

Unmasking Hypocrisy Pt. 2

Luke 11:45-54 (12-08-19)

Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, IN

Welcome back to lunch with Jesus and the Pharisees. He has stirred up a hornets' nest of resentment and hatred. But there were others reclining at the table that day, scribal lawyers, experts in the law, the interpreters of the law, the ones who wrote out all kinds of applications of the law for the Jews to follow. As Jesus strips off the Pharisees' masks of hypocrisy, these even more important scholars are listening and realize what He's saying applies to them too. That's why in verse 45 one of these legal experts, these arrogant interpreters of the law, says, "Teacher, when you say these things, you are insulting us, too!"

Luke 11:46, *But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers."*

The word "insulting" means shaming or slandering. They may be warning Jesus. "Watch out, teacher. We're the most revered scholars in Israel. You're not going to get away with these insults. We have ways of dealing with the likes of you."

Now what does Jesus say? "Oh, you experts in the Law, I'm so sorry. I certainly meant no harm. Please don't be offended." No, without flinching, Jesus lays three strong woes, three severe rebukes that attack them and their deadly apostate system. Their hearts were far from God and they were destroying the faith of the common people of the land, with their fine mesh of legalisms that no one could possibly obey. As A. T. Robertson notes, Jesus is unleashing against them "the rolling thunder of God's wrath."

Who were these pettifogging academicians? They sat at the top of Judaism's religious system. They spent their time studying and working out thousands upon thousands of applications of the law and the oral traditions that came down from Moses. There were so many fine details of these traditions that they began to write them down in what is called the Mishnah. Without getting too detailed here, these writings ended up being a labyrinth of rules and regulations of six parts, each part subdividing into other parts. Finally between 200 AD and 500 AD all these writings were put together into what is called the Talmud. The Talmud had commentaries upon commentaries and explanations upon explanations that would make your head would spin. There were two Talmuds: the Jerusalem Talmud and the more popular Babylonian Talmud. These explanations and applications of the Jewish traditions were considered by some as even more important than the Law of Moses.

The Talmud is where you find all those crazy Sabbath rules you've heard about. For example, a Sabbath day's journey was $\frac{3}{5}$ of a mile. But if on the previous day you put some food at the end of that $\frac{3}{5}$ mile, you could walk there on the Sabbath and consider that location your new dwelling and could now walk another $\frac{3}{5}$ mile. A woman was forbidden to look in a mirror on the Sabbath lest she spied a gray hair and was tempted to pluck it out, which of course would be working on the Sabbath. If you threw an object in the air and caught it with the same hand on the Sabbath, you were guilty of working on the Sabbath. But if you caught it with your other hand, you weren't guilty. If your cotton wadding fell out of your ear on the Sabbath, you could not pick it up and put it back – that would lifting a burden.

So you see how totally removed from the clarity and beauty of the Word of God they had become. They had buried God's Word under all these traditions. I grew up with some silly rules like this. We weren't allowed to have a TV, but our Uncle Lester bought one and put it upstairs in a little room hidden away from guests. However, on Saturday nights we as family could go over and watch Bonanza. Howard

Hendricks of Dallas Seminary tells about some boys playing baseball in the front yard when dad comes out and yells, "What's wrong with you? Go in the back yard to play. Don't you know it's Sunday?" Some of you were raised with some rules like this.

So Jesus has soundly insulted these top-tier Jewish scholars. He lays into them, and rightly so. They are destroying God's truth. They are instruments of Satan to keep God's people from hearing the truth of the gospel, even in an Old Testament sense. You may wonder why we as a church, we as elders, and in our preaching are so concerned about warning you of false teaching. There's one great reason. Because Satan is always trying to destroy the faith of God's people. There are always false teachers and false teachings that creep in, whether in churches, denominations, seminaries, or organizations. We are responsible to always be on the alert.

Let's look at these three woes, these strong warnings. First, what did Jesus mean? And then we'll make application to our own day and our own lives.

Woe #1 - Burdensome religion

Luke 11:46, But He said, "Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers."

The word burden is used of ships over-loaded and bearing a great weight. You can just see these people walking around with these huge burdens on their souls, never finding any rest, always weary, crushed down with these requirements. They couldn't possibly keep all the rules. And they were told it was by keeping the rules that you earned your way to heaven. It was purely works righteousness. And worse, the religious experts found ways that they wouldn't have to keep them. Contrast this with what Jesus told the common people in Matthew:

Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Is your Christian life a burden? Do you feel overwhelmed by God's Word? If it is, then you do not understand the gospel. The gospel is not a burden. It's a delight. The gospel brings freedom, not bondage. God's will is not burdensome. Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." He came that we might have abundant life, not overwhelming burdens. Your Christian life should bring you a sense of freedom, joy, peace, and rest. 1 John 5:3 says plainly, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome."

Do you go out every day delighting in the Lord, finding Him to be sufficient for all of your trials and troubles? There are disciplines in the Christian life, like reading your Bible and praying and attending worship and giving and some other things. But if they are a burden, you need to evaluate your understanding of how to live the Christian life. The chief end of man, says the Westminster Catechism, is to glorify God and enjoy Him, not endure Him, forever. Beware of people who lay burdens on you, like you should read ten chapters of your Bible every morning even before you have a cup of coffee, and then spend three hours praying before going out the door. Remember Jesus' words, "I will give you rest," not I will load you up with all kinds of burdens to overwhelm you. The angels came to the shepherds at Jesus' birth and said, "We bring you good news of great joy for all the people."

Woe #2 - Fake honor

Luke 11:47-51, "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. 48 "So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they

who killed them, and you build their tombs. 49 "For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, 50 so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.'

So what's going on here? If you go to London, you'll see a statue of William Tyndale. If you go to Geneva, you'll see the Reformation Wall with John Calvin, William Farel, John Knox, and Theodore Beza. If you go to Worms in Germany, you'll see the world's largest monument to the Reformation with Martin Luther right in the center surrounded by Hus, Wycliffe, Peter Waldo, and Savonarola, all pre-Reformers, along with civil magistrates of Luther's day. These statues are wonderful. But if Luther or Calvin or Hus came to life out of those statues and began to preach their strong gospel messages, they would probably be run out of town. Most churches today are a long way from the great doctrines of the Reformation.

These lawyers at the table with Jesus built glorious tombs for God's Prophets, but it was their fathers who despised their message and killed them. Cain murdered God's man Abel. They stoned Zechariah to death in 2 Chronicles 24:20-21. And Jesus knows these apostate religious authorities reclining at this table had the same murderous hearts. They have the same God-hating spirit as their ancestors. The wisdom of God in verse 49 is probably Jesus speaking with God's authority. They will continue murdering God's prophets. In fact, in just a few months, they will join the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin to have Jesus crucified. And then they will stone Stephen, and drive the Christians out of Jerusalem. Later when Paul came to Jerusalem, some determined to kill him. They do not want to hear the truth of God. They are self-righteous unbelieving religionists. Jesus further ripped into them in John 8:44 when He said, "You are of your father the devil, and the deeds of the devil you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and did not abide in the truth."

Jesus warns them that all this blood, all these murders, will come on the heads of this generation. When the Jews cried for Jesus blood from Pilate in Matthew 27:25, they cursed themselves by saying, "His blood be upon us and our children." They had no idea what awaited them in AD 70 when Titus and his 60,000 Roman soldiers invaded Jerusalem and utterly destroyed it, shedding the blood of thousands of Jews, even in the temple. That generation paid dearly.

What about us? We don't murder God's spokesmen, but do we receive their messages? Do we delight in their writings? Do we honor them by imitating their faith as Hebrews 11 encourages us? That first century generation brought horror and destruction on their children by their rejection of Christ. What are we handing to the next generation? In the midst of all the godlessness of our day, all the anti-God bias, all the flagrant flouting of God's standards, we want to love the truth today, love God's messengers today, and we want our children and grandchildren to hear and know the truth of the gospel. The greatest curse is for a church like ours to slowly tone down the truth and finally cover it, like so many churches have done. A painting of dear old Pastor Marvin from 1932 hangs in the church foyer. He preached the gospel faithfully for many years, but do the people in that church today hear the strong truth of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ?

Woe #3 – The lost key

Luke 11:5, "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you hindered those who were entering."

The worse crime in all religion is for the leaders to remove the one and only way of salvation and then work hard to keep other people from finding it. Can you imagine being guilty of hindering people, blocking people from coming to the truth of the gospel? There isn't a more grievous sin than that. Since you are sitting in the seat of religious leadership, you are the ones who should be first entering the gospel of the grace of God and then encouraging other. But you threw the key away and you convince others they

don't need it.

What is the key of knowledge? It's the key that opens the treasury of the riches of God's grace in Christ for sinners. Martin Luther struggled a long time without this key. He tried everything to earn God's favor. He became the best monk possible, thinking harsh treatment of the body would impress God. He tried and tried, with no peace to his soul. For him, all he knew of Jesus was wrath and anger. Jesus was his angry Judge. But then God put a key in his hand, the book of Romans. He studied and studied, pounding on the door of Romans 1:17 about the righteousness of God. He thought it meant God's righteousness required of him. But finally he discovered that the righteousness of God was the gift of God to faith. He discovered the great truth of justification by faith alone. The key slid into the truth of the gospel and he was saved. With the key of faith in his heart he felt newly born and declared, "The very gates of Paradise opened up before me."

Ladies and gentlemen, do you have this key? Has God's rich treasure of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone opened to you? Have you entered into Christ? Do you relish this truth that God has declared you righteous in Christ and accepted you as His child and brought you into a relationship of peace with Him that will never end? This is the key Christ rejoices in. For any religious leader to take away this key and not give it to others ignites the fury of Christ. All eternity rests on it.

Luke 11:53-54, When He left there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile and to question Him closely on many subjects, 54 plotting against Him to catch Him in something He might say.

Lunch time is over! The air is thick with tension as these men shuffle out of the Pharisee's house. They are steamed. They are furious. Instead of humbling their hearts like Peter and confessing they are sinful men, they began to be very hostile. They begin trying to catch him in a verbal trap, like trapping for an animal. They are determined to get rid of Him. They will dog His trail all the way to Pilate's court. Oh, how sad. No wonder Jesus wept over Jerusalem!

SO WHAT?

Love the truth of God's Word. Don't take it for granted. Keep the key of the gospel in your heart. And don't hide it from the next generation.

Psalm 78:4-7, We will not conceal them from their children, But tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. 5 For He established a testimony in Jacob And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers That they should teach them to their children, 6 That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, That they may arise and tell them to their children, 7 That they should put their confidence in God And not forget the works of God, But keep His commandments.

Be sure you are delighting in the truth of the gospel. If it's a burden to you, go to God and thank Him for His powerful grace. Jesus said, "My peace I give to you, not as the world gives." And He also said, "My joy I give to you." The gospel is "Good news of great joy!"