



We finished off Luke 11 this Sunday, looking at 11v37-54. For many of us, Jesus' woes will be loosely familiar but we may not know them in context, and we may well avoid them because of their difficult content and tone. But there are riches of grace, mercy and hope to be found there if we dig into them!

1 – A lesson in history: God's king was killed

We began by exploring where Luke is up to in his gospel story and seeing how these woes are the culmination of his call to repent to a *particular* generation of religious leaders who were opposing him (cf 11v14-16, 29-36). Tragically, they responded to these woes by planning his murder (v53-54). Therefore, when we read these woes, we are not so much to read ourselves into the story as the Pharisees, but to see a key moment in (salvation) history in which a *particular* group of people turned against Jesus and plotted to and successfully killed him. We see this through Jesus' strong words in v47-51. These woes are not first and foremost designed to show us our individual sins (as if we were Christ-killing Pharisees). We can read these woes and be relieved that we have been saved, and pray for those who do not yet know Christ.

2 – A lesson in the human heart: we are tempted by the sins of the Pharisees

However, it may well be the case that we will be tempted to sin in some of the ways that these Pharisees' sinned: hypocrisy (v39-41), legalism (v42), love of people's praise (v43) etc. This may be particularly the case for those of us who have grown up in the faith and in Christian circles, who know our Bibles well and teach them to others, and who are concerned to obey God. While we are not Christ-killing Pharisees, we should read these woes open to how the Spirit may

show us our sin and convict us. Jesus' first comment and the first two woes (v39-43) apply to all Christians, the final four woes (v44-51) apply perhaps particularly to those who have responsibility within the church (whether formal or informal). As well as being aware that these sins may be in us, we can also recognise them in others, including those who have led us. Christ knows where we have been mistreated and he comforts us. While we long for those who have hurt us to repent, we can be sure that he will hold them responsible if they do not.

3 – A lesson in God's character and action: our generous and loving God leads us well

As we hear of the Pharisees' sins, we see tiny glimpses of what they should have been like, of what our Lord is like. He is generous (v41), lovingly just (v42) and humble (v43). We also see what he does and how he leads us. He leads us into life (v41), carries our burdens (v46), takes away our responsibility for his blood (v47-51) and leads us into true knowledge (v52). As we look at these fallen and wicked leaders, we long all the more for Christ's true and better leadership.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. How does this passage fit within the story Luke is telling so far?
→ How do you think we might go wrong if we read ourselves into a passage like this too quickly?
2. What do you make of the suggestion that our primary response to this passage should be relief and joy, rather than conviction of sin and guilt?
→ How can we get the balance right in our varying responses?
3. Of all the sins Jesus lists, which do you think are particularly prevalent in the church today? at MRC? in your own heart?
4. How can this passage help us where we have been poorly led by our spiritual leaders (as had been the case for so many in Jesus' time and sadly is still the case today)?
5. What glimpses do we see of God's character and action towards us in this passage?
→ Which aspect will you most treasure this week?