

Luke Chapter 11 v 37 - 54

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to read together now from our Bibles, and I'd like you please to turn to Luke and Chapter 11. Luke and Chapter 11. We've been going through the Gospel of Luke on our Sunday mornings for some time.

And we're going to read from verse 37 through to the end of the chapter this morning. So if you have one of the red church Bibles, like this one, then that's page 1043.

Page 1043, beginning at verse 37. Just as you're turning to that, just to remind you that the other week we looked at Jesus' teaching on light and darkness, and particularly about the warning that he gives us in verse 35.

Verse 35, see to it then, have a look, investigate, make sure that the light within you is not darkness. And as we continue, verse 37, with these words.

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him. So he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

[1 : 18] Then the Lord said to him, now then, you Pharisees, clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you're full of greed and wickedness.

You foolish people. Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now, as for what is inside you, be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

Woe to you, Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.

You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you, Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

Woe to you, because you're like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it. One of the experts in the law answered him, Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.

[2 : 27] Jesus replied, And you, experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did.

They killed the prophets. You build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill, and others they will persecute.

Therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary.

Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Woe to you, experts in the law, because you've taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you've hindered those who were entering.

[3 : 35] And Jesus went outside. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely, to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.

Thank you. We've sang about our faith in the word of God, and so let's turn back to that very same word of God in Luke in chapter 11.

We read there that those verses 37 through to the end of the chapter. It would be good if you could have them open in your Bible as we go through them together. I want to ask you a question.

Do you give thanks before every meal? Or as used to be said, do you say grace before you eat? I want to ask you a question.

Why? Why do you say grace? Why do you give thanks? Perhaps it's something that you've grown up with in your family, something that their parents did, and so you've always done it as well.

[4 : 34] Perhaps it's something that you've begun to do since you've become a Christian. It's something you didn't used to do before, but now you've been introduced to this way of preparing to eat.

The question comes with this, though. Do you pray before you have a cup of coffee and a piece of cake? Should you? Do you pray before you take up a chocolate bar or an ice cream?

Where's the cut-off point? Why do we say grace before we eat a main meal, but we don't say grace and give thanks for other food that we eat?

Most importantly, what do you think of someone who you notice who doesn't say grace before their meal? Do you think of them as ungrateful, unspiritual, unchristian?

Jesus was often invited to eat, particularly, it seems, in the homes of the Pharisees. You know, Simon the Pharisee, back in chapter 7, we looked at that meal that Jesus was invited to.

[5 : 41] And whenever he went to eat a meal at the Pharisees, it always ended badly. Put it that way. Because he always said something controversial.

He's been talking about, as I said before the reading, about inner light and inner darkness. And now as we come to these events in the life of Jesus around this meal, we're, as it were, exploring his teaching.

We're seeing what it means to have inner light and inner darkness actually in the lives of those that he met with and spoke with. And so he goes to the meal and he sits down at the table and unlike us who give grace, the very first thing the Pharisee did was that he washed.

But he's upset. He's surprised. He's astonished that Jesus doesn't do the same thing that he does. Did not first wash. The word wash there is the same word we use for baptism.

It doesn't mean that Jesus was full of, covered in water or washed his whole body or had a shower. It was simply the pouring of water over their hands. And it wasn't a matter of hygiene.

[6 : 52] It wasn't that the Pharisee was more hygienic than Jesus and thought, well, you know, I've got dirty hands, I'll give them a good wash. Or that he had a case of OCD and always had to keep washing himself.

But like every Pharisee of his day, he would have water poured over his hands after being out and about and out and out. And clearly he'd been out and about. He'd been listening to the teaching of Jesus and it had spoken to him in some way and so he'd been moved to invite Jesus to come in and have this meal with him.

And his belief was that he must wash his hands before he eats because he may be spiritually contaminated by the people that he's met with, by other people's uncleanness and sin.

In Mark, there's a similar occasion when Jesus, again, is at a Pharisee's house. Not the same one as we read here. And Mark gives us a lovely background and explanation for why the Pharisee would wash.

It's in Mark 7. The Pharisees and all the Jews did not eat unless they gave their hands a ceremonial washing holding to the tradition of the elders. And they observed many other traditions such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles and even one manuscript and dining couches.

[8 : 08] Anything that had been in contact with people who were unclean had to be ceremonially washed clean. It wasn't a commandment that God had given but it was a tradition that some of the Jews had taken and added to God's laws in Leviticus where God gives instruction about being cleansed after becoming unclean, ceremonially unclean before God.

For the Pharisee, for the religious people in Jesus' day, observing these traditions, these rituals was everything. It was a mark that you were really a spiritual, a godly Jew.

And your obedience to these rules and traditions made you feel good about yourself, that you felt God was pleased with you and accepted you.

Well, is that really a bad thing? Surely how we live, what we do, the tasks we undertake are important. Aren't they even more important than the way we feel or what's on the inside?

Surely by our outward, that's how we affect people and how we care for people. Surely the outside, our actions, are what God is more concerned about than simply what's on the inside.

[9 : 35] But that's a false, I don't use big word now, dichotomy. It's false to put the inner against the outer or the outer against the inner. Jesus and the rest of the Bible teach us that you cannot separate the two when it comes to living and enjoying God.

It's like asking for a one-sided coin. It just does not exist. That's why Jesus, when he responds to what he knows is going on in the mind of the Pharisee, the Pharisee doesn't say to Jesus, why haven't you washed?

He thinks it. And of course, Jesus being God, knows his very thoughts as he knows ours too. And he says, now you Pharisees, clean. You clean the outside of the cup, meaning himself.

But inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You foolish people. It's silly to think that way, that only the outside matters. Did not the one, that's God, who made the outside make the inside too.

Inside and outside. We are not purely external people. We are internal people. We are spiritual people. We are made in the image of God. We have a soul.

[10 : 48] We may not even recognize that fully, but we all recognize that there is something within. There is something more than the external. There is the heart, the feeling, the emotion, whatever.

This has never happened to me, of course, since I've been in Whitby. But I've been to people's houses and they've offered me a cup of coffee. And I've drunk down the cup of coffee and as I've looked into the mug as I've drunk it, there at the bottom are all the stains and the tide marks of the trap.

And I'm sure you've had the same. And you know how you feel, don't you? When you've just drank it and you thought, I thought there was something of a funny taste in that cup of coffee. God made us spirit and body.

Both need cleansing. And again, when you go and do your washing up men, because of course men are the best washer uppers by far. When you go and do the washing up, even if we, that's why we don't need so much practice because we're so good at it.

We don't need to do it so often. When you clean the inside, you, actually you probably don't clean the outside as much as you clean the inside. Because you know that's the important part. God made us spirit and body.

[12 : 05] And both need cleansing from sin. That corrupting, that polluting power that affects us all and our world.

Just cleaning the outside will not have an effect upon the inside. In fact, it's quite the opposite. It's from the inside that the cleansing comes and it works itself out to the outward.

So the heart must be cleansed first. That's in one sense what Jesus is talking about. But now as for what is inside you, it's inside that matters firstly and then that flows to the outward.

Why is that? Because it's the inside, it's the heart, the soul in one sense we might put it, which is the source of sin that pollutes our lives. Jesus made this point very clear when talking again about clean and unclean inside and out in the Gospel of Matthew.

And he says to them, for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile or make a person unclean.

[13 : 18] Everything that we do externally begins with a thought or a decision or a choice internally. and so Jesus' instructions to the Pharisees here are to do with the inside, the attitude of the heart.

Do you notice that in verse 41? But now as for what is inside you, be generous to the poor and everything will be clean for you. He's not saying give your money to the poor and you'll earn forgiveness from God, but rather with a generous heart it shows that your heart's been cleansed and changed.

When there's a generosity of heart, when there's a love in heart, when there's a giving, it's because there's been a cleansing that's taken place. And he goes on, doesn't he, there in verse 42 where he speaks about them neglecting justice and the love of God.

It wasn't within them. Love of God. Now, he speaks that first woe, doesn't he?

Woe to Pharisees. We know it, but woe is a term of sadness, isn't it? It's a term of grief. Woe. Woe is me.

[14 : 35] Woe. It's not that Jesus is firstly and foremostly condemning the Pharisees. He is, in one sense, challenging them strongly, but he's saying this is so tragically sad.

You've missed the point so completely. You're so far off being. This, to me, is a grief. A grief. And we see that later on in other places where Jesus weeps when he sees people in their sin.

When he weeps over Jerusalem because there's a city that was God's blessed people and they turned their backs on him and rejected him. And our Lord Jesus Christ is filled with compassion.

And though God truly hates sin, he still is moved with compassion for sinners. And so Jesus says, Woe to you Pharisees.

This is what you do. You give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs but neglect justice and the love of God. There was a commandment and is a commandment in the Old Testament to God's people that they were to give a tenth of everything that they had by way of income.

[15 : 45] It was a way of them expressing their thankfulness to God and showing that everything comes from God and they were to give it to God as an expression of that and God used it for the provision of the temple and feeding the priests and other people and things like that.

And so it meant a farmer would give a tenth of his crop each year, a shepherd would give a tenth of his newborn lambs, a fisherman a tenth of his fish and so on. But the Pharisees wanted to go on better.

They were so concerned and so wanted to feel good about themselves that they would take the very small herbs in the garden of their mint and their parsley and their basil and whatever it is and they'd just take a tenth of that.

Now in one sense Jesus said that's not a terribly bad thing except that you're so concerned with the nitty gritty, the small little minutiae of the law that you've forgotten about what really matters.

You've missed the big picture. You've missed the wood for the trees and that is love. Love for God and love for your neighbor. The two greatest commandments.

[16 : 56] How they felt about themselves and the things that they did and what people thought of them are the things that really mattered. And so Jesus' second woe to them is verse 43. Woe to Pharisees because you love.

He's talking about love now. Here's what's in their hearts. It's not love for God and it's not love for the people. It's not the love that God wants most of all. It's a love for themselves and people's respect.

You love the most important seats in the synagogue. That was where they met on the Sabbath day. Respectful greetings in the market. They love people coming up and saying oh Rabbi and sort of bowing to them and curtsying to them and respecting them because they were so good and zealous for the law.

They only cared about the outward. And then Jesus makes the most stunning and stinging remark doesn't he in verse 44. Woe to you because you're like unmarked graves which people walk over without knowing it.

If you were to walk over a grave or if you were to come in contact with somebody who was dead in the Old Testament you became unclean. Death you see is to do with sin.

[18 : 09] And so when anything to do with death made a person unclean before God they needed to be cleansed of that. And Jesus is saying you look like you're good and respectable actually under the surface you're just a bunch of dead unclean bones.

You think you're so alive but you're really dead. And when people meet with you they don't realise they're coming into contact with someone who makes them unclean. You want to make yourselves clean and pristine to God but actually what you're doing is people without realising it when they come in contact you are becoming more unclean than they were before because they think that you are the bee's niece.

Dear friends let me ask you just this morning on what basis do you judge your own worth? Do you feel good about yourself because of the things that you do?

Do you feel that you're worthy to God or acceptable to God because of the things that you do? Whether it be saying grace before a meal whether it be reading your Bible or saying your prayers whether it be coming to church whether it be giving to charities do you feel that doing these things somehow makes you feel better about yourself and makes you feel as if God must love you because of them?

And do you do things dear friends let me ask you in the church or in your life because you want other people to like you to accept you to think well of you because you want other people to look at you and say well there's a there's a real Christian there's a good man there's a godly woman dear friends the reality is this that nothing that we do can make us right with God there's nothing that you and I can do which will please him in such a way that he will turn to us and love us rather it's about faith in Jesus only when Paul was writing to the Christians in Rome he explains to them about what God has done in Jesus and how it is through faith in him alone that we are accepted to God loved by God received by God in Romans in chapter 3 he talks about a thing called righteousness righteousness is in that sense what God desires of all of us it is being holy it is being right with God it is about living a life which is in obedience with his commandments now none of us can do that none of us can make ourselves righteous we may feel self-righteous but we cannot make ourselves righteous we cannot give to ourselves that goodness that obedience because we all break God's commandments we all sin and so Paul in writing this tells us now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known so apart from obeying the Lord keeping the law which none of us can do because we sin though the Pharisees thought they could being right with God apart from the law which the prophets and the law tell us about there is a righteousness this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe there's no difference between Jew and Gentile for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and all are justified that's made right with God freely by his grace through the redemption that's the price

[21 : 53] Jesus paid for us on the cross that came by Christ Jesus so it may sound complicated but it's as simple as this you and I are sinners before God we cannot no matter how pharisaical we are no matter how religious we are no matter how good we try to be we cannot remove that sin and make ourselves clean with God but God in his loving mercy and grace sent his son the Lord Jesus to do what we could never do for ourselves Jesus kept the commandments of God he was perfectly righteous in every way and he did for us what we could not do and it's given to us his righteousness is given to us and more than that his death upon the cross paid the price for our sin cancelled the debt so that we are freely forgiven and freely accepted so dear friends if you're a Christian this morning you don't have to do anything to please God you don't have to do anything to make yourself right with him except have faith in Jesus that he's done it for you and all the things that the Christian does come out of love for God and love for others not a sense of duty not a sense of trying to please ourselves and that sense of worth dear friends comes from looking to what price

God prayed for you your worth before God was that he was willing to give his only son for you to suffer and die for you that's your worth you are so precious to God that he paid that price you don't need to do things to make yourself feel better about yourself you feel good when you know your sins are forgiven now there were some other people there as well weren't there at this meal not just these Pharisees but these people who were told who were experts in the law and they were rather upset as well even though Jesus didn't talk to them they felt included because really they were very much the same one of the teachers experts in the law answered verse 45 teacher when you say these things you insult us also it's getting at me it's poking a finger at me as well because I do these sort of things too they were the people who spent all their time looking into the nitty gritty of God's law and finding new ways to apply it to people's lives of making new laws out of the old laws so one law became ten laws and then they kept telling the people this is what you must do this is what you must do this is what you must do no you're not you're not doing it right you're not doing it right they were constantly telling people what they must do to give them peace with God and so they say

Jesus you're insulting us so Jesus turns to them and he doesn't say oh I'm really sorry I offended you oh I'm so sorry that I said things that you you were offended by he doesn't do that does he he says woe to you okay woe to you they spent all their time telling everyone else what they should do but they wouldn't do a thing to point them to the place of peace and help you experts in the law verse 46 woe to you because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them they gave authority to their commandments and said this is what God wants this is what God says this is what he wants you to do and you should do this and do that and do the other so that your whole life like ours is consumed with trying to find ways to keep God happy but in reality their teaching was just a set of rules and traditions that they had claimed came from the Bible but actually just came from previous other teachers before them and they just wanted to invent more and more they had no concern for those people who genuinely in their hearts said I want to be right with God

I want to live a life which pleases him all they did would make them feel more guilty about themselves and they did nothing to point them to a place of forgiveness and peace and deliverance and I'm sure sadly we've met people perhaps not in a religious context maybe we have and even in a church context who are like that and they just want to tell us about the things we just don't do they are hypercritical you're reading the wrong Bible translation you're singing from the wrong hymn book you're praying using the wrong words and again and again all they can find is the faults in others which they've overcome in themselves and they now don't have any faults at all but the reality is they'll do nothing to alleviate and give grace and so Jesus continues and he comes he gets if I can put it this way heavier in what he has to say woe to you because you build tombs for the prophets now of course these experts in the law said well we honour

God's prophets we honour their words and so we take them and we seek to apply them and lay them upon you strongly so that you will do what the prophets teach but in fact they weren't doing that at all because when God sent prophets he always sent them to his people when they were in sin when they had wandered away from God when they got things wrong and whenever the prophets came and said look you need to get right with God and sort it out again and again they would take the prophets and they would kill them or they throw them into prison or they treat them abominably because they did not like what they heard and here again these experts in the law did not like what they heard from God in Jesus and as we know ultimately they were going to kill him just as their fathers did before their ancestors again and again and so Jesus in one sense turns what they think is a good work building a tomb for the prophet to honour him to show actually you've still got the same spirit the same heart the same attitude of those who went before you and in one sense verse 49 where Jesus says God in his wisdom said that's not a quote from the Old Testament it's Jesus in one sense giving an overall picture of God's wisdom of what God did through the

[28 : 35] Old Testament again and again God in his wisdom sent his prophets sometimes they did turn back more often they didn't more often they persecuted them drove them out put their fingers in the ears or killed them and so Jesus in one sense is implying this all those prophets who've died that your ancestors killed have led up to and I would say to Jesus the greatest prophet the last word from God is Jesus and now you're going to kill me and so on to this generation comes all the guilt all the guilt it's an accumulative effect he talks he talks about Abel we know of Abel of course in Genesis 4 killed by his brother because he sought to live for God and please him with the right sacrifice maybe you don't know of Zechariah but you can read about him in 2 Chronicles 24 where he's there he was the last prophet to be killed before the Babylonians came from the north and conquered the land and took the people into exile like every generation before these people have not changed in their heart towards God's word and to his prophets and so ultimately they will come upon them

Jesus says final judgment to continue to refuse God's word is not simply about well I'm thinking about it to refuse to hear God's word is to set ourselves against God's word to set ourselves above God's word and to declare that we know better than him it's to put ourselves on the road to our own judgment and fall it's to put ourselves in that place where ultimately over time there is an accumulation of our sin and unless we deal with it unless we come to Christ with it then that will fall upon us with a heavy blow and people will say woe to them they heard the gospel they had an opportunity to trust Christ but they continued to live their lives as they sought fit they continued to be externally one thing internally another they were never made clean and Jesus closes doesn't he with this final woe and it's the most terrible

I think woe to you experts in the law because you've taken away the key to knowledge the key to the knowledge of life that's what he means the key to the door to enter into heaven to the kingdom of God you yourselves have not entered and you've hindered those who were entering in other words you had the opportunity to teach and proclaim the wonderful good news of God as you knew it in the scriptures but what have you done you've hidden the key away in all your laws and traditions and those people who generally wanted to be right with God and be in his kingdom you've blocked the way for them you've made it impossible for them to come in and for that reason Jesus came came especially that he might bring the key as we thought this morning he said I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me he is the way to God so it wasn't bad enough that these experts in the law had lost the way for themselves and ruined their own copy book but they had ruined it for everybody else who listened to them and then verse 53 well it shouldn't surprise us should it but it does it's sad and Jesus went outside the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely here was Jesus telling them speaking to them just what the prophets had said before you must turn from your sin you need to get right with God and there's a way of forgiveness which means the cleansing of the inside instead of trusting in the outside and their response was not repentance was not to say

Jesus you're right we've got it wrong but we need that cleansing from within rather instead they just fight with him and oppose him fiercely and look for a way to bring him down in other words just as Jesus said their ancestors had done and that they were just the same so they were doing just the same proof positive that in their hearts they did not love God and they did not love justice now these words of Jesus are not simply words of woe to those men of old they're not just historical interesting they are powerfully important to our lives yours and mine they speak to you and me particularly those of us who judge others by what they do or don't do and we do it don't we dear friends within us there's a judgmental attitude a critical attitude and we look at someone maybe in the church or outside wherever it may be and they don't do the things that we think they should do and we think that we're better than them we think that we're more spiritual than them more godly than them are there things that I do that I insist other Christians should do because I feel that they're right to do because I believe in them or am I full of justice and the love of God and generosity of spirit what about verse 52 have we taken away the key is my life a good advertisement for the gospel does my life actually point people to Jesus and encourage them to come to him or is my life simply a stumbling block to people who genuinely are seeking because we insist that they do certain things first or live this certain way or act in this certain attitude am I a stumbling block or am I a step up am I a sign post you see James

I will close with this James as he writes to the Christians in his letter actually had to speak to them in a different way because they were trusting and believing that because they felt certain things or believed certain things it didn't matter how they lived their lives it didn't matter what they did that was enough and they were making a false dichotomy as well you see if you are a Christian dear friend if you are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour today then your life will show it and you cannot help but show it because the spirit of God lives within you and so the question is this am I trusting in a prayer that I prayed many years ago believing in Jesus but I'm not showing any other power or the change or the reality in my life am I trusting in my belief that Jesus died for me but I'm not living as one who's died to self there cannot be a separation between the two we are dear friends to be inwardly and outwardly people of

[36 : 08] God people of the spirit people of love people of the word it's my life showing that I'm truly following Jesus I want us just to take a moment of quiet before we sing our final hymn because I've put before you some very searching questions I've put for myself some as well let's turn to the Lord in the quietness of our own hearts and ask him to search us in these things to repent if we need to forgive if we need to and most of all dear friends to be sure that we truly are inwardly those who've been cleansed of our sin through faith in Jesus our saviour let's just spend a moment a minute or so doing that other in heaven we are all invisible before you in that sense that you can see into our hearts you can see everything about us and you know us you know whether there are just dead bones inside or whether there is life you know whether our lives are merely external giving an appearance trusting in the things that we do or whether we are those who have trusted in Christ

Lord we thank you that we cannot hide from you and that you know us thank you that your great desire and longing is that we might be free that we might freely live for you in the love and the grace that you have given us in Jesus thank you that you don't want us to be doing things to please you in the sense of seeking to win your approval or make ourselves feel good about ourselves or that others may think better of us than we are Lord we long to be those who are not hypocrites but those who are inwardly and outwardly followers of Jesus who live lives as he lived so we pray again that you would hear our prayers and that you would deal with us and that oh Lord you would transform us into his wonderful image and that Lord Jesus we would not be stumbling blocks to others but we would be stepping stones to lift people up to you to point them to you that our lives may be consistent hear us then we thank you for your word we've said that we've sang that we would stand on your promises but we also want to walk in your word too and we pray that in the week ahead we would do just that so we thank you for your word to us now and ask oh Lord that you would bless us and continue with us in Christ's name

Amen Amen