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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“BLIND EYES, SEEING EYES”

Luke 11:33-54

What this nation needs now is relief from onerous taxation.

What this nation needs now is liberation from a tyrannical government.

What this nation needs now is an end to godlessness and false religion.

Above all else, what this nation needs now is revival. Our people must return to the LORD God.

What will this look like? We will repent of our sins. We will affirm Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. We will confess true doctrine concerning the sovereignty of God, the resurrection of the body, sin, judgment, heaven and hell. We will feed and clothe the poor. From the top down we will be a holy people, set apart through obedience to God’s Law in every aspect of our lives.

Almighty God will restore our lost glory, security, and prosperity. And through us he will bless the world.

“This nation” is Israel.

“Now” is the first century A.D.

The speaker is a *Pharisee* (or, at any rate, a passable depiction of one). I have done my best to represent a Pharisee fairly and accurately, albeit incompletely.

Are you surprised? I suspect that few of us have viewed Pharisees in this light before now. My childhood

image of them was as flat as a flannelgraph figure: they were the bad guys, plain and simple.

{2 Ti 3:16} It was convenient: whatever my faults, I could take comfort in knowing that I was not a Pharisee. Never mind that, compared to the various first century Jewish factions, we evangelical Americans most nearly resemble the Pharisees!

Do not get me wrong, there are substantial differences. Even so we are more like Pharisees than Essenes or Sadducees or Herodians or Zealots.

■ {Lk 11:40, 42-44} In light of this fact, it is jarring to hear the Lord Jesus denounce them: **“You foolish people!” “Woe to you Pharisees,” “Woe to you Pharisees, “Woe to you.”**

¶ If that stings, get a load of the parallel in Matthew 23 {23:13, 15, 27, 33}: **“Woe to you!”** he says seven times. **“Hypocrites! ...Child of hell... white-washed tombs ... You snakes! You brood of vipers!”**

The Lord nails them at seven points.

☞ 1st, they fixate on externals & forget the soul.

■ Verses 39-40: **“you ...clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.... now as for what is inside you – be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean.”**

You take great pains to maintain ritual purity by meticulously washing your hands, bodies, cookware and tableware. Yet your attitudes and thoughts are impure.

☞ 2nd, they are obsess over lesser matters and overlook the fundamentals.

■ Verse 42: **“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.”**

{Mt 22:37, 39-40} You give God 1/10th of everything, down to your garden herbs. Yet you do not **“Love [him] with”** your whole being and you do not **“love your neighbor”** by acting justly.

☞ 3rd, they are prideful.

■ Verse 43: **“you love the most important seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.”**

You crave prestige and adoration. You care more what people think about you than what the LORD God thinks about you.

☞ 4th, they defile other people.

■ Verse 44: **“you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.”**

{Nu 19:11-13} Even indirect contact with a tomb renders a person ceremonially impure: allow your shadow to fall on a grave and you are unclean for seven days. That is why people whitewash tombs, to reduce the possibility of accidental contact.

You are like an unmarked grave. People are infected by your spiritual uncleanness without even realizing it.

■ Until now the Messiah has spoken of Pharisees in particular. But in verse 45 **“One of the experts in the law”** (one of the scribes) complains: **“Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.”**

Scribe and *Pharisee* are not synonyms. *Scribe* is a job title: scribes are paid to interpret Old Testament moral, ceremonial, and civic laws. *Pharisee* is a way of life: Pharisees embrace certain beliefs and live a certain lifestyle.

However, there is a great deal of overlap between the two groups. Most (though not all) scribes are also Pharisees. Some (though not most) Pharisees are also scribes.

So the expert takes offense at Christ’s critique of his brethren. The Lord does nothing to soothe his feelings. To the contrary, he zeroes in on the scribes.

☞ His 5th criticism (we will build off of our previous numbers) is that the Law of God is a blessing, but they are twisting it into a burden.

■ Verse 46: **“you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.”**

○ {Pr 6:23; 13:14; Ezek 33:15} We might be inclined to say, ‘Of course! It is the law.’ Yet Holy God has given it, not to rob us of freedom and joy, but to give us life. His **“command is a lamp,”** his **“teaching is a light,”** and his **“correction and instruction are”** **“a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death.”**

{Morris, p 225} Not in the hands of the scribes. They are depositing layer upon layer of nitpicking application on top of the Law, and they claim it is **“more important to observe”** their **“scribal [teachings] than the Law itself.”**

☞ 6th, they violently reject the Word of God.

■ Verse 47-48: **“you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did: they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs...”**

The prophets whom the scribes honor are conveniently dead. When God sends new prophets, including his own Son, they want to murder him.

■ And so, skipping down to verses 53-54: **“the Pharisees and teachers of the law [begin] to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.”**

👉 7th, they conceal the truth of God.

■ Verse 52: **“you have taken away the key of knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”**

{Morris, p 226} They are meant to unlock Scripture and bring people to a transforming knowledge of God; instead, they turn **“the Bible into a book of obscurities, a bundle of riddles.”** And they are so enthralled by their cleverness that they themselves cannot see the truth.

It is a long litany of damnable errors. It is so easy to distance ourselves from the Pharisees: I could never be like these hypocrites.

It is exceptionally unlikely that we will ever fall into extreme fanaticism about Sabbath law, ceremonial purity and dietary restrictions. But these are merely symptoms of a more terrible sickness – and we are not immune to their underlying disorder.

? *What is their disease?* Take a look at the context.

● In verses 11-26 Jesus drives out a demon. **“The crowd [is] amazed. But some”** claim that he is **“driving out demons”** by **“the prince of demons.”** They accuse Messiah of collaborating with the devil even after they witness the miracle with their own eyes!

● In verse 16 **“others [test] him by”** demanding another miraculous sign. In **vv 29-32** he answers, in effect, that the old-time pagans had more faith than they do, and the only sign that God will show to them is Jesus and his Word.

● In verses 33-36 he teaches about **“the lamp of the body.”** I am reading verses 34-35: **“Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body is also full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”**

¶ If we are still in the dark, the parallel in Matthew 23 {23:13-39} is radiantly clear: **“Woe to you, blind guides!” “You blind fools!” “You blind men!” “You blind guides!” “Blind Pharisee!”**

👁️ Their disease is spiritual blindness. This is not **“a [problem] of light; it’s a [problem] of sight.”** God has parted the clouds, opened the heavens, and shined down the brightest light on Pharisees historic and modern.

He gives them light through the created order.

He gives them light through his written Word, recorded in the Old and New Testaments.

○ {Jn 1:14, 4} He gives them light through his incarnate Word, his Son who **“became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” “In him was life, and that life was the light of all people.”**

○ {Mt 5:14} He gives them light through his Church, whom he calls **“the light of the world.”**

○ {Is 44:18} And still **“their eyes are plastered over”!** They embody Christ’s warning in John 9:39: **“For judgment I have come... so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”**

I am saying “they,” but let us be very careful.

The Pharisees knew the content of the Scripture better than we do. They were committed to applying it in private and in public. They strove for personal holiness. They labored to spark a national revival to prepare Israel for the Messiah. They did not see the light shining in their own eyes.

■ **“When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”**

Luke chapter 11 is the Word of the Lord.