

When Jesus Ate with Dirty Hands

Small Group Discussion

Luke 11:37-54

Warm-up question: Who is one “reformer” in history, whose life and work you especially admire?

We’re in a sermon series that’s spanning the academic year, called “The Big Story.” We’ve been walking through the Bible, seeing the ways that it’s one big story of redemption. Between now and Easter we’re looking at some of the key elements of how Jesus went about the rescue that he came to accomplish. This week, we saw an example of Jesus’s persistent critique of the Pharisees.

Discuss: Background

- What immediately comes to mind when you hear the word “Pharisee?”
- Were you surprised to learn that the Pharisees were reformers who brought about positive change in the Jewish world of the 1st-Century BC and 1st-Century AD?
- In case you missed it, review the following background from the sermon. *“The Pharisees sought to purify their nation of morally corrupt influences; promoted non-violent resistance of an oppressive government; were immensely popular among the common people of their nation.... They came about in a time when Greek and Roman influences had watered down the Jewish people’s faithfulness to God’s law. They were a group of middle-class, lay teachers who sought to help people apply the Torah to every area of life, explaining what the laws of God meant so that people would know how to obey God in any situation they might find themselves in. They held many beliefs in common with Jesus (and us)—beliefs like the existence of an immortal soul, a bodily resurrection, future rewards and punishments, and moral responsibility. In fact, they were the most closely aligned with him of any Jewish teachers in their day. Craig Blomberg, a prominent New Testament scholar, goes so far as to say that they were the ‘conservative evangelical pastors’ of their day.”*

Read Luke 11:37-54

Discuss: The Danger

- What can you gather about the host of this dinner scene, based on the fact that he invited Jesus to dine with him? Who else is present?
- Review the custom of ritual handwashing that is at issue here. (Recall that this is not good hygiene, but rather an extra-biblical law that the Pharisees had added in an effort to ensure that they did not become contaminated by any kind of ritual impurity).
- Pastor Josh stated that Jesus’ refusal to wash before the meal amounted to a social insult. What do you think of this fact? Why couldn’t Jesus just play along, and “do as the Romans do,” in the home of his host?
- In vv. 39-42, we see a summary of the problem of Pharisaism. How would you paraphrase this problem, in your own words? (Leaders: Pastor Josh said that the religious leaders’ religious expressions have become empty legalism, attempts at self-justification, or external religiosity without internal cleansing.)
- Try to summarize the three “woes” that Jesus proclaims about the Pharisees in vv. 42-44. These are “symptoms” of the heart problem that he is attacking.
- The “teacher” who speaks up in v. 45 is a scribe, an expert in Jewish law who is likely also a Pharisee. In response to him, Jesus proclaims two more “woes” in vv. 46-52. Try to summarize, in your own words, the problems that Jesus is bringing to light here.

- How have the Pharisees' efforts—which started out as well-intended, godly actions—turned them into the adversaries of Jesus? What do you think of Jesus' outspoken criticism of the Pharisees?
- Pastor Josh stated that we are susceptible to the same danger—that even our best outward expressions can become empty legalism.
 - What are some practices where you have seen this happen in your life, or where you could see it potentially happening in your life?
 - How do good, religious practices become empty, worthless legalism? What happens in that process? (We start using the external practices as means of justifying ourselves before God and others).
- Pastor Josh said that three immediate consequences come about when we focus on outward religious practices to the neglect of our hearts. They are written below. Discuss each one: *Do you agree that these are a concern? Have you seen this happen in yourself or anyone you know? Is it happening at all currently in our church?*
 - Greed overtakes our hearts.
 - We load other people down with all kinds of rules and obligations, without helping them.
 - We push people farther away from God.
- What are ways that we can help people to do and be what God asks of them as followers of Jesus?

Discuss: The Solution

- Pastor Josh said that Jesus refused to pit the external practices against the internal reality. He upheld both. How do you see that fact in the passage (especially v. 42)?
- What does it mean to “practice justice and the love of God” (without leaving undone the practice of tithing, for example)?
 - Pastor Josh said that we might describe this solution as “Marinating your life in the love of God.” What does that look like in practice?
 - How can you “marinate” in God's love this week?
 - Josh also insisted that when we shift our focus to the love of God, poured out in Jesus on the cross, the “justice” that Jesus mentions—the radical generosity he desires to see—will follow as the overflow. How does this process play out?
 - When Paul is prodding the Corinthian Christians to share generously with others in need, he doesn't command them or try to guilt them into complying. Rather, he says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” Why does he remind them of Jesus in this pursuit of generosity?
- If you have time, **read** the following passages, recorded a few chapters later in Luke's Gospel. Understand that Luke would want us to see them as connected to today's story of Jesus' meal with the Pharisees. Each of these shines light on how Jesus would have us to respond to his warning to the religious leaders.
 - Luke 18:9-14
 - Luke 19:1-10

Sharing/Prayer

- As always, take some time to share areas where you need people to pray for you.
- Depending on your comfort level, include a time of confession in your prayer time, confessing ways that you have focused on external religiosity to the neglect of the heart.