

## Jesus Goes for a Meal at a Pharisee's Home Luke 11:37-54

“It is almost surprising after such a scathing denunciation of the religious systems that existed in our Lord's day that Jesus was invited into the home of a Pharisee. But Jesus accepted the invitation and went...” These are the words of JD Pentecost as he began his look at this passage. We must remember that, at this point in Jesus' ministry, the Religious Leaders were busy looking for opportunities to find fault in Him. No sincere Pharisee would have openly had Jesus to his home. And we will find it didn't take long, and conflict arose again!

### I. The Setting

“And as he spoke, a certain Pharisee besought (Gk – dramatically asked, flamboyantly, insincerely begged) him to dine (Gk – suggests this may have been a mid-morning bunch time) with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.” Luke 11:37

First, let's review what Jesus was saying when He received this invitation to the Pharisee's home. As Pentecost pointed out, Jesus was giving a “scathing denunciation of the religious systems.” The system that this Pharisee and the other Religious Leaders were part of. Remember, after Jesus cast out a demon (v. 14), the people were greatly amazed, but within the crowd came two statements of unbelief – Jesus healed by the power of the Devil, and a desire for a “sign from heaven” (v. 15-16). Jesus then went on to counter and admonish this “evil generation” (v. 29) for their unbelief. It was then that the host Pharisee invited him to his house.

A formal Jewish meal in the first century was very different from what we are accustomed to. We might have our traditions and expectations for table settings, menus, decorations, and, if in our family, dessert! But in Jesus time, formal meals were overwhelmingly full of prescribed formalities that were religious, ceremonial activities!

- ✓ Each meal was preceded by the handwashing of just one hand – a picture of the purity of the person!
- ✓ A blessing was given, and a cup was passed among the guests
- ✓ Positions at the table would be assigned by rank or importance – the guests would recline, not sit
- ✓ Another basin would be passed for the washing of both hands before the meal

All of these washings had nothing to do with hygiene but were ceremonial and viewed as spiritual cleansings. And what is interesting is that nothing in the law commands such washing!

When we read the passage, we find that Jesus “went in, and sat down.” Really, there was a lot of religious protocol He ignored when doing so, and it was noticed! Let's look at an earlier incident with Jesus in Galilee that highlights the importance of these washings to the Religious Leaders! **Mark 7:1-5**

### II. The Problem

“And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that he had not first washed before dinner.” Luke 11:38

Jesus did not do the handwashing tradition or wait for the rank seating, but just went in and took a place at the table. This was just amazing to the Pharisee! The big standout issue was Jesus not doing the ceremonial washing! We read that he marveled, but other English translations use the words: wondered, shocked, amazed, astonished, surprised, and offended! What Jesus did was completely off the spectrum of normal in Jewish dining!

We are not told if the Pharisee asked Jesus about His lack of hand washing, but we know Jesus knew what man was thinking, and He takes up the subject of their spiritual problem – their external focus!

### III. Jesus' Diagnosis of the Religious Leaders' Heart and Soul

“And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. <sup>40</sup>Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also? <sup>41</sup>But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.” Luke 11:39-41

“Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter” – Jesus is using an illustration of a table setting – how appropriate while waiting to eat! Jesus said that the Pharisees look clean and ready on the outside....I'm sure, just like the serving dishes looked around the table that day, but they had invested time and effort into the outward appearance of their piety, and they looked great....

“but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness” – They washed their hands but not their hearts!! The problem was looking good on the outside versus wickedness within. The Pharisees kept their traditions meticulously, but Jesus revealed their inward sins of “ravening and wickedness.”

**Ravening** – has to do with money – we find other translations use greed, robbery, extortion, covetousness, plunder, and cheating. Later in Luke 16:14, we read, “And the Pharisees also, who were covetous (Lit. – lovers of money), heard all these things...” During the last week of Jesus' ministry, He spoke about how the Pharisees would “devour widows' houses.” (Matt. 23:14) They were very driven by money. Jesus will be in full verbal combat with the religious establishment. At that time, He will give the crowd of Pharisees and scribes much of the same truths. Listen as He goes on and tells them, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they **are full of extortion and excess.** <sup>26</sup>Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.” (Matt. 23:25-26)

But we find the word “**wickedness**” was more about violence, malice, hatred, prejudice, and cruelty. These involved man-to-man actions within relationships. The Pharisees were living a double life, and Jesus was calling out their inner sins; they were preoccupied with external ceremonies but overlooked the issues in their hearts. They were concerned with showcasing their pious handwashing but protected their sinful secrets!

“Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?” – First of all, please realize, Jesus is not calling these men names when saying, “Ye fools.” Instead, He is pointing out **their lack of understanding.** It reminds me of when He was talking to Nicodemus in John 3:10, “...Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” Then Jesus will go on and explain that God made both the external and the internal of man, and both need cleansing!! The Jewish Leadership was completely ignoring the filth of the heart!

“but rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.” – We know that God's favor is not found by giving to others or any other outward action, but Jesus is challenging these Pharisees to cleanse their hearts of **selfish greed** and to give to the needy. In other words, when they would confess the sin of **covetousness and stop loving their money**, then they would be fully clean – inside and out! The new purity of their heart would be seen by their outflow of generous love. The rich young ruler had this

same disease of the soul – love of money, and Jesus gave him the same remedy. **Mark 10:17-22** Later in Ephesians, Paul will say much of the same to new believers, “Let him that stole steal no more: **but rather** let him labor, working with his hands the things which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” Eph. 4:28

Real followers of Jesus have a **heart of love and generosity to God and others!** It is an outflow of a changed life, but often those who love doing religious activities and traditions are not really changed from the inside out! JV McGee said this, “Friend, giving of your substance will not make you a Christian. However, if you love Christ, you will give of your substance.” p. 299 Here we find doers of pious activities and traditions, but they have no internal love and commitment to God. **It is much easier to do religion than be truly devoted to God from the heart!** And this was the problem of the Pharisees and other Religious leaders gathered that day, and it is often our problem too, **it is easier to do than be!** As we move forward in this lesson, let’s be very aware that Jesus is looking at our hearts and honestly allow Him to reveal our needs!

Jesus now moves into what we call the “six woes” directed to the Pharisees and Scribes. These “woes” are all about their doing externals rather than being godly! And please realize, it doesn’t seem they have served the first course of the meal yet!! Wow!

#### **IV. The Six Woes**

Define Woe – Ok, when Jesus says, “Woe,” what does that mean? Literally, it means, “judgment is coming; how terrible for you; you’re in for trouble; it will be bad for you.” It is a severe warning!

**“But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment (Lit. – justice toward man) and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Luke 11:42**

Woe #1 – Externals vs Internals of True Righteousness Jesus is using the Pharisees’ practice of herb tithing. I just smile as I think of these grown, pious men, sitting at their garden tables with their long flowing robes, counting out mint leaves and then dividing out 10%. Then moving to rue and carefully splitting out piles of 10 each until they reach 100, and then setting aside 10% again... herb after herb, hour after hour! All in the name of religious piety! How ridiculous! But Jesus, in His patience, does not quarrel with the Pharisees over their concern for these minor points; rather, He points out that the weightier issues, such as **justice and love**, were completely ignored! Justice toward man and the love of God were always the Old Testament standard of righteousness. By the time of Jesus’ ministry, they seemed to have been forgotten by those who dictated and interpreted the Scriptures. Listen to Jeremiah 5:1, “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it.” The rest of the chapter recounts Israel’s sins, and at the time of Jesus, the nation had returned to an even worse situation before God! He had given plain instructions about His expectations for His people. **Micah 6:7-8**; Basic godly living was being ignored for counting herbs! **Zech. 7:8-10** The Lord never had “delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,” but instead in obeying His voice, (1 Sam. 15:22) This principle is found throughout the New Testament as well, John said, “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” 1 John 3:17

**“Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.” Luke 11:43**

Woe #2 – Pride & Vanity Position and power were central to the Religious Leaders of Jesus’ day. Jesus will address this open sin of pride several times in His ministry. We all love to be treated special, whether at a table or in how we are addressed. But in reality, position and respectful greetings are often polite and protocol. At a wedding, where do the parents sit? At a funeral, where does the family sit? At a business meeting, where does the owner sit? This is the reality of order, but the issue here isn't holding a position or being set in a logical place; **it's loving the special seats and special greetings!** Let me say it this way.....It's loving the sweet greets and sweet seats! And I'm afraid it is the same way today! This was not the example of Moses, God's chosen leader of Israel. Numbers 12:3 “(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)” And God greatly used Moses, this meek, humble man! Yet the Religious Leaders desired praise from men and didn't care about God's approval.

**“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them.” Luke 11:44**

Woe #3 – Hypocrisy. Here, Jesus uses a very negative simile to describe His fellow meal attendees. He says, “You are as hidden, unmarked graves that defile men, and they don't even know it!” Wow, I just imagine the disciples just cringing that day at Jesus' strong language against the religious elite! But what does this mean? The Mosaic law said that any contact with a dead person or a grave caused 7 days of spiritual defilement. (Num. 19:16) That is why graves were whitewashed at the time of Jesus. Not to make them pretty, but to make them stand out to reduce the risk of desecration! Did you notice that Jesus is pointing out that not only the Pharisees but also the Scribes were guilty of polluting the people, unaware. They were a bad influence in every way. Their hypocrisy, envy, covetousness, and malice were concealed under piteous airs, but those who followed them were infected! The Pharisees didn't teach the truth of God, but instead demonstrated evil, the opposite of God!

**“Then answered one of the lawyers (Lit – Scribes, experts in the law), and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also.” Luke 11:45**

*Interruption:* As with most of Jesus' conversations, even when He was teaching, there were often interruptions. Maybe someone wanted to interject something – like our lady friend from last week, wanting to praise Jesus in her very Jewish way, or here, when a lawyer wanted to clarify to whom Jesus was speaking! “Teacher, are you talking and scolding us too?” The Scribes saw themselves as superior to the Pharisees. By profession, they were more studied and immersed in the law. Evidently, this lawyer felt the sting of Jesus' statements!

But Jesus didn't respond to him, He just went on and addressed the all the Lawyers!

**“And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.” Luke 11:46**

Woe #4 – Traditionalism Jesus was using the handwashing tradition as a basis for teaching against their assuming power to impose commands on the people. God had not given these laws. Various washings were taught, but nothing like the washing before a meal – the ones Jesus had ignored that day! The Jewish people had been loaded down with rules and man-made laws over the centuries, very difficult to keep track of and follow!

“grievous to be borne” – a crushing weight!) As a matter of fact, 365 prohibitions and 248 commandments were given, if anyone was counting! Yet, here Jesus tells us they really didn’t attempt to follow these laws themselves. The Scribes were acting as hindrances to truth.

**“Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchers of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. <sup>48</sup>Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchers. <sup>49</sup>Therefore also said the wisdom of God (Lit. – word of God in His sovereign knowledge), I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: <sup>50</sup>That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; <sup>51</sup>From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias (covers all those righteous God-followers recorded in their Scripture – Abel the first to Zacharias the last) which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.” Luke 11:47-51**

Woe #5 – Persecution The Jewish killing and persecution of God’s appointed prophets is well documented in the Old Testament. At the time of Jesus, beautiful monuments were being built to honor those prophets. Yet in their rejection of Jesus, the Scribes actually had more in common with those who killed the prophets than the prophets they sought to honor. They were not obeying Jesus’ call to repentance, turning, and belief in Him as Messiah! It was much easier to build monuments than to obey the truth being preached! Turn to **Acts 7:51-52**, this is what Stephen said in his message shortly after Jesus ascended back to heaven. Paul speaks of the persecution he and others were under from such Scribes. **1 Thess. 2:15-16** With their current attitude of rebellion against Jesus, they were as responsible for the blood of the past righteous people as they would be for the blood of the future righteous they will hunt down and kill!

**“Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the keys of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” Luke 11:52**

Woe #6 – Rejected Truth The Scribes' interpretations of the Scriptures were of their own making, in line with their man-made laws and traditions. Jesus used the picture that they were actually hiding the truths of God from the people. They had taken the keys of knowledge concerning love and obedience to God, righteousness by faith, and purity of heart, and had thrown them away. These were all ignored and replaced with doing religion, but not being righteous and right before God! In Matthew 15:14, Jesus spoke of the Religious Leaders this way, “...they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch.” If they had truly known the Word of God, they would have recognized Jesus as their Messiah!

## V. Religious Leaders’ Reaction

**“And as he said these things unto them (Gk – got up to leave; was leaving), the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: <sup>54</sup>Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.” Luke 11:53-54**

What we find here is very strong language of relentless hatred and vengeance! Their anger was aroused again. The phrase, “laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something,” is often used in Greek literature to describe hunting with dogs. To trail, track down, tree, and kill. Wow! They had it in for Jesus. They threw all kinds of questions and accusations against Him. They should have repented, thrown themselves down before Him, but

they didn't. Instead, they remained blind and in darkness. And Jesus left. Banquet over, and I'm not sure they ever served food!

### **Believers' Application:**

When I started studying and reviewing the events of this passage. I smiled when I thought of Jesus being invited to a Pharisee's home. "What will happen here?" And then realized – a lot! A lot of truth given, an opportunity for these men to repent, and followers to be strengthened!

I want to quickly review the 6 Woes Jesus gave that day. They were all based on the thesis from verse 39, "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness." As we review them, ask God for a heart to see if you are guilty of some of the same actions.

### **They were busy doing religious things, but were not being righteous before God.**

- **Woe #1 – Washed their hands and not their hearts .** I loved this quote from Warren Wiersbe, "The way to clean up a dirty vocabulary is not to brush your teeth but to cleanse your heart." WW p. 175 And that is true in all areas of our lives. We all struggle with externals versus internals! Ladies, do we look all clean on the outside, but actually we are full of filth like jealousy, bitterness, and hatred?
- **Woe #2 – Remembered to tithe but forgot to love God and be just toward men.** Doing religion and not being righteous was their problem! Jesus said they majored in non-importance, but forgot to love God and to live just before man.
- **Woe #3 – Loved people's praise and position.** To the Religious Leaders, how people viewed them was far more important than how God knew them to be. Do we love praise from others and recognition?! Can we serve and give to others without it?
- **Woe #4 – Made impossible religious demands on the people.** Christians can still be guilty of placing unbiblical demands on others...what people can and cannot do...but these prohibitions or directives may not be found in God's Word. How we must be careful that, when discipling people, we do so from the Word of God...not from our words, traditions, or preferences. These types of burdens are what Jesus was speaking about when He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30
- **Woe #5 – Would not accept the truth about Jesus.** They hated Jesus and His Words. They will hate Him to the cross! Are you a follower of Jesus? Remember, there are no faith fence-sitters when it comes to belief in Him!
- **Woe #6 – Prevented others from believing in Him.** The Religious Leaders had thrown away the key to God's knowledge, preventing the people from knowing and understanding who Jesus was! They were truly the blind leading the blind! Let's be sure our lives draw people to Jesus not prevent others!

Let's remember, God always wanted the love of man from a pure heart. Not someone doing religious things, but living righteously from the heart! Ask God to show you the areas you may **be just doing** instead of **being** what He desires of you. Then you will be fully usable in His sight! **Ps. 51:6-17**