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**Day 301 - October 28**

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## **Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)**

### ***The Ministry Continues***

**Readings: *Luke 11:37-54; 12:1-59; 13:1-17***

#### ***Reflections:***

- Jesus during this phase of popularity is still welcomed into Pharisees' homes for discussion. This offer of fellowship is a significant gesture of good will. They were still undecided about Jesus and no doubt his large following and reported miracles caused them to want to investigate him carefully. In this first account, Jesus ignores the traditional ritual washing before the meal again no doubt aware that he is being at least mildly offensive. Jesus responds to his surprise. His response was very direct and again no doubt caused more offense. Jesus points past the external and again challenges the Pharisees obsession with appearances and neglect of their hearts which were dominated by greed and wickedness. Jesus then says something profound. Give what is inside the dish, give your heart, to the poor and everything will be clean inside you. This fits well with Jesus theme about the journey of spiritual maturity begins with embracing the poor, embracing our own poverty ("poor in spirit" – Matthew 5:3). If we embrace the poor, that willingness to prioritize the needy, marginalized, and vulnerable will train our hearts to love as God loves.
- Jesus now issues a number of grave warnings to the Pharisees. Woe to you...or "Look out Pharisees, you are in deep trouble." You practice giving a tenth of your smallest garden seasonings but fail to live for justice (restoring people to healthy and safe community) and love for God (restoring people to right relationship with God – often called in the Old Testament "righteousness"). Jesus says that they as people of the Torah should have done both. In Christ, the Torah is fulfilled and so we are left with the essence of the Torah, love for God and others, while we are freed from the detailed rules and rituals. Jesus doesn't stop there but he confronts them for the love for popularity and praise of people. Here it addresses their pride and desire for human praise. He concludes his grave warning by calling them unmarked graves. It looks like green grass on the surface but underneath in the secret of their hearts they are dead and decaying. People live with them and don't realize how dead they are on the inside.
- Now an expert in the Torah appears and complains that Jesus is insulting them. It is obvious that Jesus in his confrontation is causing insult. Jesus doesn't back down though. He actually keeps on going. Rather than using their influence to help people, the religious leaders add

burdens on people's lives by multiplying their traditions and rules so that serving God becomes a heavy, impossible load. Jesus on the other hand declared that his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matthew 11:30). The religious leaders would not even lift one finger to help people struggling to live a life of devotion to God. If we are responsible to invest into people and lead, we need to remember that helping people grow in their relationship with God and experiencing the life God has for them is the most important of all aspects to our servant leadership.

- Jesus then confronts the religious leaders for honoring the tombs of prophets of the past that were in fact killed by their religious ancestors. Here Jesus points both to the past and future when he says that God sent them "prophets and apostles" whom they will persecute and kill. Jesus is making it plain that to follow God was to become an enemy of religion and the religious leaders of all generations who end up persecuting and killing God's true leaders. Jesus himself knows that his ultimate fate will be the same. It is interesting that Jesus states that Abel was the first prophet. He lived completely sold out to God as he gave God his first and best. Zechariah was actually killed in the temple. Most scholars think that this is the Zechariah in 2 Chronicles 24:20-25. Anyways, he apparently sought sanctuary in the temple and was murdered by the religious leaders of his day. Jesus states that God will settle all accounts and that religious leaders who slander and attack and kill so easily need to know they will one day be held accountable before God.
- Jesus makes one final statement that sets them all off. He states that they have taken away the key of knowledge for people, have not entered into the relationship God wanted, and in fact actively worked to keep people from finding God. What is the key of knowledge? The key of knowledge is God's heart and being able to embrace what God is saying with a heart of faith and of embracing mercy. If you don't get God you won't understand what he is saying. The religious leaders didn't want to know God. They wanted to be in control. They didn't want to get close to God and live by faith. They wanted tell other people how to live. They actually wanted to distract people from truly seeking God and preferred to keep people in fearful dependence on them.
- It is no surprise that with this direct confrontation, the religious leaders have heard enough. They begin to oppose Jesus fiercely, to besiege him with questions, and to look for a way to trap him in his words. The war is now officially on.
- Jesus now turns his attention to the crowds. He now will go into a detailed warning to the crowds about falling into the trap of religious hypocrisy, putting on masks and pretending to be better than other people. The crowds that gather around Jesus are so massive that they are actually trampling on each other trying to get close and to hear him. Talk about a huge movement and momentum. Sort of like a big rock concert.
- The first image Jesus uses is to describe the hypocrisy of the Pharisees being yeast. Yeast was used in the Old Testament as a symbol for sin. Yeast is just something very small that works through a whole loaf of bread and totally transforms it. You don't need much yeast to

have a big impact. It doesn't take much sin to have a big impact on life and relationships. Unleavened bread (yeast-less) was a symbol of holiness and being pure and set apart for God. So the yeast of the Pharisees is hypocrisy, it seems small but it changes everything.

- Jesus then goes on to warn that everything in the secret places of their hearts where they whisper judgments or harbor grudges or secretly covet will be one day exposed by the light. Jesus' words here are not trying to scare us about being exposed for our secret shameful sins (although that can happen). The focus here is the religious leaders and their secret greed and wickedness, they think because it is in their minds and hearts, no one will ever know.
- Jesus then warns his followers: don't be afraid of people. They may be able to kill you but they don't control eternity. God is the only one to fear. God cares about little birds and even numbers the hairs on our heads. We can trust him with every detail of our lives and with our life now and in eternity. This, Jesus says, should give us confidence to stand strong for God even when attacked or persecuted by religious leaders.
- Jesus then gives a warning that has caused many to be afraid. He says that if we speak against the Son of Man we will be forgiven but if we blaspheme the Holy Spirit we will never be forgiven. This has caused people to believe that there is an unforgivable sin. Most commentators believe this is a misunderstanding of what Jesus said. People may not understand Jesus and as a result may speak against him for a period of time before they come to understand his message and mission and true identity. Yet, if people truly encounter God's Spirit in power and fullness, like Pharaoh in the story of Moses, and like the Pharisees that would see the incredible miracles of Jesus, then to decide to reject God can lead to a hardened heart. In time, this life-long rejection of God will result in an inescapable spiritual death. People who have become so hardened, who are beyond forgiveness, don't care because they don't believe in God whatsoever. If a person is worried about committing the unforgivable sin then there is no possible way they are guilty of it.
- Jesus then goes on to affirm that we do not need to worry about what to say when confronted but that God's presence will work through us and give us the words to say. This gives us more insight that God doesn't want us to live independent of him but to live in constant dependence and trust. God looks for ways to cultivate our active trust in him for this intimate ongoing relational dependence is the safest place for us to be.
- Someone in the crowd now presses Jesus to help him get his rightful inheritance from his brother who is greedily cutting him out of his wealth. Jesus responds not by taking the side of the man treated unjustly by his brother but by challenging the man's love of wealth and greed. Even perceived injustice must be carefully discerned because our selfishness can create a sense of greater injustice than is real before God. Jesus warns that obsession with possessions can result with ending your life completely empty before God. Jesus then goes on to make it abundantly clear that to trust in God means that we trust him with our material and physical needs even as the animals and birds of the air live in simple

dependence that their daily needs will be met. The calling of a Christ-follower is to seek first God's kingdom and to trust God to take care of us as we live in daily dependence. This complete dependence and trust in God then frees us to live in a completely open handed way, giving to those in need and trusting God will meet our needs. As we invest ourselves and our resources into the purposes of God, God stores up for us treasure in heaven as our reward. This treasure is an eternal wealth that no one can steal from us and will never be destroyed. Even more important than amassing wealth, Jesus points again to our hearts: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." What we value will define what we love and where our hearts will attach. We must choose carefully where we place our values and what is important to us. That will define how and what we love.

- Jesus takes on a new focus. A key expression of our devotion to Christ, to placing our greatest treasure in him, is our readiness and expectancy of his coming. Many have seen this arrival of Jesus as being completely focused on the return of Christ. Yet there are three ways in which Jesus "comes" as the Son of Man. The image of the Son of Man in Daniel is a Messianic prediction that points to the Messiah coming in power. The Son of Man "came" first to bring the message and power of the kingdom in his ministry. This was a battle against Satan and against the religious establishment. It ended with his triumphant resurrection. The Son of Man "came" as judge of Jerusalem in 70 AD when the city was destroyed. The Son of Man "will come" at his return and final judgment. Most commentators have always pointed to the third coming of Jesus as the timeframe he is talking about in these two parables. This may not be the case. It may be more general. In other words, simply be ready! In Luke 12:56, "How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?" It would appear that Jesus is simply giving principles to his listeners. Don't treat your devotion to him lightly. Don't just go through the rituals and routines. Be ready. Be serving. Be attentive to what signs you see and God's leading. When Christ appears you will receive your reward. In that day, the disciples who were able to interpret the times received the reward of welcoming the Messiah. Those disciples that were able to interpret in 70 AD were able to escape Jerusalem. Those disciples that will be ready at the end times will receive an eternal reward. There is one more application we rarely talk about. Many people die unexpectedly and so they meet the Lord at a time they cannot predict. If we are always ready to serve and actively serving, we are always ready to meet him.
- The second teaching calling people to readiness also has an interesting element to it. Jesus states that a servant who knows his masters will and yet doesn't do it will be beaten with many blows but a servant who doesn't know the masters will be beaten with few blows. This teaching has given rise the idea of purgatory and the idea of after death a person is purged of their evil nature through a temporary time of suffering. There is no suggestion of this anywhere else in Scripture and it is misunderstanding of this text. Jesus is simply saying that God will hold you accountable for what you know. The more you know the more you will be held accountable for that knowledge. The concluding point is what we should hold in our thoughts, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." The religious leaders

studied the Bible inside and out and yet failed to receive Jesus as the Messiah. They knew much and would be held accountable for much.

- Jesus then goes on to say that he was coming to bring fire (symbol of God's presence in power – fire coming to the tabernacle or Temple in the Old Testament, Holy Spirit in the opening of Acts) but that he did not find the nation kindled and ready to be set ablaze. They were damp and dead with religion rather than kindled and longing for God to empower them with his Spirit.
- Jesus expresses his own distress over his impending death. Here he is expressing his frustration that he has come to a nation to lay his life down and they are all treating this lightly and are completely missing why he came.
- In this way, Jesus intentionally brought division. His approach was to force people to make a decision. Were they going to embrace him as Messiah and his way of serving and loving the poorest and most marginalized? Or were they going to love their own rules and rituals and self-righteousness? He was forcing people out of their blind addiction to religion to make a choice and that choice would force people to decide do they love him more than they love their families, their closest friends. Jesus was coming as savior and judge to the nation of Israel and he was begging them to wake up, to reconcile with him and with God. If they as a nation rejected him they would face the full consequences. 70 AD was a grim moment in history when that judgment fell. The small tragedies of their time, the events Jesus sites are nothing compared to what will fall on Jerusalem when the city is basically executed in mass.
- This section of teaching on rejecting religious hypocrisy, not fearing people, trusting God completely, being ready to serve, and living in a fully reconciled relationship with God ends with the story of a unfruitful fig tree. The fig tree was a symbol in the Old Testament of Israel. It was meant to be a fruitful tree that would offer life giving truth to the nations around them. Jesus' story is about a tree that is found without fruit and yet is given a second chance to become fruit bearing as the gardener digs up around the tree and fertilizes it. The warning is that if the tree doesn't bear fruit that it will be cut down and burned. This is the image Jesus returns to at the end of his earthly ministry (See Mark 11:12-25) at the time that he cleanses the temple. Jesus encounters a fig tree that is not bearing fruit and actually curses it and it dies. He uses this as a sign that it is time for the religious establishment of Israel to now be judged.
- Luke in this account of Jesus teachings adds one more story. Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. A woman who has been crippled for 18 years and cannot stand up straight is present. Jesus heals her in front of everyone. She stands up and praises God and the religious leaders become indignant for Jesus working on the Sabbath. This story is the exclamation point at the end of his teaching. This is what being religious does to a person. They will make exceptions for their own donkey that needs some help on the Sabbath but they become upset that a marginalized and broken woman receives God's grace on the Sabbath. Rather than seeing the Sabbath as the perfect day for her to receive grace and

complete healing, their own blind addiction to the rules could not see her, her real need, and how precious she was to God. Religion dehumanizes us and makes and turns us into rule tracking accountants that judge everything according to our own set of standards. God loves people and consistently looks past the rules, even breaks the rules, so that he might pour out his lavish grace on those who need it the most.

- What is the conclusion? Jesus' opponents, the religious leaders, were humiliated. The crowds were delighted. The division was happening as people's heart of hearts was revealed.