

When Jesus Does the Dishes

Introduction

The Text

³⁷ While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

⁴² “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it.”

⁴⁵ One of the lawyers answered him, “Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also.” ⁴⁶ And he said, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. ⁴⁷ Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. ⁴⁸ So you are witnesses and you consent to the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,’ ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, ⁵¹ from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation. ⁵² Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.”

⁵³ As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, ⁵⁴ lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say. (Luke 11:37–54)

Duplicity

- A. When I read this text, one word in particular came to mind: “duplicity”. It’s derived from a Latin word that means “twofold”. And we understand this. It’s this same root underneath other words we use like “duplicate” or “duplex”. But again, the basic idea is that there is two of something.
1. With “duplicity” the idea is that there are two of me. There’s what I’m presenting to you on the outside. And then there’s what I’m really all about on the inside. “Duplicity”—I present well, but I mean ill; I smile wide, but there’s a serpent coiling inside.
- B. You know what I’m talking about. If you’ve been watching the news this past week, we’ve been given a troubling illustration of this sort of thing. Bill Cosby once dubbed “America’s Dad” now convicted and doing time as a sexual predator. I remember the wholesome shows, the cute kids, the innocent jokes, promoting Jell-O for goodness sake. Here’s what I present to you on the outside, but there’s another thing going on in here.

1. And, if we're honest, "duplicity" is not just in this text, or in the headlines, it's in us as well, right?

From Integration to Dis-Integration

- A. To set up Jesus' discussion with these Jewish leaders in our text here, there is something we should say about the nature of human beings at this point. You remember that there are two basic realities that compose a human person: namely, body and soul. God formed man from the dust (body—material) and then He breathed into him (soul—immaterial).
 1. This is actually what Jesus is referring to there in [v. 40](#) with that rhetorical question: "[Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?](#)" Body and soul.
- B. The two were integrated at first. What a person was on the inside he would be on the outside—honesty, authenticity, integrity, transparency. That is what we ought to be. That is how we were designed to function.
- C. But with the fall, something tragic happened. The body and soul were dis-integrated, as it were, no longer forming a unity. And with this dis-integration comes a stunning and horrifyingly new possibility—now, suddenly, we can present something on the outside that isn't true of us on the inside; we can do the right thing for the wrong reasons; we can do the good with evil intent; "Duplicity".
 1. This really is what we might call the "fig leaf effect" as we see it there in [Gen 3](#). In [Gen 2](#), Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed. But then, in [Gen 3](#), after sin, they are immediately aware of the mess they've made. They don't want others to see it, they don't want God to see it, so they hide—they sow fig leaves together and cover themselves. They put something on the outside as a way of hiding what's happening on the inside, in their hearts.
- D. And the crazy thing is that one of these fig leaves we often try to hide behind is religion—sewing together a garment of religious rituals and righteous deeds as a way of covering up the tangled mess that's inside. We look good, but we are far from it.
 1. In fact, this is where the story in Genesis goes next. [Gen 4](#), Cain and Abel. Both bring to God an offering, it looks the same on the outside. But Abel's heart is pure and Cain's is wicked. It seems he's competing with his brother, he's using religion for selfish gain. And when God calls him on it, Cain gets so jealous of Abel, he lies in wait and kills him.
 - a. You see his religious activity was never about God, it was about himself. It was a fig leaf. A good presentation but hiding something else inside.
- E. I say all of this because that's really what is happening here in our text. Duplicity. Dis-integration. The use of religion to hide the reality of one's heart. And Jesus is taking this issue head-on.
 1. We're going to look at three things here: (1) The Diagnosis—Jesus is going to point out this duplicity, this dis-integration; (2) The Symptoms—He shows us the sort of symptoms that

begin to expose the fact that this is going on with a person; and (3) The Cure—He shows us the way back, re-integration, redemption really . . . the way to be made whole again.

(1) The Diagnosis

- A. Now, before I dive into this idea of Diagnosis, let me first say a few introductory words to help set the scene.

He Eats Food

- A. As is often the case, Jesus is doing ministry around a table. He's been teaching out in public, and a Pharisee invites Him to dine with Him, and Jesus accepts.
- B. Now, we've got to catch this and let it challenge us. Jesus' missionary strategy does not so much involve adding this or that program to His already busy schedule—it involves being missional in the everyday rhythms of life. He does not put on an evangelistic crusade here in an attempt to meet these men. He simply responds to a lunch or dinner party invitation. He eats food with them.
- C. And so for those of us who are disciples of Jesus, wanting to be missionaries of God and bring the gospel to the lost, the question is: Do we walk as everyday missionaries? Are we engaging our mundane tasks with open eyes? Who is next to you at the coffee shop, or in the cubicle, or in line at the grocery store? Are they just in your way, or are they the mission field?
 1. When's the last time you had a meal with an unbeliever—just to move towards them, ask a lot of questions, hear more of their story, and identify ways you can pray for them, love them, and bring good news to them in Jesus?!

Not Your Mama's Table

- A. So here Jesus is about to gather with these Jewish leaders and things around the table. They're all washing up and He just casually skips that part and sits down. Everyone's looking. They're whispering amongst themselves. People are “*astonished*” (v. 38).
- B. Now a few of points of clarification are needed if we are to properly understand this:
 1. First, we're not talking about hygiene. We're not talking about the astonishment your mama had back when you were a kid and you tried to come to the dinner table after playing outside without first washing your hands. This is a ritual, a religious offense. It's not physical but ceremonial cleanness in view here.
 2. But now, second, though this Pharisee is getting all worked up over something seemingly biblical, we need to understand that Jesus is not breaking anything found in the Mosaic law here, but rather later Jewish traditions that had been extrapolated from and added to the law. It's not Bible here, but the “*tradition of the elders*” (Mark 7:3) as Mark describes it.
 3. And third, Jesus does this on purpose. This was not a surprise to Him, like: “Whoops, I'm so sorry. I didn't know.” Jesus was intentionally skipping their little ritual here to get at the

idols He knows are reigning in their hearts, to poke at that fig leaf a bit, to bring that snake out, so He can deal with it, and maybe even bring healing.

Two Pictures

- A. So now for the Diagnosis. Jesus is going to point out the duplicity, the dis-integration, the breakdown between their external presentation and internal reality. And He's going to do so by giving two somewhat haunting pictures:
1. The first comes straightaway there in v. 39: "And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness." I think His words are straightforward enough. "You're all worked up about the outside, getting it squeaky clean, but inside, your heart is filthy. Dis-integration."
 2. The second picture comes down in v. 44, and I would say it probably comes in with considerably more force. We're not just talking about dirty dishes anymore. Now, we're talking about dead people: "Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it." "On the surface you look like you're alive. You look like a pleasant place to take a stroll or spread out a picnic blanket. But just beneath the topsoil, bones . . . you're dead."
 - a. It's the same basic diagnosis, with just a different image put on it. You are dis-integrated. What you present externally is not true of you on the inside. And that's a huge problem.
- B. But there's another layer to this second image that I feel I must mention. And it's terribly ironic. You see, according to OT law, to come into contact with a grave made a person ceremonially unclean (Num 19:16). But if the grave was unmarked, well, the idea is that these people walking over it without knowing would themselves become unclean!
1. So here's the irony Jesus is bringing out: "Pharisees, you're getting all worked up because I am not ceremonially clean according to your standards, but truly it is you who are unclean and spreading that uncleanness to all who follow you!"

When the Gloves Come Off

- A. Now, before we move to identify some of the symptoms here, there is one more general observation I want to make. As we were reading this you might have noticed Jesus is getting worked up, the gloves are coming off, so to speak. He's not playing nice.
- B. You caught that, right? "You Fools!" (v. 40). "Woe to you!" (cf. v. 42, etc.). And then, I secretly love this. One of the experts in the Mosaic Law (a "lawyer") speaks up in v. 45: "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also."
1. But how does Jesus respond? "O, you're right, I'm sorry, I'm a little off base here." No! "And he said, 'Woe to you lawyers also!'" (v. 46).

- C. And we say, “Man, Jesus, what’s up with this? You didn’t get your sleep the night before? Are you getting hungry now that dinner’s being postponed, or what?”
1. No. You see, Jesus knows what is at stake here. These men were respected leaders of the Jewish community. They were the ones every faithful Jew would be looking to to tell them what YHWH is like and how He wants them to live. And Jesus refuses to let that continue. He aims to make it as clear as possible: “The God they are presenting to you is not the God I know, not my Father. These men are not on My team. They would have you get all worked up on your behavior merely, and external conformity, but my God wants your heart, He wants to cleanse you, to transform you there—from the inside out.”
- D. Are we moral? Do we grow in practical righteousness? Sure. We better. But Christianity is not external conformity to a set of rules merely. True Christianity begins with a transformation of the individual at the heart level, on the inside. It’s about the love of God that breaks into a soul, the power of the Spirit that softens a hard heart, love for God that expresses itself in love for neighbor.
1. If it is not this, then it is not Christianity. And Jesus will not allow us to think it is. So Jesus ramps up His language a bit here. He knows the stakes in this debate are too great to mince words.

(2) The Symptoms

- A. Now let me bring out a few of the symptoms of this dis-integration, this duplicity, that Jesus identifies for us here in our text. For the sake of time, I’ll just show you three. We ought to let these search us as well.

Symptom #1: You Major in the Minors And Minor in the Majors

- A. Look at v. 42: “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”
- B. The example Jesus gives here is this idea of tithing, or giving a tenth of one’s money and possessions to God. The Pharisees would do this with painstaking attention to detail—giving a tenth back to God even of their smallest herbs and things. No doubt they congratulated themselves on such efforts and thought it made them particularly exemplary.
1. But Jesus is saying here: “In all of your attention to these details, the littlest aspects of the law, you’ve missed the grand trajectory of it all: justice and love.”
- C. If you look back at the legislation in the OT concerning the tithe, you see that with it God was intending to cultivate in His people a grateful and generous heart!
1. It was intended to remind them of His provision, of His faithfulness to them. It was supposed to be a token of their own appreciation, a gesture of their gratitude and love for God and all He has done. It was meant to say: “God since you have given me all that I have, accept this as an expression from my heart that I love you and want to give what I have back to you in gratitude and worship.”

- a. This ten percent was supposed to set the tone for the way you handled the other ninety percent.
- D. But instead, the opposite has been occurring with these men. It became a way of drawing lines: “I’ll give you your tenth, right up to the line, but I will give you no more. Fine, take your ten percent but the other ninety is mine.”
- 1. They missed it! And they felt holy while doing so! That’s the danger in all of this. They felt justified and righteous, even while they were neglecting the major things of love for God and others.
- E. While I was in seminary, I must say, though there was much right with it and I came away so much richer from my time there, I did often wonder if Jesus couldn’t walk up to us in the midst of our parsing this or that theological distinction, our debates over this or that secondary issue, and say words such as the ones He says here: “You are majoring in the minors while a world out there is in desperate need of the gospel and grace you have. Who’s going to bring it to them if not you? Who cares if you know Greek and Hebrew if you’re not willing to cross your street and tell your neighbor about Me?!”
- 1. O may such things never be said of this church! “They’ve got great sermons, deep Bible studies, they’re committed to their spiritual disciplines, but they have no concern for justice or love.”
- F. That’s when you know your religion has become a fig leaf. You’re using it to justify yourself and you have no heart for God or others.

Symptom #2: You Savor the Show

- A. Look at [v. 43](#): “[Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.](#) They liked the honor and esteem that came with their religious position and authority. It felt good to be recognized and admired.
- 1. Far too often men use their service of God as an underhanded attempt to unseat Him. While they praise Him with their lips they crave praise for themselves in their hearts.
- B. I recently came across this quote from the late Puritan John Owen, and it cut me so deep, I printed it out and have it propped up at the corner of my desk. Let me read it to you. His language is a bit dated, but I think you’ll get what he’s saying: “[A minister may fill his pews, his communion roll, the mouths of the public, but what that minister is on his knees in secret before God Almighty, that he is and no more.](#)”
- 1. I read that and I was on the floor. Who cares whether my church swells to big numbers, whether I’m admired in public, whether my life looks like a success to others or not. All that really matters is who I am before God, when no one else is looking. Am I doing these things in love for Him, with reliance on Him, or is it about me?
- C. But you need to think about it for yourself:

1. How do you feel when your labor goes unnoticed by others? Is it enough to know that God sees every cup of water you give in Jesus' name and will reward you for it? Or must other people see and praise you for it as well?
2. When people pass you over in preference for another, how do you respond?
3. Are you a different person when you know others are watching? Is there serious distinction between who you are in public and who you are in private?
4. When people miss the good that you did, do you make sure to point it out, or post it to Facebook, or whatever?
5. When people stop patting you on the back, do you stop seeing a reason to serve or obey God?
 - a. Or is love for God and others the unchanging motivating factor? Is there a secret exchange with your Father that keeps you going regardless of what the world is saying about you?

Symptom #3: You'd Rather Kill than Confess

- A. Jesus gives us a lot in [vv. 47-51](#) but the basic sense is that God has been sending prophets to Israel for centuries now, bringing this up and calling them to own it and turn their hearts back to Him, but they would rather kill than confess.
- B. He mentions ["the blood of Abel"](#) and ["the blood of Zechariah"](#) ([v. 51](#)). In the way the Hebrew Bible was ordered, Abel is the first prophet killed and Zechariah the last. In English it works out quite nicely: from A to Z. And Jesus is saying: "You religious, duplicitous, dis-integrated men are guilty of it all!"
- C. How do you respond when someone points out sin in your life? Do you listen, invite discussion, pray, and repent where appropriate? Or do you prepare for war?
 1. When your heart is open to God, you'll be open to correction, to being wrong. Your whole identity isn't staked on your image, your performance, your righteousness—it's on God and the acceptance and righteousness you have in Christ. So you can hear another person out without getting all worked up.
 2. Self-righteous people, for all of their apparent confidence and strength, are the most insecure people on the planet. Why? Because they are unrelentingly committed to defending and upholding something that they know deep down in their hearts is not true. "I'm broken, I'm needy, I'm sinful, I'm scared, but I cannot show it, and I will not own up to it. I would rather kill than confess."
- D. And that is what they do to Jesus: [" 53 As he went away from there, the scribes and the Pharisees began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, 54 lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say."](#) Like Cain, lying in wait for Abel, these Jewish leaders lie in wait for Christ.
 1. And this, surprisingly, ironically, moves us to the third and final piece: The Cure.

(3) The Cure

A Better Word

- A. These men are trying to put an end to Jesus' mission and ministry but in killing Him truly they help Him complete it. Because, you see, Jesus is not just another Prophet in a long line of prophets. He's the Christ, the Savior, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. When they killed Him they were inadvertently developing the cure.
1. Isn't that just like God? To take the worst possible expression of our sin and rebellion, turn it on its head, and make from it for us the very means of our forgiveness and healing?!
- B. The author of Hebrews tells us, and I want you to hear this today: The "blood [of Jesus] . . . speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:24).
1. In Gen 4, God says to Cain: "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (v. 10). It was calling for justice, for vengeance. So God cursed Cain.
 2. But Jesus' blood cries out from the cross not for our condemnation but for our pardon!
- C. You remember the initial conflict that occasioned this whole discussion in our text? Jesus didn't wash His hands like a good Jew should. Well, I didn't mention it at the time, but one commentary I read explained the reason for this handwashing. Here's what it said: "Before eating anything, scrupulous Jews had water poured over their hands to remove the defilement contracted by their contact with a sinful world" (TNTC).
1. So for the Jews here it was: "Get their sin off of me. Yuck!" But Jesus doesn't wash His hands. Don't you see it?! He's not interested in getting my sin off of Him, He wants to get my sin off of me. He's not interested in washing His own hands, He's come to wash my heart.
 - a. The Pharisees and lawyers are concerned about what my sin might do to them, so they keep a safe distance. But Jesus is concerned about what my sin will do to me, so He moves towards, comes in close, rolls up His sleeves, gets dirty, goes to the cross, washes me up, and makes me whole again!
- D. And He's here this morning. And He's calling us out. He's calling us towards re-integration, to open our hearts to Him, to stop it with the sham. Stop pretending you're not scared, like you can do this on your own. Stop harboring that secret sin. God sees it. You might fool us, but you're not fooling Him. Stop it with the religious game and get real.
1. So long as we're pretending, keeping a distance between who we really are and what we present to everyone else, we impede God's work. Jesus won't work with you if you are not willing to be honest with Him.
- E. But He's given us no reason to keep hiding. Back in Gen 3, when He calls Adam and Eve out of hiding, do you know what He does? He covers them with something better than fig leaves. He makes clothes. That's what He does. He washes, He covers, He doesn't turn away.