

Two Parables about Light; The Scribes and Pharisees Denounced

Luke 11:33-54

*Luke 11:33-54: "No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light. **34** The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. **35** Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. **36** If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light." **37** And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. **38** When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner. **39** 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. **40** Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? **41** But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. **42** "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. **43** Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. **44** Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!**[a]** For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them." **45** Then one of the lawyers answered and said to Him, "Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also." **46** 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. **47** Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. **48** In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs. **49** Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' **50** that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, **51** 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. **52** "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." **53** And as He said these things to them,**[b]** the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, **54** lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.*

Background Notes

In our last talk from Luke, we saw the critical point in Israel's rejection of their Messiah. The religious leaders of the nation actually attributed the power source of our Lord's miracles to the power of Satan. This sin of rejection was unpardonable.

In the last section of Luke 11, after illustrating this rejection with two short but to-the-point parables about light, the Lord moved on to denounce the scribes and Pharisees for their legalism, hypocrisy and blindness. The content of this scathing rebuke is very similar to Matthew 23. However, a closer examination of where and when our Lord was speaking in these two chapters indicates that they probably took place on two different teaching occasions. Remember, the content of the messages that the Lord spoke to the scribes and Pharisees on different occasions would have had a lot of overlap and similarity. Teachers and preachers today do the same thing when speaking on the same topic in different locations or different occasions.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord commended the light and sight of believers.

Verses 33-36 contain two parables about light. In verse 33, we have the parable on the hidden lamp, and in verses 33-36 we have the parable about a bad eye.

In Matthew 5:14-16, the Lord Jesus said, *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”* This is very similar to what the Lord said here in Luke 11:33 - *“No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light.”*

Did you notice the slight difference in emphasis between these two passages? In Matthew 5:16, the Lord exhorted us to let our light shine, and not hide it. In view of the context, the emphasis in Luke 11:33 seems to be that the Lord, the Light of the world, had come. The scribes and Pharisees had seen that Light, and were revealed by that Light - but they rejected that Light, as indicated in the next little parable about the bad eye.

“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when the bright shining of a lamp gives you light.”

Remember, the Lord gave this parable before the invention of reading glasses, contact lenses, trifocals and bifocals, or cataract surgery and eye medications. So these folks could easily identify with our Lord's illustration. If you have “bad eyes,” your whole body is affected. Even though the light is there, *you* are in darkness. The application of this parable was obvious to His audience: the Light of the world had come, but Israel's spiritual eyesight was bad that they weren't receiving the Light. Thus they were in spiritual darkness. They could not see.

The personal application of this parable is obvious as well. If you have good spiritual eyesight, then you can and will receive the true Light of this world - the Lord and His Word. As a result, you will not be in darkness, but you will be walking in the Light. Your whole person will be enlightened. You will see truth clearly. The Lord commended the light and sight of believers.

2. The Lord denounced the legalism and hypocrisy of unbelievers.

In verse 37 the Lord accepted an invitation to have lunch with a Pharisee. The Pharisee was surprised that the Lord did not wash His hands before the meal. (By the way, if someone were to use this text today as an excuse for not washing their hands before a meal – well, that would of course be pulling this Scripture way out of its context!) This was a “ceremonial washing.” It was not commanded in God’s Law - it was a ritualistic washing that had been added to the daily religious practice of observant Jews, and had become just as important to the legalistic Pharisees as God’s Law! So the Lord used this occasion as an opportunity to denounce the legalism and hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees had many ritualistic rules for washing themselves and their dinnerware, while at the same time their inward thoughts and motives were evil (v39-40). You can’t clean up your sinful thought life by washing your head, and you can’t clean up your sinful activities by washing your hands. The Lord must cleanse your heart.

The Lord pronounced three “woes” on the Pharisees for their legalism and hypocrisy (v42-44). They meticulously tithed everything, down to the last small measure of cooking spices or herbs - but they were not concerned about justice or about the poor and needy. If they were really clean on the inside, they would have had compassion, and they would have cared for the poor (v41). The Pharisees loved to show everyone how religious they were on the outside, but the Lord said that on the inside they were like unmarked and hidden graves, full of corruption. People became defiled without realizing it when they came in contact with these proud and corrupt men (v44).

Then the Lord pronounced three “woes” on the lawyers (v46=52). The lawyers of that day were the teachers and scribes of the Old Testament Scriptures, because the Old Testament was the Law of the Jewish people. But these scribes twisted and misinterpreted the Word of God. Like the Pharisees, they honored the prophets by building large tombs for them, but meanwhile their generation continued to persecute and kill the prophets, just as their fathers had done. This “generation” of unbelievers who persecuted and murdered the God’s faithful servants stretched all the way through the entire Old Testament history – from the murder of Abel to the murder of Zechariah the priest in 2 Chronicles 24, which comes at the end of the Hebrew Old Testament. The lawyers of Jesus’ day were continuing that wicked tradition. They had joined with the Pharisees to plot against Jesus (v53-54), and they would continue to persecute and kill the New Testament prophets and apostles as well (v49).

Notice the third “woe” pronounced upon these lawyers (v52). *“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.”* What was “the key of knowledge” that these religious leaders were taking away? It was the teaching of the Lord Jesus! His teaching about

Himself and His Kingdom opened up a person's whole understanding of Scripture - and of life itself, both then and today. But the scribes and Pharisees would not believe. They would not enter in themselves, and they did everything possible to hinder those who were turning to the Lord and His Word. The Lord denounced the legalism and hypocrisy of the unbelievers.

Practical Application

Use a meal to discuss an important matter.

Can you imagine the tension that existed at this luncheon in the Pharisee's home? One of the lawyers actually said to the Lord (v45), "*You insult us!*" That lawyer had not missed the point that the Lord was making to the Pharisees! Then the Lord went further in denouncing the scribes. Talk about "rocking the boat"!

The atmosphere at this meal was tense, but the Lord did not back away from it. The important point at this luncheon was not to enjoy the meal in peace, but to use the meal to discuss an important matter – the legalism, hypocrisy, and wicked motives and attitudes of the scribes and Pharisees.

We, too, can use a meal to discuss important matters. At times we may have to confront others, or sometimes be confronted ourselves. A meal may be a golden opportunity to get beyond "small talk." Use a meal to discuss an important matter!