you want to know who Jesus was hardest on, it was clergy- people like me!³

Whenever he met the gap of hypocrisy- which was everywhere- Jesus stripped away the cover and exposed it, particularly among Jewish teachers. He was the only one with perfect integrity, the love of God and people from inside to outside and from outside to inside; Jesus was one simple thing.. Not so with us; we’re all deeply divided. Hi was a severe mercy, and one of the reasons we killed him. The teachers and their experts could not bear to be so thoroughly exposed. What else do you do with a prophet who makes you look bad before the very people you’re trying to impress with learning and piety? You either repent and join his movement, or else reject the messenger and try to get even, thus the end of today’s lesson, “As Jesus went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to *press him hard*, and to *provoke* him to speak of many things, *laying in wait* for him, *to catch at something* he might say.” Can you feel the hatred? He spoke the truth in love without flinching; they could not handle it because they knew it was true but did not want to change. To start over with him cost too much prestige. He made them look bad. To come to Jesus, then and now, is to stand in a circle of divine light that illumines the darkest corners of our inmost thoughts. Jesus exposes all our hiding places, and here his love is utterly ruthless. H.G. Wells put it memorably:

“He was like some terrible moral huntsman digging mankind out of the snug burrows in which they had lived hitherto. In the white blaze of this kingdom of his there was to be no property, no privilege, no pride and precedence; no motive indeed and no reward but love. Is it any wonder

² S. Gaukroger, N. Mercer, *A-Z* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 78.

³ James 3:1.

that men were dazzled and blinded and cried out against him?”⁴

As an exercise in self-examination I put myself in the story as a Pharisee and Scribe and imagined Jesus naming every big and little hypocrisy in my life in front of a congregation. It was quite a list. I wanted to run and hide. “Lord, could we please do this in private? This is embarrassing,” to which the thought came quickly back, “I tried; you weren’t listening.”

Today I introduce you to a *rude* Jesus, an *out-of-control* Jesus, a Jesus who uses *ridicule*. I introduce you to a Jesus who forgets his manners and ruins a perfectly good dinner party by verbally assaulting everyone in sight.⁵ And he did it deliberately because he was guided by the Spirit. The Lord is much more concerned about our character than our reputation. I’ve got bad news for us all: Jesus is not into *appearances*. He wants a changed heart and a new life which aims at one thing.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

Attack On The Pharisees (vv.37-44)

It could have been a marketplace session, but more likely a synagogue service on the Sabbath. There was a serious lay theologian in the audience, a Pharisee, a member of a sect within Judaism known for its ultra-strict adherence to the law and to the traditions of the elders that had arisen as a protective layer of practices around the law.⁶ It was the custom for guest speakers to be invited to a post-service symposium, a theological discussion around a meal.⁷ So Jesus was invited to dine and discuss, and he accepted. Other Pharisees were there as well as another sub-group within Judaism, the scribes or lawyers who were technical experts in the interpretation of Jewish law. Pharisees and their scholars: these were men serious about understanding

⁴ David Garland, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011, 498).

⁵ On the ancient norms of sharp ridicule in philosophical and religious debate, see Charles Talbert, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 150-153.

⁶ On Jesus’ tension with the Pharisees, see N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 1999), Chapter 3, “The Challenge of the Symbols,” 54-73).

⁷ On Luke’s repeated use of the symposium genre, see E. Springs Steele, “Luke 11:37-53- A Modified Hellenistic Symposium,” *JBL*, 103/3 (1984), 379-394.

and practicing their faith. It was the focus of life, every waking moment a constant dialog with Scripture and the traditions of the elders as a test case of obedience. Not casual adherents, but deadly serious about being Jews in a highly distinctive way to separate themselves from the unclean and defiled Gentiles with their many gods and immoral ways. These were Jesus' meal companions, a specialized renewal group convinced that if everyone lived as they did, God would finally have his *holy people*, and it would be them! So serious were they that the rituals Scripture prescribed for the priests they applied to themselves, including various ceremonial washing before meals; they showed how serious they were by doing more than Scripture demanded. It made life complicated, as if you had to have both a law degree and a Ph.D. in theology to please God; none of the ordinary people could do that.

One of their customs involved a careful ritual washing of the hands before meals, even between courses. To omit even the slightest detail was to sin.⁸ It was not about hygiene but a symbolic cleansing from anything the law of God considered unclean before they ate in the presence of God. Jesus knew all about it and deliberately omitted it. It was a calculated attack on an entire religious system and the view of God that undergirds it. It was a public challenge, and Luke reports the response of the host in verse 38, "The Pharisee was *astonished* to see Jesus did not first wash before dinner." It was as if the flag came by and Jesus didn't take off his hat or put his hand over his heart, clearly unpatriotic. It was as if everyone stood as the bride came down the aisle and Jesus stayed seated. You'd think him uncouth, disrespectful. Those who do such things are deviants; they stick out, and Jesus did it by design, the question being, What really matters to God, and who is God's prophet? You could feel the tension in the air. Someone had to speak. What do you do with a dinner guest who picks a fight and attacks your religion? A guest has dishonored your home and all your colleagues.

What was it like to know the human heart the way Jesus did? By his observation of behavior aided by the illumination of the Spirit, Jesus knew what was in people. They were an open book. It takes a counselor or psychiatrist many sessions to piece together a relatively full understanding of one troubled person, but not Jesus. Superman's X-ray vision went through walls; Jesus' moral vision saw past appearances to the very heart. The Holy Spirit whispered the inner truths of what people were trying to hide; we call it *the word of knowledge*, and it is still in operation. You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people

⁸ William Barclay, *Luke* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976), 155.

all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time, and you can never fool Jesus- not even one time! May as well just tell him the truth from the beginning. I've found that to deal with him is to discover the truth about me. He loves us too much to let us continue in a lie, and every day his followers lived in his light. It was education not in the sense of abstract information but in the deeper sense of character formation and heart purification. With him there was no place to hide, which explains why his friends often end up looking like The Three Stooges.

Much of our speaking and teaching is educated guesswork. But Jesus' words went to the very core of what needed addressing. Imagine a doctor who needed no tests but intuitively knows the correct diagnosis, not only for diseases but also for emotional and relationship problems. That was Jesus. He knows us to the core. This is the reason some find him attractive (*He knows me*) and others find him not-so-attractive (*He knows me*). Walking with Jesus means lifelong exposure as layer by layer of the self is brought into the light for surgery and healing. Because I call him *Lord*, he gets the right to shine his light into every crevice and corner of my inner life, even my dreams, and to speak truth into the shadows of my soul.

Jesus is merciful but not always gentle. He hurts but does not harm. He deliberately omits a ritual washing and his host's blood pressure goes up a hundred points. A button is pushed. Verse 38: "The Pharisee was astonished to see Jesus did not use the ceremonial washing before dinner, and if- as they believed- his hand had touched something unclean, then it would be transferred to whatever else the touched, even to the food, which by going into him would render him unclean and thus unfit for God's company. That was their thinking process. And the Lord said to him, 'Now you Pharisees cleanse the *outside* of the cup and the dish, but *inside* you are full of extortion and wickedness.'" Jesus saw what was inside this man and his friends, and it was not pretty. They were using external rituals of cleansing to cover up a filthy, greedy interior. On thing on the outside, a different man within.

Something smells as you enter the room to the side of the sanctuary where each week the brass and silver are polished. There sits the silver pitcher for communion. You peek in and find someone has poured raw sewage in the pitcher. Something holy is filled with something repulsive, and you're disgusted. Men counted as religious leaders are full of greed and all forms of wickedness, says Jesus. Someone needs to clean the inside; polishing the outside fixes nothing. Jesus saw past their ceremonies to what they were within, a smelly brew of greed and wickedness. There are people here who will cheat someone in business this week, lust after someone else's spouse,

tear someone's reputation down through gossip, spend the tithe on more stuff, harbor racist attitudes, ignore the needs of the poor, wink at injustice, delight in someone else's misfortune, then be back next Sunday. I know because I'm one of them, a card carrying member of Club Hypocrite! The gap between persona and heart is a big one. I often feel like a fraud. Its why he came. We cannot change our own hearts.

There is dream and a daydream I keep having; because it keeps popping up I know I've not deciphered the depths yet. I'm in various places and Jesus appears. Church, home, out in public. I immediately make the right response; I quickly fall on my face before His Majesty. All kinds of things go through head and heart: fear, love, dread, regret, expectation. I hear a voice, "Stand to your feet," and when I do he puts both hands on my shoulders and stares me in the eye. "Ask me," he says, and I reply, "Ask you what?" He smiles, "We both know what it is, so ask me." It then erupts out of my heart like a volcanic eruption, "What the hell do you want me to do? Either start showing up, or give me my life back. I keep bragging on you, and you keep hiding." I'm surprised he's not mad and doesn't fry me on the spot. Instead, he throws back his head and laughs out loud, then he's gone between blinks and I'm left feeling exposed and foolish again. And since I don't have an answer, I keep doing what I'm doing, waiting for him to show up and do for people what only he can do.

One of our most fundamental experiences is that while we are one person, we have an inner and an outer reality. We can behave one way and be thinking something contrary. Our actions can appear faithful, but if our heart was revealed, people would see the split between the outer and inner. When people focus only on outer behavior and ignore their inner life, they loose touch with the depths and become conventional, hollow people. But Jesus wants to bring the inner and the other back together by cleansing the inside and then letting it show up in behavior. Forgiveness of sins starts the process of inward newness. The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit deepens the process. Dealing with the external actions of sin is much simpler than dealing with the roots sunk deep into the soil of inner greed and wickedness. Jesus wants to clean us up on the inside, to do the deeper soul work so our actions are an expression of a new heart. The trouble is that it's so much easier to work on appearances than to work on the heart, easier to get a salon or gym *make over* than a deep conversion. But to work on the outside and not on the inside won't finally work because who we are will always reveal itself. Jesus said as much, "You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?" If God made the inner you, then God can deal with the inner you! It's a word of hope we can be different on the inside, in our thoughts and desires, even our dreams. So the external rituals of religion and piety are both

necessary and ambiguous. When I see you come to communion I've no idea whether it's an outward expression of an internal grace or a pious coverup for a heart of darkness. Religion can be the outer expression of an inner truth or the last place to hide from God! Jesus specializes in pulling back the shades and exposing what's within! It's what made him so utterly annoying.

There are two ways to read verse 41 which is the cure for the disease Jesus discovered. Since one of their heart problems was greed, the cure is the giving of alms to the poor, "But give alms for those things which are within..." The cure for greed is not more but less, not accumulating but giving for mercy's sake. A new habit of faithfulness (what we used to call a *penance*) is a help to inner change. Another reading is simply that these Pharisees need to pay some sustained time and attention to their inner life.⁹ We give alms to the poor, but what if it's me that poor, not in terms of money but poor in my own soul. What do I do if I am outwardly faithful in appearances but inwardly corrupted? I turn inward to the ugly part of me and give some time and attention to the core of me that only God can touch and change. I may change my habits by force of will, but only God can change the deepest control chamber of my life which is the heart. I take an inner journey, and for many people in our culture the call to such comes somewhere in the middle of life. You climb the ladder of success and find it's leaning against the wrong wall. You have it all and are nothing. You look in the mirror one day and ask, Why am I so miserable? For such a journey you need a trusted guide, a soul friend, a pastor or faithful layperson who has taken up an inner journey themselves. Do not try to go alone. It is the most dangerous and fulfilling trip you will ever take. Jesus was blunt and rude and honest and right. When the heart is purified, everything is clean and you see God in everything. What did Jesus say in another context? "Blessed are the *pure in heart*, for they shall *see* God."¹⁰ The meal has not yet been served and already Jesus has exposed the stench within and offered a way forward. His formal symposium on sanctification and holy living has now begun.

Congratulations come when we succeed; condolences come when there has been a loss. A beatitude is a note of congratulations from Jesus- something good has happened, "Blessed are you..." And a woe from the mouth of Jesus is a word that something bad is about to happen, "Woe to you, Pharisees..." Doom is ahead;

⁹ See Darrell Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 330-331.

¹⁰ Matthew 5:8.

condolences are in order; someone's about to die in a bad condition. So if the disease Jesus uncovered is the gap between outer holiness and inward corruption, what are some of the behavioral signals this is true. Three are given in verses 42 through 44, and each is preceded by a woe. It is as if Jesus stands ahead in their future and announces back to them in the present that to continue as they are will lead to death.

Some time ago I pronounced just such a woe on a severe alcoholic. I simply said to him, "If you continue drinking, you will die." I could have easily gone on to say something like this, "If you will tell me some of your favorite hymns I will write them down and pass them on to the pastor who will do your funeral in a few months. Grave side or church? Ground or cremation? What's your choice?" A woe is a classic tool of pastoral care to help people see where their actions are leading. Jesus' didn't hate these men, but the form his love took was tough. They were among the acknowledged leaders of the people, and they were leading them the wrong way! Outward conformity is not enough. God wants to give us a new heart so that we don't have to fake it! Loving God, myself and others from a pure, deep heart. That is what Jesus is after, and only he can bring it about.

The first symptom was money. They tithed everything, even table seasonings. For every ten grains of salt, one for God. Nine leaves of mint for me, one for God. Nothing wrong with keeping good books and being careful about the tithe. But if the giving ten percent is used as a religious excuse to avoid issues of justice or others and the love of God, then it's a cover for sin. We don't buy off God or our consciences with the tithe! It is to be an outward symbol of an inner reality, a part that reminds me that God owns it all and that one day it all goes back in the box as my soul stands naked before God. So if I tithe as a way to keep God off my back and out of my inner life, I'm kidding myself. Being over-scrupulous about religious duties is a dead give away that I see God as an petty accountant who must be paid off. Tithing is important. Jesus said so, "These things you *ought* to have done." But what is more important is justice and love. To tithe and harbor racism in my heart is a sin. To tithe and not love my spouse is a sin. To tithe and vote only my pocketbook in elections is sin. To tithe and not cry to mercy for my own sick soul is a sin. To tithe and think it gives me the right to spend the other ninety percent without regard to God is a sin. The use of the symbols of religion as an excuse to escape the substance is sin. The tithe, for all its worth, is ambiguous. It can be an outer expression of an inner reality, or it can be a subtle coverup for a heart that ignores the bigger issues of justice and love. The synagogue treasurer cheered the Pharisees; Jesus did not cheer because he knew the deeper truth.

Luke 11:37-54 12

A second symptom of hypocrisy, especially among religious leaders, is playing to the wrong audience. Whether because of their specialized clothing or their community reputation, Pharisees were easy to spot. They were shown deference, given the best seats in the synagogue and greetings in the marketplace as the accomplished spiritual athletes of the day. They thrived on such accolades because they craved honor; it was the high currency of their culture: anything for honor and status. When people call me *Reverend* or give me some courtesy, I have an inward check. I remember they are saluting the uniform or the office and not the one who wears it. How easy in the professional ministry to began to play to the wrong audience and to live for compliments and courtesies and little privileges not afforded others. It is a subtle seduction. Seeking honor is a dead end and a dead giveaway you're playing to the wrong audience. Jesus said it meant death: verse 43, "Woe to you, Pharisees! for you love the best seats in the synagogues and salutations in the market places." They loved it. Woe to the preacher or serious Christian who forgets that they finally stand before an audience of One who knows the truth.

But the third, and worst, symptom of hypocrisy is its effect on others. According to Jewish law, touching a dead body rendered one ceremonially unclean and required an elaborate ritual cleansing over seven days. So the practice was to whitewash graves and tombs so that they could be easily avoided while walking. It was not enough that these Pharisees were inwardly corrupted and hiding it; they spread their corruption to anyone who came near them, just like walking over an unmarked grave. They who were to be teachers of the people had become corrupters of the people. Just to be around them, said Jesus, was to risk becoming like them because we reproduce what we are. Nothing is so valuable as authentic spiritual leadership and nothing so deadly as an imitation. It is a privilege to be a pastor but also a peril because we get the harsher judgment.¹¹

Some Christians at the 1934 Baptist World Alliance in Berlin praised Adolf Hitler, stating: "Chancellor Adolf Hitler gives to the temperance movement the prestige of his personal example since he neither uses intoxicants nor smokes." Charles Leek, a delegate from Alabama, wrote: "Our observation is, that while Hitlerism is not the ultimate end, for Germany directly or Europe indirectly, it is for Germany *a safe step in the right direction*. Nazism has at least been a bar to the

¹¹ James 3:1.

universal boast of Bolshevism.”¹² Outwardly righteous, inwardly wicked. *A safe step in the right direction.* Can you believe it? It damages those who live it and invariably spreads to those they lead, whether in affairs of state or church.

There is something about truth that is self-validating. When you’ve heard it, especially about yourself, there’s no denying it, much as it may sting. What Jesus has done for his host and his fellow Pharisees is to take a Cat-scan of their soul and to point out the various malignancies growing there. It was the truth, and they knew it. It is hard for us to understand just how confrontive and utterly offensive Jesus’ words would have been in a culture where honor and protocol are the name of the game. Inviting Jesus to do this to each of us would be an interesting experiment. “Show me what’s on the inside, O Lord. Show me what you see.”

Attack On The Scribes (vv.45-52)

If you insult a woman, her husband is liable to take offense as well, because to offend one is to offend the other. If you demean the South to a South Carolinian, a Georgian is liable to join the discussion. And if Jesus slams the Pharisees, their friends the scribes will come to their aid: verse 45, “One of the lawyers answered him, ‘Teacher, in saying this you reproach *us also*.’” That was all the encouragement Jesus needed for a threefold assault on them as well.

The scribes were the scriptural experts who compiled and interpreted the traditions of the fathers, the case law of Judaism. If you had a question about how Scripture applied to a particular situation, you went to the experts for a ruling. This is why they’re called *lawyers*; law, precedent and interpretation were their specialties. The Pharisees were the group who lived out the rulings of the scribes who were their scholars and technical experts.

There is a sickness to which seriously religious people are often prone. It is the multiplication of rules and regulations, of demands and obligations that must be fulfilled for one to be acceptable to God. Do’s and don’ts become scorecards rather than the love of God and neighbor. In some forms of contemporary Christianity it gets down to the level of which translation of Bible you use and whether or not you speak in tongues or read certain authors. You get the sense around such people that

¹² C. Douglas Weaver, *A Cloud of Witnesses* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 147.

you're being evaluated on a scorecard for acceptability. Do not therefore trust any preacher, including this one, who lays burdens on you and then does nothing to help lift the load. There are clearly *good things* that we are all to do and *bad things* we are all to avoid, and a big gray swath in the middle left up to the dictates of conscience. To attempt to fill this gray area with a million regulations is a mistake. A mark of true spiritual leadership is one who is clear where Scripture is clear and who knows the difference between what the Bible teaches and their own private opinions about what is prudent. It is a sin for preachers to lay burdens on God people they cannot carry. I don't want to hear Jesus say, "Woe is Phil!" Faith in Christ should both clarify and simplify what God wants of us. If living out your faith is consistently a heavy burden, I suggest you check your knapsack to see whose been loading you with stones that did not come from God. Get rid of them; lighten up; stick to the basics. It is a recurrent sickness in the church: verse 46, "Woe to you lawyers also! for you load men with heavy burdens to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers." A true pastor will teach the truth and help you obey it. Just teaching is not enough; there must be modeling and coaching and help and encouragement and the grace of a hundred new beginnings.

If you're an insurance salesman, I have a caution for you. Never sell life insurance to a prophet. Preachers like me? Yes. Prophets? No. That's because true prophets typically don't live long and mess up the actuarial tables. The truth they speak is so disturbing that it's easier to get rid of them than to continue listening.

Israel had a track record of rejecting those who spoke a word from God. John the Baptist lost his head. Jesus was strung up. Stephen was stoned. Paul was beheaded and Peter crucified upside down. But after they're dead, people honor them and build great tombs to honor them, as we have with Dr. Martin Luther King. I remember the days in my youth when he was a hated and feared man, when his name was cursed by adults who went to my church. Prophets are disturbing people because they do for us what Jesus did for these Pharisees and scribes; they expose our sins and call us to repentance, sometimes on an individual level, sometimes a national level. Teachers are many; prophets are few; teachers may quibble, prophets never do.

I wonder when the next prophet will come. One who speaks to the conscience of the church and calls us out of lethargy to obedience. It is so much easier to praise a dead prophet than listen to a live one. "Woe to you," said Jesus, "for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and consent to the deeds of your fathers; for they killed them, and you build their tombs." Like

Luke 11:37-54 15

father, like son, the sin of rejecting God’s voice through the prophets was passed down, even among those most committed to interpreting the Scriptures. Such is the power of generational sin and inherited prejudice. It can block our ears to hearing God’s Word.

In 1942, after receiving a doctorate in Greek from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Clarence Jordan returned to his native south Georgia to establish Koinonia Farm, an experiment in Christian interracial communal living. On one occasion, after preaching to a congregation on the spirit of brotherhood and equality found in the New Testament, he was accosted by an elderly woman taken captive to her culture, “I want you to know that my grandfather fought in the Civil War, and I’ll never believe a word you say.”

On that occasion Jordan was more than just a preacher; he was a prophet, at least to her. He simply said, “Ma’am, your choice seems quite clear. It is whether you will follow your granddaddy or Jesus Christ.”¹³

The third woe and punch line to the Pharisees was that they were hidden graves polluting anyone that came near; the parallel punch line to the scribes was that they were frauds and a positive blockage to any who were seeking God: verse 53, “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.” It would be hard to stand before God and answer this question, “Why did you use the Scriptures to keep people away from me?” True spiritual leaders, pastors and laity, help people out of their ignorance and sin and show the way to God because they know the new freedom themselves. Heaping up unnecessary regulations and requirements so we can hide our hearts behind them is a disaster. Jesus wants to clean us all up on the inside. Biblical religion goes to the core and is never content to get the externals right.

It was in intense few minutes there in the home of an unnamed Pharisee. Jesus doesn’t wash his hands, and as a result a veritable flood of prophecy breaks loose like a volcano exploding in the middle of the room. Now they have a choice. Get humble or get even? They chose the later- just like their ancestors, as verse 53 makes clear, and it is a testimony that being serious about religion is no guarantee of being right with God. We all need to hear the piercing voice of the prophet Jesus shatter our worlds on a regular basis, and particularly those of us, laity and pastors, who carry serious responsibilities. No matter how sincere we are, no matter how worn and

¹³ Weaver, *A Cloud...*, 155.

Luke 11:37-54 16

marked our Bibles, no matter the length or intensity of our prayers, no matter how faithful we are in the disciplines, not matter how sincere our intentions, and no matter how many people agree with us, none of us are immune from the kind of distortions Jesus so clearly addresses. Sin is that powerful and pervasive. We need him again and again to speak the word of truth and correction. We never outgrow needing a Savior or the need for a humble response to his correction. It's why we sing, "Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart, in my heart, in my heart."

CONCLUSION

This is what happens when you commit yourself to preach through a book of the Bible. You have to deal with the tough stuff. Today I may have preached more to myself and to my imaginary colleagues than you. But if the church is to be renewed in the truth in our day, then Jesus has a lot of work to do with those of us who stand behind the pulpit each week. But Luke did not preserve these materials only so we could understand the ancient sins of the Pharisees and scholars. He saw the same tendencies in himself and his friends, and they continue among us. Ask Jesus to plow your insides today. Ask him for a dose of heart religion. We all need it, starting with me.

