

INTRODUCTION

It began pleasantly enough, especially after the recent discussions we'd observed between Jesus and others. These were over why he did what he did, by whose power was he working and why didn't he give people unmistakably real signs as to who he was?

We, his friends looking on, felt then it was pretty generous of the Pharisee to invite Jesus for a meal because of all this. Then we were really surprised at what came next.

Luke 11:37-54:37

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. 38 But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

39 Then the Lord said to him, 'Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But now as for what is inside you – be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

42 '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 practised the latter without leaving the former undone.

43 'Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the market-places.

44 'Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.'

45 One of the experts in the law answered him, 'Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.'

46 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.

47 'Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. 48 So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and 'You build their tombs. 49 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.' 50 Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 51 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.

52 'Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.'

53 When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, 54 waiting to catch him in something he might say.

This is relatively new territory for us – I don't how you think of Jesus but when you've said your prayers for years beginning, 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild,' it takes time to shake that off.

You've got to understand that Jesus sailed into the Pharisees and legal experts – not dissimilar in a way to the letters to the editor over the recent conviction of a rich son from another island. We need to remember Longfellow's words

**THOUGH the mills of God grind slowly,
they grind exceeding small;**

Do you understand then the power of Jesus' criticisms of the P's and L's? Firstly the Pharisees cop it – 4 things

Accusations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You look good but you're full of greed and wickedness• You give God a tenth of everything down to the last detail BUT• You love the most important seats in the synagogue• You are like unmarked graves	The better way: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be generous to the poor• Practise justice and love• Keep giving anyway
--	---

Briefly let's consider Jesus accusations:

As the fundamentals are concerned the Pharisees believed in nearly everything we do. They believed in the inspiration and authority of their book (in their case it was the Old Testament). They believed in God, the supernatural, in Satan, angels, heaven and hell, and the resurrection of the dead and tithing of everything. Outwardly they looked fine yet Jesus says they were full of greed and wickedness; they liked to be seen to be prominent and they put obstacles in the ordinary folk's way – that's what the unmarked grave comment is about

The Pharisees developed an extensive tradition of extra laws; applying it to every area of life this factor made them the strictest of the Jewish religious sects. They felt strongly had their religion sorted but sadly they were far from God. They'd turned their relationship with God into a sham.

They weren't alone

One of the legal experts picked up pretty quickly that this wasn't only about the Pharisees; I love the lawyer's comment: **'Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.'** I'm offended!

Accusations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You load people down with burdens• You build tombs for the prophets and yet your ancestors killed them• You have taken away the key of knowledge	
--	--

Majored on minors – reduced faith in God to a set of complicated rules; they'd continually run out of town or killed the people who spoke for God; they made it so difficult for people to get close to God – they made truth harder to find by covering it up in silly little rules.

I don't want to dwell on their shortcomings today just make a few comments not in any particular order – I invite you to reflect with me on what I've observed as I prepared for today:

1. By implication the religion of the Ps and Ls seemed to be joyless – the one characteristic of Christian faith that sets it apart from most religions and no religions is joy – as Demos Shakarian wrote 'Christians are to be the happiest people on earth.' At least that's what the book he wrote said.
2. They'd reduced powerful faith and trust in God to a set of difficult rules – while we can say well of course this was before Jesus and his cross and the Holy Spirit coming and all that – well it was Jesus who was having a go at them. I see –this as being perhaps more so in my youth – following Jesus was really a list of don'ts
3. They wanted to be in the limelight - in the old days we called it pride. Possibility of us doing this – it's all about me. And they focussed on appearances.
4. You look pretty righteous to me but I don't know what's really going on in your heart – unless you tell me. I know what's in mine and I extrapolate from my experience: This is our dilemma – we can be regular at church (which in itself is a small miracle these days – there are just so many conflicting demands and many of them are good); we can study the Bible diligently, we may be generous givers but if in our hearts there is pride as there was in the Pharisees' hearts, where are we. No person is a Christian truly if they simply observe religious conventions and forget love and humility.
5. And judging by the reaction of the host to Jesus not washing his hands quite the right way, his attitude shows barely concealed contempt, criticism and lack of love.
6. There's also a bit of fear in this – if I don't do this, this and this where will I stand – fear is no motivation for following the way of Jesus.
7. The biggest question for us is this - do we ever behave like Pharisees, like legal experts. Are any of us like this; as we as a community like this?

Notice Jesus also gave some alternative ways of living

- **Be generous to the poor**
- **Practise justice and love**
- **Keep giving anyway**

Oh dear, it's really quite clear isn't it? And as Mark Twain said, 'It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that worry me...'