

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **Woes to the Pharisees and Lawyers – Part 2**

*Luke 11:45-54*

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# Woes to the Pharisees and Lawyers – Part 2

## Scripture

Last week I started a two-part message about Jesus' pronouncement of woes upon the Pharisees and lawyers. Last week we looked at the setting of Jesus' rebuke and the statements of rebuke to the Pharisees. This week I would like to conclude the message by looking at Jesus' statements of rebuke to the lawyers, as well as noticing their reaction to the rebuke.

Let's read about Jesus' pronouncement of woes upon the Pharisees and lawyers in Luke 11:37-54, although this week we will study only Jesus' pronouncement of woes upon lawyers in Luke 11:45-54:

<sup>37</sup> While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. <sup>38</sup> The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. <sup>39</sup> And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. <sup>40</sup> You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup> But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

<sup>42</sup> "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. <sup>43</sup> Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. <sup>44</sup> Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

<sup>45</sup> **One of the lawyers answered him, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also."** <sup>46</sup> **And he said, "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. <sup>47</sup> Woe to you! For you build the tombs**

**of the prophets whom your fathers killed. <sup>48</sup> So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. <sup>49</sup> Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' <sup>50</sup> so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, <sup>51</sup> from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. <sup>52</sup> Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering."**

**<sup>53</sup> As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, <sup>54</sup> lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say. (Luke 11:45-54)**

## **Introduction**

Virginia college sophomore Danny Foley just wanted to be part of his school's men's basketball team – even if that meant faking his way onto the court. Danny noticed that all of his team's assistant coaches wore the same suit with a bright orange tie. So before Virginia's conference championship game against Duke on March 16, 2014, he and his friends went searching for some cheap knockoffs. He found everything he needed at Walmart – a suit jacket, suit pants, dress shoes, dress socks, a white dress shirt, and the orange tie.

The next morning, he bought \$30 nosebleed tickets just to get in the door and headed to the game. During a TV timeout, Danny made a move, confidently marching past an usher and onto the court. Danny said, "I walked right behind the cheerleaders and onto the court and joined the [team's] huddle on the court."

Following his team's big win, he went for an even bigger

thrill. When the game's final buzzer sounded with Virginia defeating Duke 72-63, Danny joined his "teammates" in the handshake line. As the confetti fell around him, Danny got to shake hands with "Coach K," the legendary coach for Duke. Photos from the end of the game show Danny wearing a championship t-shirt over his suit and smiling in the middle of the confetti-covered arena.

After celebrating with coaches and players, a member of Virginia's staff caught up with Danny, but he quickly climbed the railings and disappeared into the stands.<sup>1</sup>

This story is about a relatively harmless college prank, but is it possible that we are attempting something much more harmful by faking our way as Christians? Have we just bought a suit and tie without really joining the team? Are we new creations in Christ, or are we the same person with just a new suit and new tie?

The religious leaders of Jesus' day had substituted true godliness with spiritual hypocrisy. So, Jesus spoke vigorously against their spiritual hypocrisy.

## Review

Let's begin our lesson with a brief review.

The analysis of the incident of Jesus' pronouncement of woes upon the Pharisees and lawyers in Luke 11:37-54 warns us of the danger of spiritual hypocrisy.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Setting for the Rebuke (11:37-38)
2. The Statements of the Rebuke (11:39-52)
3. The Reaction to the Rebuke (11:53-54)

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2585433/Hidden-plain-sight-Student-uses-orange-Walmart-tie-help-sneak-UVA-huddle-just-historic-ACC-win.html>.

## **I. The Setting for the Rebuke (11:37-38)**

First, let's look at the setting for the rebuke.

A Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him. The Pharisees washed their hands before dinner, not for hygienic reasons, but for religious and ceremonial reasons. God had not commanded his people to do so, but the Pharisees insisted that it be done. Jesus did not wash his hands before dinner. R. C. Sproul noted, "Reading between the lines, it is clear that Jesus deliberately broke the laws of the Pharisees, in order to teach them a very important lesson."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus used the opportunity to warn people of the danger of spiritual hypocrisy.

## **II. The Statements of the Rebuke (11:39-52)**

Second, let's examine the statements of the rebuke.

During the course of the dinner Jesus addressed statements of rebuke to the Pharisees and also to the lawyers.

### *A. To the Pharisees (11:39-44)*

First, let's examine Jesus' statements of rebuke to the Pharisees.

Jesus issued a fourfold rebuke to the Pharisees. The first is a general rebuke, and the last three consist of specific woes.

#### **1. For Their Foolish Duplicity (11:39-41)**

First, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their foolish duplicity.

The Pharisees were concerned with their external behav-

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<sup>2</sup> R. C. Sproul, *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 249.

ior and did not pay attention to their own hearts. Jesus wanted the outside of a person to match the inside.

2. For Their Heartless Legalism (11:42)

Second, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their heartless legalism.

The Pharisees majored on the minors. They were concerned about tithing on herbs that was not even commanded by God and did not treat their neighbors justly and love God with all of their heart and mind and soul and strength.

3. For Their Vain Pride (11:43)

Third, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their vain pride.

The Pharisees loved the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. They loved it when people noticed them and what they did.

4. For Their False Teaching (11:44)

And fourth, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for their false teaching.

The Pharisees taught the people how to have a relationship with God, but their teaching was false. Jesus opposed that.

### **Lesson**

Let us continue now with today's lesson.

*B. To the Lawyers (11:45-52)*

And second, let's examine Jesus' statements of rebuke to the lawyers.

Having just rebuked the Pharisees, **one of the lawyers answered** Jesus, **“Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also”** (11:45). The lawyer did not like being included with the Pharisees. It is helpful to keep in mind that a **lawyer** in Jesus’ day was a theologian. They were like seminary professors.

Jesus addressed three statements of rebuke to the lawyers.

1. For Their Manmade Religion (11:46)

First, Jesus rebukes the lawyers for their manmade religion.

In verse 46 Jesus **said, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”**

The lawyers studied God’s law and taught the people how to obey God’s law. But they added their own rules to help people obey God’s law. The problem was that these rules become massively burdensome. For example, God’s law commanded people “to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). But how was this command to be obeyed? The lawyers said the following about carrying something on the Sabbath day:

To carry a burden was forbidden, but the codified written law laid it down, “he who carries anything, whether it be in his right hand, or in his left hand, or in his bosom, or on his shoulder is guilty; but he who carries anything on the back of his hand, with his foot, or with his mouth, or with his elbow, or with his ear, or with his hair, or with his money bag turned upside down, or between his money bag and his shirt, or in the fold of his shirt or in his shoe, or in his sandal is guiltless, because he does not carry it in the usual way of carrying it out.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 188.

The lawyers set down rules that were designed to help them obey God's law. But they just become oppressive burdens to the people. Leon Morris said that the lawyers laid down "many vexatious and trifling rules" that people had to keep "if they would be saved."<sup>4</sup>

The lawyers in effect produced a manmade religion about how to get into a right relationship with God. They said that in order to get into a right relationship with God people had to keep hundreds and hundreds of extra-biblical laws.

Let us never teach that we earn favor with God by our obedience to his law. Let us never teach that our obedience to manmade rules – or even to God's law – will merit us heaven.

Beware of manmade religion.

## 2. For Their False Guidance (11:47-51)

Second, Jesus rebukes the lawyers for their false guidance.

Jesus said in verses 47-48, **"Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs."**

If you visit Jerusalem today, you will still be able to see some of these tombs in the Kidron Valley. The people said that they were built in memory of the prophets from the Old Testament, and were considered a way to honor the prophets. But Jesus disagreed. As far as he was concerned, when the people built these tombs they were only finishing the work started by their forefathers. In effect, the people in Jesus' day were unwitting accomplices to the murder of the very men they sought to

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<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 205-206.

honor. The attitude that was prevalent in their fathers, that led them to destroy the prophets who came speaking the word of God to the people, was present in Jesus' day, because the greatest Prophet that ever lived was in their presence and the lawyers were prepared to kill him.

Jesus rebuked them for their false guidance in verses 49-51:

**Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.**

The lawyers honored the prophets slain by their fathers, but they plotted to kill Jesus, the one pointed to by the prophets. Later, they would kill the apostles and God would require of that generation all the unrequited blood of the Old Testament age.

The phrase, **from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary**, includes all the Old Testament martyrs. **Abel** was the first person in history to be murdered, killed by his brother Cain (Genesis 4:8). Luke does not tell us to which one of the more than two dozen men named Zechariah in the Old Testament Jesus was referring. However, Matthew tells us that it is "Zechariah the son of Barachiah" (Matthew 23:35). This **Zechariah** was the author of the Old Testament book of Zechariah and his martyrdom, though not recorded in Scripture, took place near the close of the Old Testament.

The lawyers were false guides because they did not rec-

ognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God and savior of sinners. Rather than pointing people to find salvation in Jesus, they killed Jesus.

Pay attention to your teachers. Be sure that they lead you in the way of truth and not in the way of error.

Beware of false guidance.

### 3. For Their False Teaching (11:52)

And third, Jesus rebukes the lawyers for the false teaching.

Just as he rebuked the Pharisees for false teaching, Jesus also rebuked the lawyers for false teaching. He said in verse 52, **“Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”**

The lawyers were supposed to lead people in the way of salvation. But, instead, they did not. They had lost **the key of knowledge**. And so they were unable to show people how to come into a right relationship with God.

What is **the key of knowledge**? Jesus Christ is the key, since no one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6). The key to saving knowledge is that by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone a person can receive the gift of eternal life. There is no other way. That is the only way to receive the gift of salvation.

The lawyers should have known this. But they did not teach this to the people. Instead, they opposed anyone who did not agree with their legalistic rules about the way of salvation.

Salvation is found in no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Let us never hinder anyone who is seeking a way into heaven. When I was a young pastor I often used to say that we should be suspicious of a young child’s profession of faith. Young children, I

said, often say that they believe something just because their parents told that to believe it. I remember the day my wife came to me and said that our young daughter was distraught because I was implying that she could not be a Christian. Oh, how I repented! That I should be the cause of my own daughter's stumbling! May God help us never teach anything that would prevent anyone from going to heaven.

Beware of false teaching.

### **III. The Reaction to the Rebuke (11:53-54)**

And third, let's observe the reaction to the rebuke.

Luke said in verses 53-54 that **as Jesus went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say.** Of course, we know that they did not rest until they eventually crucified him several months later.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of Jesus' pronouncement of woes upon the Pharisees and lawyers in Luke 11:37-54, we should seek after true godliness.

Only the gospel transforms us and gives us eternal life. Only the gospel strips us of foolish duplicity, heartless legalism, vain pride, false teaching, manmade religion, and false guidance. And only the gospel enables to live a life of true godliness.

Do you want to go to heaven? Do you want to be part of God's family? Don't just put on a suit and tie. No. Put your trust in Jesus Christ and repent of your sin. Ask God to give you his grace so that you can be a new creation in Christ. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

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**PRAYER:**

O Lord our God, Jesus warned us of the danger of spiritual hypocrisy. We look at this narrative and know that we need to examine our hearts.

Help us to repent of foolish duplicity, heartless legalism, vain pride, false teaching, manmade religion, and false guidance. And enable us to trust in Jesus Christ alone for the gift of eternal life. Help us to live in spirit and in truth.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!