

JESUS-WHO RUINED A DINNER PARTY

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And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him; and he went in, and sat down to meat (Luke 11:37).

Throughout the Middle East it is considered a great honor to share a meal in the home of an official. If a sheik entertains people, it is always a very lavish occasion when guests are treated as royalty. This was evident during the life of the Savior. Various people for different reasons invited the Lord into their homes, but sometimes their motives were suspect. Matthew, the publican, made a feast to introduce friends to the Lord (see Luke 5:27-29). Martha of Bethany invited Jesus into her home because she desired to entertain the One who had captured her admiration (see Luke 10:38). Zacchaeus descended from the branches of a tree to become the host at a hastily arranged party for the Lord (see Luke 19:5-6). It is disappointing to discover a Pharisee who asked the Lord to share a meal, hoping legal friends would be able to discredit the Savior's teaching. He and his colleagues disliked what they had heard and planned to refute His statements. When the Lord entered that home, he resembled Daniel who walked into a den of lions!

This gathering of guests had been premeditated. It was not a sincere offer of hospitality. The fact that critical lawyers were present suggests they had already been advised of the opportunity to question Jesus. The Savior had been addressing an outdoor congregation when the Pharisee invited Him to dinner, but what apparently was to be a time of fellowship, eventually became an unpleasant debating session. Jesus, who had never been a student in any university, was suddenly confronted by the most astute legal scholars in Palestine. It is not difficult to visualize the proceedings. The home of the Pharisee was probably pretentious, with the guests seated either at a table or on cushions on the carpet-covered floor. At convenient places were large jars filled with water required for ceremonial cleansing.

"It is not possible to understand the criticism of the Pharisee,

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nor appreciate the scathing denunciation of Jesus until one has become acquainted with the ridiculous requirements of the man-made laws of the Jews. This was not a casual washing of the hands in normal preparation for a meal. If that had been the point in question, the Lord would not have reprimanded His host in such a way. Many writers have tried to express the details of the ceremonial law but probably Barclay's account is among the most informative. This author in his delightful Daily Study Bible, at page 158, says, 'The law laid it down that before a man ate he must wash his hands in a certain way, and that he must also wash them between courses. As usual every littlest detail was worked out. Large stone vessels were specially kept for the purpose because ordinary water might be unclean. The amount of water used must be at least a quarter of a log, that is enough to fill one and a half eggshells. First the water must be poured over the hands, beginning at the tips of the fingers and continuing right up to the wrists. Then the palm of each hand must be cleansed by rubbing the fist of the other into it. Finally, water must again be poured over the hand, this time beginning at the wrist and running

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right down to the finger tips. To the Pharisee to omit the slightest detail of this was to commit sin.' Thus the beauty of the Mosaic law had been spoiled by man-made additions, and when the Lord failed to comply with the requirements of these ceremonial laws, the watching host began to criticize. It was this unfortunate state of affairs which occasioned the scathing denunciation of Jesus. He reminded His hearers that God is more concerned with the state of a man's heart than with the appearance of his hands. Holiness is a quality within the soul; sin is greater than a speck of dust on the hand. One kind act is of more value in the sight of God than all the ceremonial washing preceding any feast."

Throughout the history of the Hebrew race, the practice of washing before and during meals was mandatory. Every worshiper or guest was expected to comply with the ritual, and to refuse was considered an insult to the entertaining host. When Jesus walked past the water jars without pausing to cleanse His hands, the guests were astonished and whispered their

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disapproval. "And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that he had not first washed before dinner" (Luke 11:38). Jesus understood what the host was thinking and proceeded to utter six woes" which suggested informative word pictures.

A Startling Contrast... Practical

And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness (Luke 11:39).

The statement mentioned utensils and dishes which were only partially clean. The outer side had been carefully cleansed, but the inside had been neglected. A servant who was guilty of this would have been severely reprimanded or dismissed from his employment. The Pharisees who had gathered for dinner had meticulously washed their hands but were indifferent regarding the corruption in their souls. This was a terrible indictment against the lawyers who were always seeking faults in other people but remained ignorant of their own depravity. They should have been wiser men, for their Scriptures said: "The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

A Special Concern... Predominant

Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets (Luke 11:43).

The Lord evidently was aware of the conceit of His critics. They were egocentric, desiring the praise of men. When they attended the services in the synagogue, they demanded the most prominent seats so that they could be seen by the entire congregation. Every movement made was meant to attract attention. When beggars at the door asked for alms, the Pharisees looked around to be certain their benevolence was being seen, and the giving of the coin was ostentatiously given. When there were no spectators, the proud man looked away, pretending not to see the beggar. On market days these

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hypocritical donors wore their most attractive clothing and walked through the crowded streets enjoying the salutations of the crowd, acting as though they were the elite of mankind. They loved to see men bowing as they approached and enjoyed the reactions when grateful beggars loudly thanked their benefactors.

During the time the Savior was in that house His words were as rapier thrusts, cutting through the superficial crust of conceit, hypocrisy, and falsehood. He had been invited to dinner, but possibly the meal was never served. The other guests became so enraged they detested their antagonist. The Lord was concerned, courageous, and challenging. He refused to be intimidated.

A Serious Contamination... Prevailing

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them (Luke 11:44).

Three types of people were invited to the dinner. The Pharisees were there to ask questions, the lawyers to find fault with the Savior, and the scribes to provide written evidence that could be used at future arraignments. They were a nest of vipers! The statement that they were unseen graves was particularly offensive, and the audience had no illusions regarding the insinuation. Defilement was a serious menace which all Hebrews feared. Contact with death prevented entry into important places and deprived people of valued privileges. The law demanded that every grave be clearly marked to warn travelers, and ignoring the regulations was punishable by law. Even the most remote contact with a decaying corpse was considered to be a terrible calamity.

When the Savior accused the guests of being unmarked graves, he made His most serious accusation. They were sources of putrefaction. In spite of their self-esteem they endangered innocent people. The scribes who made notes were writing death warrants for sincere men and women and would be held accountable for their deeds. The lawyers who accused

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others in a court of law would themselves be judged in God's hall of justice. They professed to be interpreters of the Mosaic law, but did things for which others were condemned. It is not difficult to visualize the Lord pointing an accusing finger in their direction and saying indignantly:

Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for he lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and you yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres (Luke 11:46-48).

The torrent of words proceeding from the lips of the Lord was devastating, and probably the guests lost their appetites. There were many monuments in Jerusalem which were esteemed by pilgrims. When Jesus said the other guests were hypocrites, He was justified. The religious leaders revered the prophets but, had it been possible, would have repeated the murderous actions of their ancestors.

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A Strong Challenge... Presented

Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were

entering in ye hindered (Luke 11:52).

"The Talmud gives us the clue to the Master's words of bitter reproach here. There were very many in that restless age of inquiry waiting for the consolation of Israel who longed to enter into the real meaning of psalm and prophecy. But the scribe, the lawyer, and the doctor, with their strange and unreal interpretations, their wild and fantastic legends, their own often meaningless additions, effectually hindered all real study of the divine oracles. The Talmud-in the form we now possess it-well represents the teaching of these schools so bitterly censored by the Lord."²

The key of knowledge was and still is the inspired Word of

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God. The legalists in Israel had replaced the commandments with dictates of their own. Their action had hindered true believers, and it was impossible to differentiate between the true and false. The lawyers resembled unreliable watchmen who failed to warn of impending disaster. When people perished, they would be required to answer for their deplorable conduct.

And as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him (Luke 11:53-54).

The guests in the Pharisee's home condemned themselves. The cataracts of unbelief had already closed their eyes to the beauty and grace of the Savior. Deceit and pride had poisoned their souls. Jesus read their thoughts and refused to become a victim of their schemes. When they rejected the Lord, they condemned themselves. All people sooner or later will be confronted and challenged by the claims of Jesus and must either accept or reject His message. Wise people consider this fact.

Luke appeared to be impressed by the occasions when the Lord accepted hospitality. He described at least five times when the Savior dined in various houses (see Luke 4:38; 5:29; 7:36; 14:1; 19:5). It is worthy of note that the writer to the Hebrews said: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). The Lord loves to be invited into the homes of His people. If He came in disguise to us, what kind of a welcome would He receive?

1. Ivor Powell, Luke's Thrilling Gospel (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1984).
2. The Pulpit Commentary, vol. 16 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984).

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