

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

September 25, 2019

The Gospel of Luke

Woe Unto You Pharisees and Lawyers

Topics – Luke 11:37 - 54; Pharisees, Lawyers

Text – Luke 11:37 - 54

Congregational Reading – Luke 11:37 - 54

Introduction

We are in a section of Luke's gospel that contains exclusive information, meaning that the events that we are reading here are exclusive to Luke and are not also contained in the other gospel accounts. These exclusive events will continue straight on through the middle of chapter 18. There will be some minor breaks in the chronology where some information will be inserted from John's gospel, but for the most part, Luke alone contributes a significant portion of this last year of the ministry of Jesus.

The account where Jesus addresses the Pharisees and Lawyers begins in verse 37, but we will quickly read through the previous verses leading up to them (from verses 27 – 36)

- **Jesus Corrects a Woman (vs. 27 – 28)**

The remainder of this chapter contains a lot of strong rebuke from the Lord, but what we see in these two verses is really just a mild correction. Just like any loving parent, the Lord will correct His children:

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:5-11)

This unnamed woman attempts to praise the mother of Jesus. Jesus corrects her and tells her that Mary, though blessed among women (Luke 1:28, 42), is just a woman. Mary was a sinner in need of redemption just as any other woman or man. Jesus was not putting down Mary; He was emphasizing the need for people to listen to and keep (heed, obey) the Word of God, particularly when it comes to salvation.

Notice also the emphasis on obeying that which you hear (see James 1:22 – 25).

- **Jesus Condemns the Generation (vs. 29 – 32)**

Jesus here draws a parallel between the people of Nineveh and the people who were listening to Him today. The people of Nineveh, though a very wicked and idolatrous people listened to the warning from Jonah, and they repented. In faith, they turned from their sinfulness and turned to God (see Jonah 3).

Jesus also illustrates this point by reminding them about the Queen of Sheba who came to listen to and learn from Solomon (1 Kings 10:1 – 13).

The point is that the people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South both listened to and heeded what they heard. However, many people listening to Jesus rejected what He taught them, and rejected Him as well.

Notice also that Jesus clearly teaches here that He is greater than either Solomon or Jonah; He is greater than any man, or angel, because He is God.

- **Jesus Is Concerned About Their Focus (vs. 33 – 36)**

We saw this also in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 where it is used to support the overall topic of giving. In Matthew 6:22 – 23, Jesus teaches that we must keep our eyes focused on the Lord and on eternity rather than on the evil pleasures of this world. If we divide our focus, it will negatively affect our ultimate outcome. Our focus must be singular. God expects us to keep our eyes focused on Him.

Here in Luke 11, Jesus seems to be concerned about the evil teachings that were entering into the eyes and minds of the people. He warns them to wisely choose who they will listen to. Jesus was light; "*the entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple*" (Psalm 119:130). However, many were not letting just light enter in.

Wiersbe states:

When we trust Jesus Christ, our eyes are opened, the light shines in, and we become children of light (John 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:3–6; Eph. 5:8–14). The important thing is that we take advantage of the light and have a *single outlook of faith*. If we keep one eye on the things of God and the other eye on the world (1 John 2:16), the light will turn into darkness! There is no "twilight living" for the Christian, for God demands total submission and obedience (Luke 11:23).¹

We need to be careful as well. We have the light of Christ, and the Light of the Word of God, but we also let a lot of bad stuff enter into our eyes and minds.

David said, "*I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.*" (Psalm 101:3)

I. **Jesus Criticizes the Pharisees (vs. 37 – 44)**

First of all, let me point out that these religious leaders were not inviting Jesus because they liked Him, or because they wanted to learn from him. They were always trying to trap Him.

A. **Regarding Ceremonial Cleansing (vs. 37 – 41)**

According to the concordance, the word used for "dinner," here in v. 38 (ἄριστον – *ariston*), usually refers to an earlier meal, such as breakfast. It was expected that Jesus would participate in the traditional ceremonial washings that were practiced by the religious leaders present. The fact that Jesus deliberately chose not to do so is an indicator that He was trying to teach them something.

John Phillips states this regarding these ceremonial washings:

The Lord Jesus responded to the invitation and deliberately omitted the prescribed ritual of washing His hands. Several such ablutions were attended to during the meal. The Lord deliberately refused to wash His hands as a way of "washing His hands" of a religion that spent itself interminably on trivialities and external rites. Nothing that Jesus could have done could have shocked the Pharisees more, which was exactly what Jesus wanted to do. The Pharisee "marvelled." Other guests were present—lawyers and scribes, for instance (11:45, 53). What Jesus did astounded them. Surely, even a man from Nazareth could not be that ignorant of this most basic custom of polite society.²

This was a ceremonial cleansing that the Pharisees practiced, but it was not a commandment in the Law. The Pharisees believed it cleansed them from a spiritual defilement.

"And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 217.

² John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Lk 11:37–38.

found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do." (Mark 7:2-8)

B. Regarding Their Concern Over the Outward (vs. 42 – 44)

The Pharisees were very focused on the external, but were little concerned with matters of the heart. God is concerned about the inside, because what is on the inside will overflow to the outside.

"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. ... Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:6, 10)

II. Jesus Chastises the Lawyers (vs. 45 – 52)

The lawyers were the same as the scribes.

Illustrate – Lester Roloff was asked to speak to a group of lawyers at a luncheon and preached from this text. He said, somebody ought to warn these fellas that there was a strong woe against them.

The lawyers here tell Jesus that His rebuke of the Pharisees is hitting them also. Jesus tells them, “if the shoe fits...” (It’s in the Greek.).

The lawyers were making all of the practical applications to some of the broad principles found in the Law. They were making hard rules that were impossible for the people to follow. And, according to v. 46, they were not practicing what they preached.

Verses 47 and 48 teach that these Scribes honor the prophets of old, but they are just like the people that killed them.

Notice vs. 49 – 51 – there is no Old Testament verse that is being quoted from here. Jesus is pronouncing this judgment Himself, as God.

Notice v. 51 – Jesus excluded the Apocrypha from the list of prophets.

Notes from Bibliology section of the Bible Synopsis Paper:

The Apocrypha, meaning “hidden or concealed,” refer to fifteen non-canonical books from the Old Testament period known as the Silent Years. These books, though perhaps having some historical value, were not accepted by the Jews or Protestants as Scripture. Catholicism recognized twelve of the fifteen books as canonical in 1546 at the Council of Trent. There are many reasons to reject the canonicity of the Apocrypha, but at the top of the list must be the fact that neither Jesus nor the Apostles quoted from or even alluded to them, and the Book of Acts doesn’t include any of the historical information contained in them. Jesus limited the scope of the Old Testament from Abel to Zechariah (Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51). The first recorded murder in the Bible was that of Abel (Genesis 4:8), and the last murder recorded in the Hebrew Bible was Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:21). 2 Chronicles is the last book of the Hebrew Bible. “If the order of the Old Testament books was the same in Jesus’ day as in the present Hebrew Old Testament, Abel to Zechariah would represent the entire Old Testament canon, from the first book (Genesis and Abel) to the last book (2 Chronicles and Zechariah).”³

³ Robert H. Stein, Luke, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 343.

Jesus was stating, "from the first to the last murder in the Bible."⁴

"And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." (Luke 24:44)

Verse 52 – Jesus is the "Key." Without Jesus, they cannot have the Holy Spirit, which will illuminate their understanding of the Scriptures. Jesus was stating that these lawyers didn't want to enter into salvation themselves, and neither were they going to allow anybody else to enter.

III. The Pharisees and Scribes Attempt to Catch Jesus in His Words (vs.53 – 54)

The religious leaders were always trying to catch Jesus doing or saying something that they could use against him in accusation.

Examples:

- Mark 12:13 – 17 – the Pharisees and Herodians – two groups that do not like each other – attempt to catch Jesus regarding taxes.
- Mark 12:18 – 27 – the Sadducees who do not believe in resurrection try to trip him up with a question about a woman who was married to seven brothers (one at a time), and whose wife would she be in Heaven.

The religious leaders were always trying to trap Jesus, but He was always ten thousand steps ahead of them.

Even the tax collectors try to catch Jesus not paying taxes. They asked Peter, "Doth not your master pay tribute?" (Matthew 17:24 – 27).

Conclusion

All of the things that we have seen here in this chapter are things that we see happening in our world today. Though there are few who love the Lord and listen to Him, there are many that are rejecting Him, and some who are even actively working against Him.

You and I need to not be intimidated by these folks, and we certainly need to separate ourselves from them (Psalm 1:1 – 3; Romans 12:1 – 2; Ephesians 5:11). We do need to pray for them, and we also need to persevere and stand for the truth in front of them. It may be that our testimony will convince them that Jesus is real, and that the Word of God is true.

⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Ryrie Study Bible: King James Version, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 1463.