



The Road Less Traveled:

Gospel of Luke.

In the middle section of the Gospel of Luke, we see a unique aspect of Jesus' ministry, his life and ministry on the road. We see him interact with strangers, answer difficult questions, and teach with boldness. Along the way, Jesus teaches his disciples—and us as well—what the Kingdom of God is and what it means to follow Him.

WEEK THREE

MISUNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM

Message Passage: Luke 11:37-54

Small Group Passage: Luke 12:1-12 & Luke 18:9-14

TEACHING AND VIDEO NOTES

Luke 11:37-40

We are not so different: While we do not adhere to the same religious practices today, we do, in fact, have the same tendency to focus on the outside to the detriment of the heart. We so often are more concerned with the appearance of righteousness rather than being righteous.

Jesus proceeds to give six rebukes (warnings or woes in other translations) to the Pharisees. When we see the heart of the warning, we realize that these warnings are not just for the Pharisees, but for us as well.

Luke 11:41-42

Woe #1: You legalistically observe the Law (Oral Law: Mishnah) and yet you refuse to obey the greatest commandment, to Love God and love people (Mark 12:30-31, Deut. 6:4,5, & Lev 19:18).

Heart of the issue: The Pharisees had outward signs of righteousness without an inward yearning for justice. Therefore, they did not have the same heart as Jesus.

Luke 11:43 *“Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.*

The synagogues of the day had a specific seating order. In Jesus' time, synagogues typically featured stepped benches lining the walls, with attendees facing the center of the room.

Woe #2: You live to be praised by people. Your concern is with how much people are impressed by you or pleased with you, rather than seeking, above all else, to please and worship God.

Luke 11:44 *“Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.”*

Woe #3: This third condemnation pictures the Pharisees, for all their ceremonial cleanliness, as actually typifying the worst sort of uncleanness. The Old Testament laws stated that a person who touched a grave was considered unclean (Numbers 19:16). Sometimes, a body might be buried in an unmarked grave, causing an unwary traveler to become ceremonially unclean by walking over it. Jesus accused the Pharisees of actually being hidden graves who made others unclean by their spiritual rottenness. Like graves hidden in a field, the Pharisees corrupted everyone who came in contact with them.¹

Luke 11:45-46

Woe #4: You willingly burden people without caring for their burdens. Instead, we are called to carry one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), not out of obligation but out of compassion (Mat 9:36)

Luke 11:47-51

Woe #5: The Pharisees were responsible for committing the exact same sin of rejecting God's messengers that their spiritual forefathers had done. We are responsible for our actions before God, even if we came by them honestly (past family sins).

¹ Bruce Barton et al., Life Application New Testament Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 306.

Luke 11:52 *“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.”*

Woe #6: The Pharisees had both failed to understand the true teaching of the Bible and had no desire to teach sound doctrine that would be a blessing to the people.

Luke 11:53-54

A Gospel issue: At the heart of all of this was a misplaced expectation of who the Messiah would be and what kind of Kingdom he would usher in.

- The Pharisees were expecting a coming king (the Messiah) who would be impressed by their religious resume. They had grievously misunderstood the nature and mission of the promised Messiah.
 - The Pharisees were waiting for a coming kingdom where they would be considered among the elites. They had grievously misunderstood the nature of the kingdom that Jesus would usher in.
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Segway to Small Group: But how do we avoid these pitfalls? How do we avoid making the same mistakes the Pharisees did? Jesus answers these various questions in the passage we will be discussing today.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How would you describe the downfall of the Pharisees? What mindset did they have that led them to miss the significance of Jesus' life, ministry, and teaching?
2. Do those same mindsets exist today? In other words, how could we easily make the same mistakes?

Leader Note: Many of the Pharisees' mistakes and mindsets are all too common today.

- They refused to speak directly to those whose behavior bothered them, in this case, Jesus. Instead, they conspired and condemned Him in their own inner circle. That is the default way most people deal with conflict.
- The Pharisees obeyed the law down to the letter. In doing so, they appeared righteous to many people, especially to themselves. However, they did not love

God, mercy, justice, or people (Micah 6:8). They failed to understand that sin is inherently a heart issue (Matthew 6).

- They were controlled by pride. Pride will always blind you to your own sin.
- They were quick to criticize but slow to help.²

READ: Luke 12:1-12

3. Vs. 2-3: Jesus warns against the danger of believing that hidden sins are truly hidden or will remain hidden, as the Pharisees assumed. What are common “hidden” sins that we can easily dismiss because they are not always visible to others?
4. Vs. 4-5: We are commanded again and again in scripture to fear God (Deut 10:12, Joshua 4:24). Why is it so important that we fear God?
5. How would fearing God keep us from making the same mistakes as the Pharisees did?

Leader Note: If we fear God, we will obey all that he commanded us to do. The keyword being ALL. When we do not fear God, we selectively choose which parts of Scripture to obey. The Pharisees chose to observe the Sabbath commandment in a legalistic manner. Yet, they completely ignored the commandment to show mercy (Micah 6:8). If we fear God as Lord, we will obey all that he has commanded us to do.

Leader Note (*vs 8-10 & the unpardonable Sin*): Verses 8-10 are hotly debated and have been for some time among theologians. Some falsely claim that these passages support the potential loss of salvation of someone who denies Christ under duress or persecution. This overlooks the central point of the passage and its context. These verses continue to refer to the Pharisees and religious leaders whom Jesus had just rebuked. The Pharisees were currently speaking against the Son of Man, referring to Jesus, and could be forgiven for doing so if they believed in Him one day. However, if they continued in their unbelief after Jesus conquered sin and death on the cross and the Holy Spirit came to testify about Jesus’ work (John 15:26) and convict the world of its sin (John 16:8), they would be condemned eternally. In short, rejecting Jesus Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit that points to Jesus after the cross is the unpardonable sin.

READ: Luke 18:9-14

² NIV application Commentary: Luke, pg 334-335

6. Vs. 11-12- Much of what the Pharisee said was not a lie. His life was not like the “robbers, evildoers, adulterers.” I have no doubt that he did in fact “fast twice a week and gave a tenth of all he had.” Yet this Pharisee's actions and mindset serve as a warning to us. What did he get wrong?

Leader Note: The Pharisee wrongly assumed that God was impressed with his religious resume. God was, in fact, not. Similarly, Paul pointed out to the Church in Philippi that his religious resume as a former Pharisee was even more impressive. Yet, Paul viewed it all as garbage (Phil 3:5-8). Why? Because he had been made righteous through faith in Christ, not obedience to the Law (Phil 3:9). It is only when we understand the Gospel that good works find their place (Eph 2:8-9). Not as a means of receiving grace or earning God's mercy. But, instead, they are done in response to his grace and mercy (James 2:18).

7. Vs 13 - What did the Tax Collector get right? How does he serve as an example?

Leader Note: The Tax collector rightly understood that he was a sinner in need of a savior. The painfully ironic part is that the same statement accurately describes the Pharisee, and every human being who has ever lived (Rom 3:23). Much like the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the older son clearly saw his sin. In contrast, the self-righteous older brother was falsely blind to his self-righteousness and hard heart. This is why we must remind ourselves that we are sinners saved by grace. When we forget this, we drift far from God's will.

8. What are some practical things that we can do to maintain the humble attitude of the tax collector?

Leader Note: A couple of thoughts...

- If we regularly confess our sins to God, we will guard our hearts against the pride of self-righteousness. This is why we must make confession and repentance a regular part of our prayer life (1 John 1:9-10).
- When we serve or do any good work, we should remind ourselves of why we do so. We do not earn more of God's love by serving, reading the Bible, or engaging in any other good work. Does doing these things please him? Yes. But only when done for the right reasons.

PRAYER TIME

In addition to your regular prayer topics and rhythms, we can pray that God would guard our hearts against the temptation of self-righteousness and the many other mistakes that led to the downfall of the religious leaders of Jesus' day.

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