

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

LUKE 11:37-12:48

Modern American cities with a substantial Jewish population have what's called an eruv (ay rube).

Jewish Law says you can't **carry** outside your home on the Sabbath Day - *not a book, not keys, not even a child*. But modern rabbis have come up with a work-around that expands the boundaries of Jewish homes.

An eruv is a wire, sometimes it's fishing line, hung from poles at the borders of Jewish neighborhoods.

In a ceremonial sense, the eruv expands the walls of each home. Thus, allowing a Jewish family to carry their child to the synagogue, or a bag of groceries from the market. It's a convenience. A person can outwardly conform to the Law while bypassing its real demands.

An eruv surrounds the entire borough of Manhattan in New York. It costs \$100,000 each year to maintain.

In Atlanta, Toco Hills, Virginia Highlands, and North Druid Hills are communities with an eruv. Over 200 Jewish neighborhoods in America have an eruv.

And this gives you an idea of the kind of Judaism practiced by this sect of Jews called **the Pharisees**.

They were legalists who took pride in their religious appearance and bowed to self-righteousness. The Pharisees took God's Law and created work-arounds. They developed ways to accommodate their own convenience while maintaining a religious facade.

And perhaps the most prominent example of this at the time was the rabbinical ritual of hand washing.

Verse 37 begins, “And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner.”

And not only the Jewish Pharisees, but now all the moms reading this, and current CDC officials, are in a state of shock - Jesus didn't wash His hands for dinner!

These Pharisees should've owned stock in Purell hand sanitizer, for they were into hand washing! Not for hygienic purposes, rather they thought washing their hands made them righteous and pleasing to God.

And religious Jews still prioritize washing hands. Today, just before the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, there's a basin where washing hands is expected before prayer.

The first-century Pharisees washed their hands in a specific way and for a specific number of times. It was *salvation by scrubbing*. And Jesus refused to *lend a hand*. He saw through the superficiality of the practice.

“But the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also?”

So what if your hands are spic-and-span if your heart is as filthy as a mechanic's greasy rags! What pleases God is not *our appearance*, but *our attitude*. God cares far more about

what's on *the inside* than *the outside*. Purity begins *in the heart*, not *with the hands*.

Verse 41, “**But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you.**” Honor God with all your life. Give Him His just due; then you can enjoy life with a clean conscience. Whereas, the Pharisees were compulsive in their external conformity.

Jesus warns them, “**But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.**” The Pharisees were meticulous and obsessive tithers.

They went through the spice rack counting the poppy seeds, and nutmeg granules, and bay leaves being sure God got one of every ten. They insisted He receive His share of the spices *as if that's what God cared about*.

God's priority is **love** and **justice**! So what if He gets a tenth of the cinnamon sticks if there's hate in your heart. Do you think God cares more about spices than he does the just treatment of people? Of course, not.

The Pharisees “**minored on the major issues while majoring on the minor issues.**” And they were not the last church-folk to do so. Christians today often act like the Pharisees of old. We're proud of our worship practices and religious traditions, all the while we harbor prejudice in our hearts toward people of a different race, or accent, or socio-economic status.

Do you stereotype races, and mock ethnicities, and look down your nose at folks of a lower social standing? While the

God you say you serve cares most about the just and loving treatment of those people.

A few years ago I read a tribute to Martin Luther King written by a white man who grew up in the 1960s.

Here's an excerpt, "I don't know how we missed it. While King marched in Selma and an entire race cried out for justice, I heard sermons against rock and roll, the Beatles, mini skirts and long hair, but I never heard them mention racism, injustice, intolerance, hatred, and bigotry. Those are the things God hates. Those are the things that Scripture really does speak against."

I can relate. As a child of the 60s, I attended a white church full of folks proud they weren't like those dirty hippies. The outside of the cup was clean, but the inside was full of self-righteousness, bigotry, and hate. Like the Pharisees, they were oblivious to God's heart.

In verse 43, Jesus lowers the boom on these people.

"Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces." These guys loved to feel superior in the eyes of their peers. *If only they saw themselves as God saw them.*

For **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them."**

According to Jewish tradition, if a Jew touched a grave, even inadvertently, for a time afterward, he or she was treated as unclean and unfit for worship. And yet Jesus says that the hypocrisy of the Pharisees was more defiling than dead

bones. Their phony piety contaminated more people than any unmarked grave.

Verse 45, “Then one of the lawyers (a religious scholar, a supposed expert in the Law of Moses) answered and said to Him, “Teacher, by saying these things You reproach us also.” This man’s toes were aching too. They’d been stepped on by the truth!

It’s interesting, in His many sermons, Jesus never scolded the prostitutes or tax collectors - *the blatant, notorious sinners*. He reached out to those aware of their sin with a surprising love, mercy, and gentleness.

Rather Jesus saved His harshest words for religious folk - hypocrites - who were outwardly righteous, but inwardly corrupt. Apparently, the one trait God insists on is **honesty**. Jesus has no tolerance for pretenders.

And Jesus goes right after the man who complained. “And He said, “Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”

The leaders of Judaism had interpreted the Law of Moses as a maze of impossible commands. A common person couldn’t possibly attend to all the details.

They took what God intended to be **simple**...

The Law was love on display. It was an illustration of what *love for God* and *love for others* looked like. Yet the Jews turned it into a ladder of achievement you had to climb to prove you deserved God’s love. *A ladder with too many rungs to ever make it to the top...*

The Jews did to God's Law what Detroit has done to the automobile. I read where the average car now has 14,000 parts, and many of those parts require their own tool to manipulate. The complexity of a modern car has put the shade-tree mechanic out of business.

Of course, this is all intentional. Today, if you want your car repaired you have to take it to the dealer...

And this is why the Pharisees complicated the Law. If you wanted to please God you had to come to them and play by their rules. Jesus offered the people a different path and threatened the religious authorities.

He says, "Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs."

When you go to Jerusalem and walk through the Kidron Valley - the valley between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount - you find a series of tombs.

The Jews of Jesus' day built these tombs to honor the devotion of the prophets of old. Yet ironically, the genuine piety of these prophets would've pitted them against the Pharisees. Hypocritical Pharisees honored the men they would've tried to kill if they'd been alive.

"Therefore the wisdom of God also said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,' that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel (Adam's son killed by his

brother, Cain, the first martyr) to the blood of Zechariah (the last OT martyr) who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation.” Since the OT pointed to Jesus, the Jewish establishment that turned a deaf ear to Jesus would be held responsible for the witness of all the prophets.

Jesus adds, “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.” You’ve heard it said, “If you can't lead and won't follow, then get out of the way, all you are is a dandy roadblock.” This is descriptive of the Pharisees.

The supposed “*representatives of heaven*” were actually sending the people who followed them to hell.

“And as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.” It got ugly.

Over the next few months, the Jewish hatred of Jesus will rise to a boil and erupt in an assassination plot.

Chapter 12, “In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another...” Everyone had now heard of Jesus’ miracles and wanted to see Him for themselves.

Remember the times when He told the recipient of His miracle - like Jairus - that mums the word. Don’t tell anybody? Here’s why - **it was crowd control.**

John 6 tells us that around this time one out-of-control mob tried to make Jesus king against His own wishes. They were trying to forcibly put Him in power.

Jesus refused to be manipulated by the crowd.

Throughout Chapter 12, Jesus taught His disciples using a method popular among the rabbis of His day, called “stringing beads.” Oriental women would make necklaces by slipping one bead at a time onto a string.

And likewise, when a rabbi randomly covered unrelated topics they said he was *stringing beads*.

And the first topic Jesus addresses is hypocrisy. “He began to say to His disciples first of all, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” The Greek word “hupocrites” referred to a stage performer.

Greek actors performed with larger-than-life masks, that contained a device that augmented the volume of his voice. Over time, the word became synonymous for anyone pretending to be something he was not - a **poser**. And the Pharisees were the *premiere posers*.

They had a phony faith. They pretended to love God, but what they really loved was for you to think they loved God. *This is a mask you should never wear.*

For Jesus compares the hypocrisy of the Pharisees to “leaven,” or yeast. Leaven corrupts by puffing up. And this is hypocrisy’s effect. It promotes sinful pride.

In verse 2, Rabbi Jesus puts another bead on the string, “For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor

hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.”

Some of you have heard my story of appearing on the matrix board at the Braves game. I had the sniffles that night, and I was trying to wipe my nose when suddenly I looked up in centerfield to see myself 70 feet tall in front of 40,000 fans... *picking my nose!*

The cameraman caught me! But realize, God is currently catching us every day, and one day, every evil thought and sinister deed will be posted on heaven’s matrix board for all to see. *Secrets don’t really exist.*

Everything *private* will one day go *public!* The only exception is what’s forgiven under the blood of Jesus.

"And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, **fear Him!**" For centuries this verse has been the creed of the martyr’s courage. **“Fear God and you have no one else to fear.”** It’s true.

It’s foolish to worry about the temporary harm people might inflict when it’s God who can do the permanent damage. *Ever heard of hell? God can write your ticket.*

Verse 6, **“Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God.”**

The Greek word translated “*copper coins*” or “*assarion*” was the Roman equivalent of a penny. These little birds sold for less than half-a-cent a piece.

Yet God tracks them on heaven’s radar. He monitors distant galaxies but also cares about a single sparrow.

And He cares even more about us. “*But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.*”

If you are blonde, you have approximately 140,000 hairs on your head. A brunette has 125,000 hairs. And a redhead has 90,000 hairs. *But these are just estimates.*

The exact number of hairs varies from head to head, and as some of you are learning can change daily.

Yet God knows! God is so concerned about you He keeps a running tally of every hair. Every time you run a brush through your hair the number changes, yet God keeps track. Jesus is teaching us that *God is more personally involved in our lives than we realize.*

"Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God." It takes little courage or commitment to say you follow Jesus in the sugary-sweet atmosphere of church, but are you willing to confess your allegiance to Him in front of evil men?

These verses are clear. Whether you stand up for Jesus on earth, *before men*, will determine whether Jesus stands up for you in heaven, *before the angels*.

And then verse 10, “And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven.” Here’s one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. It’s caused great confusion in the minds of many believers. Jesus talks about the only unforgivable sin, *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*.

Now in John 15:26, Jesus says of the Spirit, “He will testify of Me.” God’s Holy Spirit doesn’t point people to Himself. The Spirit’s mission is to direct folks to Jesus.

Now at the time He spoke this, Jesus had been interacting with Jews who rejected Him. Remember last week, there were Jews who even ascribed His miracles to Satan. They dismissed the Father's witness of the Son - *the fulfillment of OT prophecy, the voice of the Father at Jesus’ baptism, the testimony of miracles*.

They had rejected the witness of the Father **and** the Son, yet there was still hope. The Spirit would be sent.

The Father had spoken from heaven. Jesus came to earth. But the Holy Spirit would soon speak directly to human hearts. He would get inside their heads and by God’s inner witness to confirm the truth about Jesus.

And Jesus is saying here that you can deny the Father’s voice from heaven. You can even deny the Son’s voice on earth. But if you deny the inner voice of the Holy Spirit that’s God’s final witness to mankind.

Thankfully, the Spirit’s voice is a *lingering, longing, loving* voice, but the Holy Spirit is still God’s last call.

Be glad God's Spirit doesn't give up so easily. John Bunyan called Him the "hound of heaven." He's like a bloodhound that *tracks you and trees you*. But if you continually reject Him, the Holy Spirit *leaves you*...

God turns you over to your unbelief. Reject the Father and Son, and there's still hope, but die saying "no" to the Spirit and you forfeited His pardon forever.

In verse 11, Jesus makes a promise, "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

It's hard to be prepared for life's every contingency.

What if you were suddenly persecuted for your faith in Jesus, at work perhaps? For the first disciples, this was more **when** than **if**, but Jesus instructs them not to worry about how they'll answer their accusers. The Holy Spirit will be there to guide them. He's telling us that **in the face of the unexpected, trust the Holy Spirit!**

"Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But (Jesus) said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" And here's a vital lesson for us all.

Even Jesus, God incarnate, didn't jump into a situation that was not *His* responsibility. Here Jesus is baited into a family squabble between two brothers.

And He's asked to take sides... *Wow, been there, done that*. People always want the pastor to be on their side. **Yet often**

the moment you take sides you lose the high ground. You become immersed in the squabble.

Jesus is so wise here. He avoids getting used by either side. Instead, He speaks to a deeper problem.

“**And He said to them...**” Notice, by not taking sides Jesus preserves his neutrality and speaks into the lives of both arguing brothers. “**Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.**” Jesus *stays* above the *fray* to have His say in both brothers’ lives.

On the one hand, He says don’t be stingy. Share the inheritance... On the other hand, He says there’s more to life than money. Split the money, not the family. Money isn’t worth losing a brother... **Since He doesn’t take sides, Jesus can speak wisdom to both sides.**

Verse 16 “**Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.**

And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.' He could’ve shared, but he decided to horde.

***And then he got haughty!* “And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.” ‘ Notice, the rich man lived in his own echo chamber. He spoke to himself. He said, “*I will say to my soul...* But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which**

you have provided?’ So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” As the saying goes, “You can’t take it with you, but you can send it on ahead.”

It reminds me of Osceola McCarty. She lived down the street from Southern Mississippi University and spent her 80-plus years in a one-room shack washing clothes for Hattiesburg’s lawyers and doctors.

In the process, Ms. McCarty saved a little money, \$260,000 *to be exact*. But rather than take an exotic vacation or buy a new house, she donated her nest egg to the university for scholarships to needy kids.

Never say to yourself, “*Soul, take your ease: eat, drink, and be merry.*” You can say that to your body. At times, your body needs to take it easy and rest, *but never say that to your soul*. Keep stretching your soul.

Don’t get sluggish. Keep pressing toward God and exercising your faith. Keep storing treasure in heaven.

“Then (Jesus) said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.”

Life is more than *food and fashion*. Don’t get mired down in trivial, material concerns and miss out on why you were created - *for God, for eternity, for heaven!*

Here’s a command from Jesus: “***Do not worry about your life.***” Worry isn’t a defect or character flaw. It’s a sin. Jesus doesn’t *suggest* we not worry. He commands us. And He gives us three reasons why...

First, worry is **irreverent**. “Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?” If God cares for ravens who dot the sky for just a short while, how much more will He care for His kids, who He’ll live with Him forever. Worry is an insult to His faithfulness.

“And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?” Worry is **irrelevant**. Say you’re vertically challenged. *Start worrying. Worry for hours. Yet all your worrying won’t add a fraction to your height.* Worry changes nothing about our circumstances. “Worry is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do, but it doesn’t get you anywhere.”

Worry is **irreverent, irrelevant, and it’s irresponsible**. “Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith?” Worry is an absolute waste! While you’re worrying over matters God promises to provide, major issues go unattended.

This is why we’re told. “And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the

kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." God will supply our material needs. We need to focus on God's kingdom. His reign in our lives.

If you want to worry about something worthwhile, worry about the issues that concern God - *like the folks around you who are going to hell - like the health of your own spiritual life - like the strength of your church.*

Here's the irony, **the key to overcoming worry is worry.** Worry about the right stuff and you won't have time for irreverent, irrelevant, and irresponsible worry.

Jesus says, "Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys." Here's another way to beat worry, *I doubt you've tried.* Sell whatever it is you worry about, and it won't be a worry anymore.

We once had a Beagle I hated - it barked at night, woke my neighbors, jumped out of an upstairs window, ate my carpet, scratched a hole in my door - I worried constantly about that dog until I got rid of the dog.

This is why Jesus says, "*sell what you have.*" Give the proceeds to God. Send it on to heaven, and you won't worry about it any longer on earth. You don't have to worry about eternal treasures. They can't be lost or stolen. Invest in *timeless* not *tenuous* treasures.

Verse 34, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" **Your heart follows your treasure.**

That means you love what you truly value. John Wesley said, "When I have any money, I get rid of it as quickly as possible, lest it find a way into my heart."

We need to guard our hearts. Our love for God grows cold when the wrong stuff starts to matter too much. We need to constantly *measure our treasure*, and evaluate it against what's eternal and spiritual.

For Jesus says in verse 35, "Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning..." In other words, "Be ready!"

Jesus is coming back! *How do we prepare?*

A man hitches up his belt when it's *time to work*. A woman lights a lamp when it's *time to watch*. So we get ready for the Lord's return by *working* and *watching*.

Verse 36, "And you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them.

And if he should come in the second watch (a little later, 9 PM to midnight), or come in the third watch (from midnight to 3 AM), and find them so, blessed are those servants." The servants who don't stop watching, just because the Master delays, receive the reward.

"But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into."

A thief's success is due to the element of surprise. Thus, the best defense is to **never stop watching!**

Years ago a man was arrested for robbing a Santa Barbara restaurant. He handed the cashier a note that threatened **"to shot"** her... He had misspelled **"shoot."**

The police set up a roadblock, and asked everyone fitting the man's description to spell **"shoot."**

Well, the robber was consistent. He misspelled the word again and was easily apprehended. The point is twofold: **learn to spell, and always be watching.**

This is how to stay ready for Jesus' return - *work and watch*. Verse 40 **"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."**

The Bible tells us Jesus will come as a surprise - as a thief in the night - but He's not coming without some warning signs designed to keep us on the lookout...

The return of the Jews to their ancient homeland – a rebirth of Israel - the reunification of Europe - Russian hostilities toward Israel - a growing anti-Jewish sentiment around the world - an age of global travel and worldwide communications... and there's far more.

Put all the prophecies together and I believe we're on the threshold of the rapture of the church. That's why we need to be ready - both working and watching!

Verse 41, **"Then Peter said to (Jesus), "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"**

And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.

But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." It won't go well for the man who ignores or denies the Lord's coming and thinks He has forever.

Don't think the Lord is delaying His coming so you can act like the master and seek to please yourself.

Notice the end of verse 46, you'll be treated like *"the unbelievers."* Think of those ramifications... That's not what you want, *let alone "beaten with many stripes..."*

Verse 48 *"But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few."*

For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." Again, Jesus teaches the principle: knowledge means responsibility.

God grades His servants on the curve. Know a lot, and a lot's expected. Know a little, and not so much.

Let's live up to the opportunities we've received.

So here's what we've learned today...

Jesus looks on the inside of the cup, not the outside... Be sure *God's concerns are your priorities...*

Pretenders have no place in God's kingdom...

Fear God, and you have no one else to fear... Worry is *irreverent, irrelevant, irresponsible, and* a sin... You'll regret it forever if you turn a deaf ear to God's Spirit...

And finally, be ready! Jesus is coming back soon.