

Luke 11:37-54 - Majoring on the Minors

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

If you have your Bibles with you, please open them up to Luke chapter 11. We'll be finishing up this chapter today, starting in verse 37, going through the end of the chapter.

If you don't have a Bible, it'll also be on the screen behind me. And we have deacons who will be going around to see if you're playing on Facebook or if you're listening to the sermon.

There's going to be a lot of similarities between the sermon this week and the sermon last week for several reasons that I'll go into. So I'm going to dive right in and just read the text. The primary difference is Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and lawyers this week.

And while we might see that as him tailoring his message to the leadership of the church, I think we're going to find out today that there's a lot of it that has to do with all of us.

[1 : 07] So please read with me, beginning in Luke chapter 11, verse 37. While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him. So he went in and reclined at table.

Now the Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you're full of greed and wickedness.

You fools! Did not he who made the outside of everything make the inside also? But give his alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

But woe to you, Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and every herb and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

And woe to you, Pharisees, for you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you, for you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.

[2 : 10] And one of the lawyers said, Hold on a minute, teacher, in saying these things, you're insulting us also. And Jesus said, Yeah, woe to you, lawyers, also. For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

Woe to you, for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses, and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs.

Therefore, also, the wisdom of God said, or in God's wisdom, he said, I'll send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute, so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.

Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. Woe to you, lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.

And as he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in between something he might say.

[3 : 23] Pray with me, please. Father, these are difficult words for us, and as we explore them more this morning, we pray for your mercy and your grace.

Send your Holy Spirit to illumine our hearts and our minds to know what we are to do with a text like this. I pray that you would be with the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts.

They would be pleasing unto you. And most of all, that the name of your son, Jesus, would be made great and that we would know more of your love for us today than we did yesterday.

For the sake of our Savior, King Jesus, amen. So last week, Ron spoke on many things about this generation of people who Jesus said, this is going to fall on you.

And one of the bigger deals was back at the beginning in 1114 when Jesus cast a demon out of a man and the people accused Jesus potentially of doing this because of Beelzebul and saying he was in cahoots with the devil.

[4 : 39] Pretty unfair accusation, and Jesus logically stepped through it with them, saying, well, if that's the case, how did your sons do it? What is actually happening here is the kingdom of God has come present, is there.

If we read in the book of Matthew, it says the son of David is here, the Messiah, the very promised one, is here. And people are casting division in that. They're not unifying around the long-promised Savior.

Instead, they're becoming divided by it, and Jesus sees it happening. And he says to the crowd, look, if you're not with me, you're against me. There's no other place to be.

And he calls them a wicked generation. And this wicked generation is represented by these leaders that Jesus spent several verses here discussing the realities of who they are in light of what the gospel says.

And we're going to dive right in this morning. The first point in your bulletin that you see there is called response versus rebuke. And the reason that I say that is because the gospel enables response, and ignoring the gospel demands rebuke.

[5 : 55] And the gospel is not something that magically started when Jesus came to earth. God's been on about this in the whole Bible to this point. We see the covenant starting with the covenant with Adam, and then the covenant with Noah, and then with Abraham, and then with Moses, and then with David.

And we think that somehow these covenants get replaced by each other. But in reality, God is building a layer cake of covenants where he knows that we aren't fulfilling our end of it.

And ultimately, he makes that promise in Jeremiah of the new covenant that will be in the blood of the Messiah. And so, here he is. And in each of these terms, God's only requirement of his people is that they embrace his covenant from the heart.

That we will see him for who he is, and know who we are, and therefore act accordingly. So, we see with the Pharisees that that's not necessarily what's going on.

And he jumps right into it with rebuke number one there in verse 38. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner.

[7 : 13] And this is not a matter of hygienic washing. This wasn't a question of did Jesus wash his hands. What was going on here is that the Pharisees required an extra-biblical set of rituals for people to do before they ate.

And please don't doubt the zealosity of these men. These Pharisees were trying to protect what they thought was piety and what they thought was humility in front of God.

And yet the God-man is sitting there with them, and he doesn't wash his hands as the beginning of a series of terrible things that you don't want said about you by, certainly not by Jesus.

And he moves directly to rebuke number two, neglect. In verse 42. Rebuke number three, pride. And rebuke number four, death.

So going back to the washing, Jesus says, You fools, didn't he who make the outside make the inside also? Give alms within, and what comes out of you will surely match that.

[8 : 19] Don't make things right on the outside. There's no good there. If you were truly embracing the covenant from the heart, which you as the leaders of the church and the people who are teaching the people of God how to live with him and live with each other, you would know that if you were to do that within, it would certainly spread to without.

And rebuke number two, the neglect. Woe to you Pharisees, for you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and yet you neglect justice and the love of God.

These you ought to have done. You should have done justice and the love of God without neglecting the others. Leviticus says, yeah, you've got to tithe that stuff. But this is going to be the crux of our whole passage because essentially what Jesus is saying is the thing that he said to the gentleman earlier in Luke 9, I believe.

All of the law and the prophets can be summarized in the reality of loving your neighbor as yourself and loving God with all of your heart and your soul and mind.

And what Jesus is saying is you're tithing mint and herbs and rue and you're denying love for other people and you're denying love for God.

[9 : 42] We see this pictured in Micah 6.8 where it says that, for he's shown you, O man, what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

I'm going to look up my other verse too because it seems that we don't have those on the slides. Colossians 3. We're in sword drills now.

Somebody can beat me there. Start reading Colossians 3. There we go.

Study Bibles are great. They're just long. Colossians 3 starting in verse 12. Put on then as God's chosen ones holy and beloved compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other as the Lord's forgiven you.

That's how you're supposed to forgive. And above all these things, put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Justice in the time of Micah who had great success preaching and speaking and was able to turn the king's heart toward the Lord was the idea of the people who were in control looking out for those who had been oppressed, looking out for those who were being suppressed.

[11 : 31] We call it in our core values looking out for the lost and the lonely and the littlest and the left out. That's the role of these people but they're not doing that.

The Pharisees aren't doing that. Instead, we move to rebuke number three starting in verse 43. Woe to you Pharisees for you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplace.

That means that they like to go and sit in the front of the synagogue and be seen. They like to see and they like to have other people to know where they were. And the greetings in the marketplace wasn't a simple, hey, how you doing?

It's good to see you today, pastor. It was a ritualistic, extra-biblical thing that they made people do. They had to stop and go through an entire rite with them publicly just so they could be seen.

Scratch that itch of pride. And then he bookends it with the worst woe, number four. For you are like unmarked graves and people walk over them without knowing it.

[12 : 36] In the beginning, they had accused Jesus because he didn't wash his hands and Jesus is saying, look, you're an unmarked grave. And the significance of that to this culture is that touching anything dead or being around anything dead made you ceremonially unclean for seven days.

And Jesus is saying, not only are you doing that to people, but they don't know you're doing it to people. In fact, they think they're approaching the leaders of the church, the leaders of the people of God, who are giving them good information.

But you're defiling them. And while they're ceremonially unclean, you're spewing more of what you're spewing at them, more of the venom that you have. And you're leading them to death.

And that's a terrible thought for people who are supposed to be the ones leading people to life. And all four of these rebukes center on the title of this sermon.

The Pharisees are majoring on the minors. They're not paying attention to the heart of what the covenant is and the heart of what the gospel is. And instead, they're piling on to people.

[13 : 44] And we'll see more of that in a minute with the scribes. I abhor abortion with every fiber of my being. Yet I was raised, and I think many Gen Xers like me were raised in a time where I was not taught very well how to think about abortion.

I was taught a lot of answers that became more ideology than they became interacting with the gospel on a terrible, heartbreaking issue.

It became politicized, which is one of the problems, I think. And I'm not condemning any people in my past. I'm saying the net effect of that on me was that I looked at abortion as a set of things that were an ideology rather than the heartbreaking reality of a life being lost.

and the heartbreaking reality of someone who could have been going through the worst circumstances. Instead, she's just kind of condemned and lost and forgotten about.

And open and public displays of condemning that without the other side of that being the compassionate coming toward those people in love, men and women who would have found themselves in that situation.

[15 : 12] And I can't help but think that that's happening again with a different issue now, especially as I deal and speak with the youth on it. Emily and I, and the boys, well, three boys at the time, moved to St. Louis in the August of 2012.

And a few things happened while we were living there, none bigger than, on August 9th, Michael Brown was shot by a police officer and killed.

And I remember walking into work, I worked full-time for the seminary, and looking at a guy that I worked with and saying, hey, this is going to end up being a really big deal. And he looked at me and was like, no, this happens all the time. And I said, yeah, I think this is going to end up being a really big deal and I didn't know why.

And that was the beginning of me walking for the rest of the time we lived there with African-American brothers and sisters, many of whom were in the PCA, through a situation that I kind of thought I knew about.

Most of my friends growing up were African-American. I'd seen a few things being in that situation. But what I was experiencing there was something different because there was some kind of a heart change that was going on inside of me toward the issue.

[16:30] And for the first time in my life, I truly began to understand my neglect and my pride toward the issue of racial reconciliation and of systematic injustice and things like that.

And really what Jesus is talking about here is that, is the response to that, not the conclusions we draw from that. And I saw that my response was really steeped in an ideology that I'd either developed or been taught, culturally, personally, I don't know.

And yet here I was face to face with believers who I knew and who I trusted who were telling me things that were wholly other than what I had ever experienced or known.

and my heart began to break because of how much sin I saw inside of myself in that situation.

As God's people, we are to be rushing to those situations and leading the way, not in solving all of the problems because that's not what we can do and that's not what God calls us to do but he calls us to rush to the situations with compassion and with mercy and with patience and with understanding and with love.

[18:02] All of those things I read that Paul spoke of in Colossians. Not to mention the historical reality of who God's people are in the earth. We're meant to be a taste of the kingdom for everybody that comes in contact with us.

And a lot of the time we're judged on that first thing that happens, that response.

How do we respond? And that's where I felt condemned because my first response is always a knee-jerk thing that's not very indicative of what I should be rushing to.

I rush to my ideology and I don't rush to the gospel. I don't rush to consider how might God be working in this situation. What is broken?

What is not broken? How do I engage with that trusting that my role is not to be the fixer or to hold on too tightly to things that I don't want to change but it's actually just to be present and to act like a Christian the way that God has called me to be.

[19:17] And don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not discussing conclusions. I'm discussing initial response. And we can see the hearts of the Pharisees in this situation not responding but instead deserving rebuke.

And the gospel of Jesus Christ lets me know where I stand as a humble sinner completely in need of saving. And I can't stand here and bind anyone's conscience based upon conclusions or outcomes.

Can't do that. But I can absolutely point to a scripture that demands for you and me to humbly and patiently and compassionately and lovingly seek out and to listen to our brothers and sisters and to listen to people of all sorts of races because we are the ones who are the dominant culture not differently than what Micah was speaking to.

And it's important that we understand as the church our responsibility to be out in front of that. Our posture is what is at stake well before the outcome of any of these situations.

And defensiveness and self-preservationist motives are exactly what Jesus is condemning here.

And this isn't lost on the audience as we see when we move on to the lawyers who said, hey man wait a second you're talking about them we're the ones who supply them with a lot of our information so what you're saying you're talking about us too slow down buddy we invited you to dinner.

[21:06] Actually the verb or the noun there would suggest it was earlier in the day meal but anyway we invited you to eat with us. And Jesus starts levying some woes on them and your second point there in the outline is repentance versus reaction.

what does being faced with the reality of the gospel cause you to rush to? Does it prick your heart in a way that would cause you to desire to repent and even seek out what those things are to repent of?

Or do we just viscerally react? Let's see what the lawyers did lawyers, scribes they studied the law they advised the Pharisees ultimately they're the ones who killed Jesus.

Woe number one was unnecessary burdens we see in verse 46. What are you lawyers also for you load people with burdens hard to bear and you yourselves don't touch the burdens with one of your fingers.

It was interesting to read different commentators discuss this because they're discussing a couple of different things. One they're talking about several things that they add on to the requirements of the law and the gospel I mean I'm sorry the law and two things are probably happening one the people can't meet the requirements that they're adding they're burdening the people and the people have no ability to rise to it and so and it's hopeless because if you can't rise to it there's no other way these are the people who are telling you the way to God and so if you can't rise to that and the other part of that is they weren't even doing it themselves and they didn't care it was hypocritical of them and Jesus is pointing that out saying this is this is not right this is not good so going back to what he said to the Pharisees in place of justice and mercy you're actually levying undue burden and hypocrisy on these people stay with me for these next couple because they're they're a little bit it was difficult to read

[23 : 16] I'm sure it was difficult to hear and I'll try to explain it a little bit because it's it's very important what Jesus was saying the second woe was the woe of the tombs verses 47 and 48 woe to you for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed so your witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers for they killed them and you built their tombs these people obviously didn't kill the prophets what he's speaking of there is their complicit response to what their fathers had done their motivations show their collusion and much like he does in Matthew 5 when we see Jesus talking about if you even think sexually about a woman you have committed adultery and even if you think hateful thoughts about your brother you've committed murder this is another floor and ceiling type of a thing they would say well they killed him back several hundred years ago this didn't have anything to do with us and Jesus is saying no you're not you're missing the point you are complicit in this willingly complicit in this so verses 49 and 51 this will be more of an explanatory aside but therefore also the wisdom of God said the NIV

I really like there it said God in his wisdom said that I lost myself there I will send the prophets and apostles some of whom they will kill and persecute so this is part of God's plan that this is going to happen so that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be charged against you guys this generation from the blood of Abel who we don't usually think about as a prophet but he was someone who embraced love for God we could say embraced the covenant from the heart to Zechariah and Zechariah is a little bit hard to pin down but most likely if you have a study Bible in front of you you'll look at the note there most likely it was Zechariah in 2 Chronicles which in the Hebrew Bible means that Jesus was laying out for them Abel in the beginning of the Hebrew Bible all the way to Zechariah at the end of the Hebrew Bible you're responsible for all of this this blood is on you and woe number three which is going again back to similar to the final rebuke against the

Pharisees with the unmarked graves verse 52 woe to you lawyers for you've taken away the key of knowledge you did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who were entering key of knowledge that idea that they had the key as the teachers of the law and the ones who review and translate and advise on the law that they never even knew it themselves and not only that but because of what he said at the beginning that they were burdening unnecessarily the people of Israel God's chosen people with all of these other things was hindering them from getting inside as well they didn't have the key you don't have the key and you're keeping other people who want to go in from going in pretty harsh stuff and then we see in 53 and 54 what reaction looks like because in repentance you hear that and tear your clothes right lay in sackcloth and ashes like the Ninevites and as Jesus alluded to in the sign of Jonah you realize who you are how you've acted before a holy God how much more so for the people who were supposed to be the leaders but they don't repent they react and this language is so strong in the original language that it's hard to catch in English but I think in English it's pretty strong also as he went away from there the scribes and Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things lying in wait for

him to catch him in something that he might say and as I was reading this the visual image I had was someone trying to leave and like a pack of dogs circling him and foaming at the mouth and seething and angrily going at Jesus trying to get him to show that he's not who he's claiming to be because if he's who he's claiming to be who are they there are many difficult things facing us as the church of Jesus

Christ today and we we can't help but look and see that we stand in the midst of some kind of a transition in our country and it's scary to think that the things that were might not be the things that are or the things that will be and we clutch and we grasp and that's that's my I shouldn't lay that on you that can be my reaction to what's happening and what's going on we think of the immigrants from Syria and from Haiti from the Dominican Republic from Cuba from Central and South America from other places we have been in war at war for a long time in one place and now we're scared of a war starting in another place potentially and then we even think about in our recreation which is going to be interesting to see today how many players if not whole teams in the NFL are going to respond to the call from many for them to be silenced and the question that faces us is what about us what about you and what about me the church the people of God we're called to lead in these things we're not called to sit back and wait for others to respond and then see how it goes we're to lead so that others can have a taste of the kingdom do we begin to think about situations with compassion and with mercy with a desire and a passion for justice and patience and kindness and loving do we pray do we care to and if we do do we do we pray with passion and heartbreak for those who stand to suffer greatly or do we begin with ideology do we rush out with bleeding hearts to seek a quick fix until the next thing flashes across the news screen that we need to go and be championing that next cause do we react with condemnation and premise coldness and a lack of willingness to engage or do we understand who we are at the foot of the cross

[31 : 29] Jesus calls I think this is in your bulletin I'm not sure Jesus calls his followers to examine their heart motivations at every turn and the question for us is when we lead do we follow my wife looked at me cross-eyed when I told her that was going to be in the bulletin and here's what I meant by that all of our situations are impossible whether we levy our ideology on others as was done by the Pharisees and the scribes or we have ideology of others levied upon us both of those situations they create impossible outcomes and completely hopeless outcomes which is probably the real tragedy that we read in this passage that the people could not meet these standards and there was no hope for them and Jesus also presents us with an impossible outcome if we're left to ourselves but the difference is that he covers the impossibilities we are unable to respond in and of ourselves because it's not natural to be inclined to the things of

God and we're not able to repent not because just because we lack the inclination but we also don't have the ability and that's the beauty of where we are as the people of God when found in Christ because through Jesus who's our perfect covenant representative our Savior our God the one through whom all things have been made when he condescends to sinners like me and sinners like you we have the ability to do these things not because suddenly we want to but because he brings that about in us and in our hearts he sends down closely to us and he says follow me and when you follow me

I'm going to give you the ability to follow me how can this not humble us as the people of God how can this not drive us to lead how can this not spur conversations of the gospel and the goodness of the grace of Jesus Christ with everyone around us how can our hearts not be pricked at signs of injustice at signs of people running to ideology for comfort passionately screaming about politics or anything other than the love of Jesus Christ and so when we're out there leading with those conversations that are put on our hearts because of the Holy Spirit that's coming from both the Father who loves us and his Son who is our King and Savior the Holy Spirit is driving us into those situations and we don't have to be afraid you don't look dumb when you walk into a situation because it's not politically right where we live you're part of the kingdom of God as God's people we lead in those situations and when we lead in those situations by following Jesus that's when reconciliation happens not because we bring it about but because we're willing to be there and be patient to respond and to repent we're known into the deepest parts of our being by a God who still loved us and pursued us while we were yet sinners Christ died for us we don't have to be afraid of that so I want to encourage us as we leave today after our 15 minute or so congregational meeting

I want to encourage us to consider how do we respond and how do we repent because we have a father who loves us very very much and his son stands there on our behalf interceding for us and we're his church we're the taste of his kingdom here on earth and we're called to do that pray with me please father we're grateful for your love and your care for us we're grateful for the responsibilities you put on us as your people not because we can rise to the challenge and not because we're worthy of them but because you're not going to leave us or forsake us it's a joy to respond to your

[37 : 07] Holy Spirit it's a joy to repent because we know how much you love us help us to look to your son help us to lead as your church in the world in his great name we pray amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org and and and and on and up