

Like, WOE

(Luke 11:37-54)

Reflection (by Min. Dennis Lee)

So here we find Jesus being invited by a Pharisee to a meal. Not a bad deal right? Seems pretty nice of Mr. Pharisee. What we find is when Jesus gets here he doesn't wash his hands and the Pharisee is a little shocked by it. Now, this isn't a lesson about hygiene, or lack thereof. The Pharisee isn't "astonished" because Jesus had dirty hands. The deal was, washing your hands at that time was a religious deal. It was in a way representing God cleansing you. It was something you did before you ate. Imagine if Jesus came over to your house and didn't give a blessing on the food. I am not saying you don't pray before you eat; you should thank God for providing for your needs (important and Biblical), but we'd be pretty surprised if Jesus didn't bless the food. Well, in a non-biblical sort of way, that was what hand washing was to these Pharisees. It wasn't really in the Bible, but somehow it found its way into the tradition you do before you eat.

So Jesus knows what Mr. Pharisee is thinking and calls him out on it! He's basically saying the Pharisees just care about appearing to look holy but they don't really live holy lives. They are just fakers. They don't really want to be holy, they just want people to think they are. But if you pursue holy lives you will look holy because, well, what is on the inside of a person will eventually come out, for better or for worse.

Then Jesus goes into his "WOE IS YOU" deals, which pretty much is a big deal at that time and you don't really go "woeing" people because they might get offended. He gives the Pharisees three of them. First, you try to follow rules such as tithing (which is a good and holy thing) but you kinda forget to do things such as JUSTICE AND LOVING GOD. He isn't saying one is more important than the other, but more so, you can't pick and choose what you want to follow. Second, he WOES them for wanting the best seat in the house. The Pharisees like the spotlight and glory. They like things to be about them. Lastly, Jesus WOES them for leading their people to disobedience. So back in the day, you don't touch dead people because they are unclean and then you will be unclean. But sometimes there are unmarked graves around and you accidentally walk on their grave (big no-no). Whoops, you are now unclean for a period of time. You don't mess with their graves or anything like that. So when Jesus called the Pharisees unmarked graves He says, you just trick people into doing wrong and messing up, big, big mistake.

Then the lawyers/scribes are all upset because they are not only Pharisees but they are the theologians at that time. They teach about God's Word and they interpret it. The "regular" Pharisees do what they do because the lawyers/scribes interpreted it. Jesus then goes, I am going to WOE you too! Why? Because you place a heavy, heavy burden on the people that don't even need to be on them (like following all these crazy rules that aren't even in the Bible), and on top of that, you don't even help them out with this burden you place on them (that's just jacked up). Also, you do things like build up monuments for the dead prophets, but your attitude seems to be quite similar to the people that killed the prophets during their time (interestingly, they did end up having a hand in killing Jesus). Lastly, Jesus WOES them because they misinterpret God's Word where clearly they have no idea what they are talking about (key of knowledge) but they also prevent people from having true knowledge of God.

Many times we like to think of ourselves as better than the Pharisees but we actually look a lot like them. We might have turned into strict law followers (which isn't necessarily a bad thing) and forgotten the heart of the law. We put pressure on other people to follow the rules, and there is very little grace and mercy involved. It seems like the same problem over and over. We love to follow rules and we love to judge those who do not follow them. Jesus makes it clear that: (1) We don't make up our own rules. (2) We don't pick and choose the rules we want to follow. (3) If you are a leader, you better be dang sure you are leading them towards life and not destruction. That means, we better know what Jesus expects out of us and we better follow it and help other follow it with grace and mercy. Christ has high expectations of His followers, but they are not meaningless rules for us to follow. He gives us the best guideline for our life and we must help and encourage each other to live according to what Christ.

Personal Reflection Questions

1. In what ways do you care more about your outward appearance of looking like a “good Christian” rather than striving to live a God centered life?
2. Do you ever feel like you pick and choose when and how to follow Christ? What part of your life is Christ calling you to let go?
3. Are you spending your time carefully studying Scripture so you can truly know God’s Word? If you are a leader at church, are you leading people towards God’s Word and will or away from it?
4. Attitude check: Is your life filled with love, grace, and mercy for people, or are you constantly judging people for falling short of your standards?