



Luke 11:42

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.

Reflection

All of the Old Testament Scriptures point forward to Jesus Christ. God's progressive

self-revelation through time culminates in him. God's saving plan for the nations reaches its climax in him. Jesus is both the fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures and the fullest expression of God's character, God himself in human flesh. Furthermore, many of the greatest Old Testament characters are types of Jesus, their miracles and ministries and the pattern of their lives foreshadowing him. The Old Testament prophets, priests and kings spoke about the one who would come as prophet, priest and king *par excellence*, as Messiah over God's people, proclaiming his salvation and pending judgment of all the nations of earth. Jesus' prophetic ministry is clearly seen in this section of Luke's Gospel.

In Luke 11, Jesus pronounces powerful de-

nunciations on the leaders of the people of God recalling the language of the many of the great prophets. He pronounces six woes on the Pharisees and experts in the law. A 'woe' is akin to a curse that warns against catastrophe, which looms should the current behaviour continue. Doom can be averted but only through swift repentance. The situation is dire, the wrath of God is incited and destruction is imminent, the woe pronounced as one last act of mercy. Turn and repent before it is too late.

The language of the Old Testament prophet Amos conveys this sense of woe. In Amos 5 he's speaking on God's behalf about the hypocrisy of his people's religious practices who on the surface were generous towards God but underneath

are taking advantage of and abusing the poor. God pronounces this woe on them through Amos,

21 'I hate, I despise your religious festivals;

your assemblies are a stench to me.

22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,

I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,

I will have no regard for them.

23 Away with the noise of your songs!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.

24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing

stream!

Jesus' first woe in Luke 11 has a similar flavour, let me read it to you, just one verse from Luke 11:42,

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.

The picture Jesus paints is borderline ludicrous. The giving of one mint leaf in ten. The Pharisees are portrayed as calculating their tithing down to the decimal point. They never miss a leaf. And yet in their myopic existence they are missing

the forest for the trees. They are majoring on the minors and minoring on the majors. Somehow in their preoccupation with the minutia they are completely disregarding the weightier matters of the law – justice and the love of God. They give their money fastidiously towards the temple but have no heart for the cause of the poor, no love for the orphan or the widow. They zealously follow passages like Deuteronomy 14:22 instructing them to set aside ten percent of all their fields produce but forget, six verses on, the reason for their tithe includes the welfare of foreigners, the fatherless and widows (Deut 14:28–29). They’ve lost the heart of God behind religious rules and thus render their religious practices null and void.

Perhaps Micah says it the best,

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

Or his new Testament counterpart in John,

17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 John 3:17–18

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.

The Pharisees have compartmentalised their hearts and managed to excel in the minutia while completely disregarding the driving priorities of the Christian life. They excel in religiosity but have no love. There is no compassion behind their giving, just dogged obligation. They've settled into and are excelling in religious routine but seem to have lost their first love of God and the reasons why they started these good habits in the first place. And notice, these are good habits. See the end of the verse,

You should have practised the latter

without leaving the former undone.

Tithing their mint and dill is in fact not as ludicrous as it seems. Jesus applauds their diligence in financial giving in a back-handed kind of way. But their diligence in this area does not make up for their gross oversight when it comes to the love of God and neighbour.

Think & Pray

And so as we consider today's passage it is worth taking stock of our own personal walk with Jesus. Are we majoring in the minors, while neglecting the majors? What of justice and mercy and love of neighbour in your life? Perhaps you go to church each week, give financially to the church and are excelling in the usu-

al Christian routines. But does your heart beat for justice and mercy? Do you attend and serve at church out of a growing love for God and neighbour or because it has simply become a settled pattern in your life?

And just like the Pharisees, over time it so easy for us to get caught up in the small things. Perhaps it might be politics in your congregation or the style of church music or any number of things that the Bible says very little about. All the while neglecting the great themes of the Bible: evangelism, prayer, Christian life together as family, and care of the most vulnerable in our world. What is the equivalent of tithing the herb garden in your Christian life? What forest are you missing for the trees?

And while the Pharisees may have got their religious priorities wrong (a serious thing indeed), their meticulous giving still meets with Jesus' approval. Perhaps you are majoring on the majors, perhaps your love of God and neighbour is growing and is the driving force behind your ministry and Christian service but if so Jesus would still see you meticulous and generous with your financial giving. Perhaps his final words this morning are the most applicable ones to you.

You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone.

Wherever this passage finds you today spend some time now talking it over with God in prayer. Pray for his heart in all you do. Pray for a spirit of generosity. Pray that

you would act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with him today. And thank him for sending his son to guide us in all wisdom and truth.