

39. Jesus Pronounced Woes on the Pharisees

We saw in our last topic that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that a person can have a heart that is full of spiritual darkness. The Word of God is the only thing that can penetrate that darkness and that is why it is so important that we share the Word of God with others rather than our own opinions. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus gave a warning to the Pharisees and lawyers that were gathered for dinner at the home of the Pharisee who had invited Jesus to have dinner with him.

We saw in our last topic that Jesus had warned the people that they were a part of an evil generation. One of the Pharisees in that crowd then invited Jesus to dinner at his house. However, the Pharisee was immediately critical of Jesus because He did not wash His hands in the way that the Pharisees taught people to wash their hands. As a result, in Luke 11:39-44 we see that Jesus now warned this Pharisee by saying, “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over *them* are not aware of *them*.’” Jesus gave the Pharisees several reasons why grief would come upon them.

Jesus said that the Pharisees tried to be one thing on the outside but they were very different on the inside. On the outside, they tried to appear to others like they were a clean cup or dish. They washed their cups and dishes and worked to make sure that that they did the proper ceremony when they washed. However, in their heart they were full of greed and wickedness. Jesus said that the Pharisees were foolish because the Creator who made the outside also made the inside and so He knew their hearts. Instead of outward acts, Jesus said that they needed to have a concern for the needy that came from a heart that was right with God. Matthew 6:3-4 says, “‘But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.’”

Jesus also said that the Pharisees would experience grief because they gave tithes from their spices, but they ignored justice and the love of God. Jesus said it was right to give tithes, but it was sin to forget the much more important issues of justice and love for God. Jesus also told the Pharisees they would experience grief because they loved the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. The best seats were the places where the most important people sat. The greetings in the marketplaces were ceremonies where people were greeted according to their rank in that culture. Both things pointed to the pride of the Pharisees. Jesus said that the Pharisees were like graves that could not be seen. The Pharisees were carefully hiding the inner attitudes of their hearts.

One of the lawyers suddenly spoke up. Luke 11:45-51 says, “Then one of the lawyers answered and said to Him, ‘Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also.’ And He said, ‘Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. Therefore the wisdom of God also said, “I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,” that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.” The word translated “reproach” means *to speak shamefully*. The lawyer said that Jesus was also bringing shame on the lawyers.

The lawyers were scribes who were considered experts in the Old Testament law. Jesus then said that the lawyers would also experience grief. Jesus went on to explain what the lawyers did. He said that they loaded the other people with burdens that were hard to carry. The word translated “burdens” were the heavy loads of traditions that the lawyers made other people follow. Matthew 23:3-4 says, “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.” Jesus made it clear that they put rules on others but did not obey those rules themselves.

The lawyers and Pharisees also built fancy tombs for the prophets that their fathers had killed. Matthew 23:29-30 says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.”” Jesus said that they were just as guilty as their fathers. They would soon show why they were as guilty as their fathers by condemning Jesus to death. Jesus said that they would be held accountable for all of the blood of the righteous people who had died from Abel to Zechariah.

In the wisdom of God, He had given the Jewish religious leaders the Word of God through the prophets of God. Now, God was going to give them the apostles that would share the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Just as their fathers had killed the Old Testament prophets, these religious leaders would kill and persecute the apostles. Here, we see the reason why God said that all of the Old Testament martyrs would be required of this generation. They were as guilty as any of their fathers that had killed the prophets. Jesus said this generation would be held accountable for their sin.

Jesus went on to tell the lawyers in Luke 11:52-54, “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.’ And as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail *Him* vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.” Jesus concluded by giving the lawyers a final reason that they would experience grief.

Jesus said that the lawyers had taken away the key of knowledge. The way that they had taken away that key is explained in Mark 7:13 where we read, ““Making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”” The lawyers taught the traditions that had been taught by their fathers instead of explaining the Word of God. This replaced the Word of God with the opinions of men. In contrast, Matthew 7:28-29 says, “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” In Matthew chapters five through seven, Jesus repeatedly said, “You have heard that it was said...But I say to you.” In each case, Jesus replaced the traditions of their fathers with a proper interpretation of the Word of God. That is why Jesus said the lawyers had taken away the key to knowledge.

The lawyers had chosen not to enter the kingdom of God and they were doing whatever they could to try and hinder others from entering the kingdom. That is why Jesus had earlier said in Matthew 7:13-14, ““Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”” The way that leads to destruction is wide because it rejects the Word of God and follows the traditions of men. In contrast, the way into the kingdom of God is narrow because it requires repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. As a result of Jesus confronting the fact that they had taken away the key of knowledge, the scribes and Pharisees were very angry and began to attack Him.

The word translated “lying in wait for” means *to prepare a trap for*. Here, we see that the purpose of the Pharisees and lawyers was to try and trap Jesus in His words. The word translated “to catch” means *to go hunting or to trap with a snare*. These words show that the lawyers and Pharisees had only one goal. Their goal was to trap Jesus with His words and find some way that they could accuse Him. That is exactly what they did later as they spoke to Pilate about Jesus. Luke 23:1-2 says, “Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. And they began to accuse Him, saying, ‘We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.’” Then, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod and the chief priests and scribes accused Jesus to Herod. Luke 23:10 says, “And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him.” Here, in Luke 11, we see that these men had already begun to plot against Jesus and to try and trap Him in His words in their efforts to find some way to condemn Jesus.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that there are many like the scribes and Pharisees who want to replace the Word of God with their traditions. We also want to help our children realize that they will face opposition from such individuals as they focus on obedience to the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you equip your children to face opposition from those who oppose the Word of God.