



Luke 11:37–41

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.

Reflection

At just the right time, Jesus Christ came to earth to defeat Satan, sin and death forever. He also came to reform Judaism. The Judaism of Jesus' day had gone off the rails. Perhaps no chapter of the New Testament sums it up better than Matthew 23. Here's just one of the seven woes that Jesus pronounces on first century Judaism in that chapter,

15 'Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You

travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.

Strong words, but certainly warranted. You see, instead of leading people to God, the first century leaders of God's people were leading converts away from him, slamming the door to the kingdom of heaven in people's faces, crushing them with religious rules that they had relentlessly added to Scripture so much so that the central teachings of the Bible had become obscured. Jesus' refers to them as blind guides, blind men, blind fools who in their hypocrisy and wickedness had let go of the commands of God while holding relentlessly to the traditions of man. The tragic result was that they were leading

those who were seeking God away from him (which is about as bad as it gets when it comes to God).

And the irony of this is that the Pharisees would have, in turn, thought of themselves as reformers. Typically, they did not come from the upper class, they came from amongst ordinary people. The Sadducees were the political class, born into the ruling families of Jerusalem. They'd compromised their faith to curry favour with the Romans. But not the Pharisees. They were committed to holy living, their very name meaning 'separated ones'. They were thought to be the holy men, the spiritual guides, the true community of Israel. Many Pharisees were scribes (experts in the law) who so revered the Old Testament law that they hedged it in with extra

protective laws. As the *Mishnah* (the first major collection of Jewish oral traditions) records, ‘Tradition is a fence around the Law (Aboth 3.14).’

And yet these innumerable additional laws were set on par with Scripture, obscuring it and placing unbearable burdens on would-be followers of God. For example, fully one quarter of the *Mishnah* is related to ritual purity, the idea of ceremonial cleanness meant to somehow reflect purity and holiness within. The other major agenda for the Pharisees was tithing and money. But before we think that somehow the Pharisees had simply tragically fallen victim to misplaced zeal Jesus is quick to remind us throughout the Gospels of their hypocrisy. Their whole agenda was outward show that concealed the hypocrisy

of their inner lives. Mouths that espoused generosity through tithing and sacrifice concealed greedy hearts. Religious practices done noisily on street corners and standing in the synagogues conveyed the image of holiness and humility but were done more for public acclaim than for the sake of God – such was the state of their pride-filled hearts. Man may look at outward appearances but the Lord is not fooled because he looks at the heart and in Matthew 23 Jesus is devastating in exposing their corrupted hearts.

And Luke 11 is a lot like Matthew 23 as we'll see over the course of this week beginning with today's passage from Luke 11:37–41,

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ing, 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.

Prepare to have your eyes glaze over as I read this passage to you from the *Mishnah*,

‘The hands are susceptible to uncleanliness, and they are rendered clean [by the pouring over them of water] up to the wrist. Thus if a man had poured the first water up to the wrist and the second water beyond the wrist, and the water flowed back to the hand, the hand becomes clean; but if he poured both the first water and the second beyond the wrist, and the water flowed back to the hand, the hand remains unclean. If he poured the first water over the one hand alone and then bethought himself and poured the second water over the one hand, his one hand [alone] is clean. If he had poured the water over the one hand, and rubbed it on the other, it becomes unclean, but if he rubbed it on his head or on

the wall [to dry it] it remains clean. (Yad-daim 2.3)

The Jewish religious leaders have just accused Jesus of being in league with the devil and now they've invited him over for lunch. As we discussed last week there is not a deeper insult you could level at the son of God so it is no wonder Jesus walks right past their ritual washing stations before sitting down to eat. We've just seen an example of the interminable Jewish oral laws when it came to ceremonial washings. Jesus is so incensed at their hypocrisy and wickedness that they so piously conceal behind a mountain of religious rules like these that he refuses to play ball. Evidently they're taken aback, eyebrows raised. Listen to Jesus' blistering reply,

‘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? But now as for what is inside you – be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

In their ritual cleansing and their public displays of piety they clean the outside of the dish until it shines blindingly bright in order to obscure the filth of its contents. But Jesus’ words turn them inside out, exposing their greed and wickedness. They are foolish people, in the sense that wisdom begins with fear of God, holding him and him alone in deep reverence and awe. But they are full of themselves and thus

fools. They are hypocrites, wicked; and their presenting sin, for all their talk of tithing and giving, is the sin of greed. And so Jesus, who always cuts right to the heart of the matter goes to their hearts. The root cause of their particular sin is their greed and so Jesus offers this solution.

But now as for what is inside you – be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

Giving sacrificially to the poor (according to Jesus, and especially for them) is a deep and genuine expression of a pure heart. So instead of relentless washings before meals, as if outward show somehow reflected the inner person; when one's heart is pure, according to Jesus,

everything will be clean for you.

Think & Pray

We are not Pharisees, but we can be Pharisaic in the way we live. Take a moment to consider your life. Are you working hard at the cleaning the outside of the dish? At projecting an image of how you'd like others to see and think of you? It's something we all do I think. But what about your inner person? The thoughts and motivations of your heart? Your secret life? The side of you that only God sees? Surely this should be the focus of our efforts? Surely what people see should be the overflow of our hearts and not a pretend version of ourselves that we construct and wear when other people are around? Why put so much effort into this deception Jesus

says? Instead, turn your efforts towards really becoming the person that you are pretending to be, to the approval not so much of those around you but of God himself.

Spend some time thinking about the outside of the cup this morning. And then peer within. Be honest with God and confess your sins to him. And ask for his help in reforming your heart today, by the power of his Holy Spirit.