



Luke 11:47–54

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.

Reflection

Today's passage comes from Luke 11:47–54,

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It is hard to get our minds around the tragic irony that it was the leaders of God’s people – the Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, chief priests and experts in the Old Testament law – who handed the Son of

God, their long promised Messiah over to the Romans to be executed. But when you think about it a little more, this really shouldn't surprise us. After all, they have a long history of it. For centuries God has been sending prophets to Israel, to warn them of God's displeasure at their wandering from his ways and worshipping idols instead of him. And for centuries, God's people have been killing their own prophets. The very last of them they killed was John the Baptist; Herod himself was a professing Jew.

It's just like Jesus' parable of the tenants in Matthew 21:33–46. The tenants have taken over the vineyard. The owner sends servant after servant to claim his share of the harvest but the wicked tenants beat one and kill the other until finally the own-

er sends his very own son to claim what is his. But they say to themselves, 'This is the heir, let's kill him and the vineyard will be ours!' The vineyard is Israel, the servants are God's prophets and Jesus is his son. They've taken Israel for themselves, they've killed God's prophets who were sent to warn them to repent of their ways and now finally they're beginning to plot in their hearts to murder God's son.

It is fitting that these are final woes that Jesus pronounces on the Pharisees and teachers of the law with the emphasis on the woe in verses 47 to 51. Because this one is the climax, they're all leading up to this one, because it's the worst one, the one that sums up them all. In this their sins will be heaped up to the very limit. We must never forget the irony that it is

the leaders of God's people who kill God's son. We must never forget that the ones who are supposedly waiting so expectantly for the Messiah are the ones who kill him. We must never forget this as a warning. It is a warning that reminds us that it is often those who profess most loudly to be Christians that bring the most damage to Christianity. And our hearts are not immune either.

Religion gone wrong, bringing death instead of life. Suffocating traditions, instead of breathing new life into a culture that is barely gasping for air. Driving people away from God instead of to him through religious practices and routines that have been cut off from the source.

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.'

How does this happen? Jesus has been teaching us that this happens through hypocrisy and pride. Hypocrisy and pride in 'the way we do things' that leads us to stop listening to Scripture and becoming blind and deaf to the rebuke and guidance of God's word.

Christianity isn't about building beautiful churches, it's about building beautiful lives. And this happens by listening ever more intently to God's word as he speaks into our hearts by the power of his Holy Spirit. This happens by giving ourselves over to his words and allowing ourselves

to be changed by them. This happens by allowing ourselves to be renewed into the image and likeness of Jesus by embracing the work of his Spirit as we conform to the pattern of his words. But it often hurts. This is because God is tearing us down in order to build us up higher than we could ever imagine. But if we build ourselves up as the Pharisees have then we're destined to be torn down.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law have stopped listening to God's words. Their ancestors refused to hear God's words in the mouths of the prophets and they're refusing to hear God's words in the mouth of Jesus. Christianity goes terribly wrong when Christians stop listening to God's words.

Think & Pray

Have you stopped listening to God's words? Or to some of them? It's an easy thing to do. The back half of Luke 11 has been far from enjoyable reading. And in fact much of the Bible makes for far from enjoyable reading; all those parts that are a little too real, that shine a light on things in our lives that we'd rather keep hidden, things that we'd rather not think about and rather not have exposed. Truth often hurts. And so we often avoid what we need to hear the most. Instead of allowing God to deconstruct us so he can reconstruct us into something truly beautiful, we turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to what we need to hear the most, and we stall in our transformation. Ironically, we hold on to what is holding us back, we embrace what is

stopping us from being truly satisfied and truly happy. And little ironies like this can lead to big ironies as we see in the Jewish religious leaders who go on to kill the son of God.

Cast your mind now back over the six woes in Luke 11. They make for uncomfortable reading not just because they are so confrontational but because none of our hearts are completely free of the hypocrisy that Jesus is speaking of. But instead of blocking our ears and gliding over the words that make us feel most uncomfortable as the Pharisees did, what is it that we need to listen to most carefully? What is stopping you from living a beautiful life? How do you need to be torn down by God so that he can remake you into someone who is truly great? What hard work in the

area of repentance and character change do you need to perform with the help of the Holy Spirit so that you can live the beautiful life needed to win people for Christ in this world? What is it for you? Is God showing you that the depths of your pride seem to have no limits like he is for me? Is the Holy Spirit cutting you to the heart when it comes to the way you love the material things of this world over the things of God? As counter-intuitive as it feels and as hard as it is embrace what God's words are doing to your heart. Don't recoil from them like the Pharisees did but embrace them. They may hurt but by them you are being healed and being remade into someone with the potential to be truly great.

Then spend what time you have left before you are caught up in the day ahead

confessing your sins to God. Ask for God's help with whatever sin is most burdening you in this moment. Give it over to him and watch him take it away for good. Ask for the grace and strength that you need to leave it behind forever. But don't forget either to celebrate the work that God has performed in your life so far. And thank God for Jesus' words and example. Pray that you'd never stop listening to him and wanting to be like him, that you would love listening to him and that God would make you like him. Pray it in his name and know that God loves answering prayers like these.