

# THE TABLE OF THE PHARISEE

At the Table Series (Part 4) | Luke 6:37-45; 11:37-54

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Jesus says: <sup>37</sup>“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. <sup>38</sup>Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” <sup>39</sup>He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?<sup>40</sup> The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. <sup>41</sup>“Why do you look at the SPECK of sawdust in your [neighbor’s] eye and pay no attention to the PLANK in your own eye? ...You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your [neighbor’s] eye. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Over the past few weeks, we’ve been examining the encounters Jesus had AT THE TABLES he frequented during his earthly life. From these intimate conversations, we’ve been looking for clues as to how we might live more creatively at the tables we go to each week. In light of this intention, hear this further account from Luke 11...

<sup>37</sup>When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. <sup>38</sup>But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. <sup>39</sup>Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. <sup>40</sup>You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup>But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. <sup>42</sup>Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth [a tithe] of your [produce], but you neglect justice and the love of God...

<sup>45</sup>One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.” <sup>46</sup>Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them. <sup>47</sup>“Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. <sup>48</sup>So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. In other words: *What you claim as a value, you do not do. What you ask of others, you do not do. What God seeks of you, you do not do. This I name, at this table, and ask: What will you do?*

At a crowded traffic intersection, a stoplight turns from red to green. The person driving the first car in line is busy texting and fails to notice the change. This prompts

the driver in the second car to begin pounding on his steering wheel in frustration. When the first driver still doesn't move, the man behind erupts in a rave. As the light turns yellow, the man leans on his car horn and starts shouting obscenities out the window. Jolted by the commotion, the first driver looks up, sees the yellow light, and accelerates through the intersection *just* as the light turns red.

The second driver is practically bursting a blood vessel now. Amid his ranting, he looks out his window and into the barrel of a gun held by a very serious-looking policeman. The officer promptly arrests, handcuffs, and jails him. An hour or two later, the driver is led back to the booking desk where the original officer is waiting. *"I'm really sorry for this mistake,"* the officer says. *"You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping that driver off, and cussing a blue streak. Then I noticed the **"What Would Jesus Do?"** bumper sticker. I saw the fish emblem on the trunk. I just assumed that you had **STOLEN** the car."*

Like the police officer in this story, people sometimes get confused when they look at "Christians." Most think it is reasonable to expect that those who wear the name of Jesus will behave *somewhat* like Jesus did amidst the traffic of human life. Of course, many Christ-followers do. YOU are probably one of them. But what makes it hard for some to believe that Christianity has something truly life-changing to offer them is that they meet so many untransformed Christians. I'm talking about people who act as if righteousness were mainly about ranting and raving over the sin in *other* people's lives instead of dealing with it in their own. They encounter religious people who seem determined to rush at **the speck** in others' eyes when **the plank** – which is code for their own protruding pathologies -- are savagely spearing those around them. Have you ever met someone like that? Have you ever been someone like that?

Obviously, from the text we read in Luke chapter 6, you know that this phenomenon concerned Jesus. I'm not asking you to do *more* than I have modeled myself, says Jesus. **A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40)**. In other words, if you are truly training in my company (and that, by the way, is what discipleship is – a training process to become more like our coach) I DO expect that you will increasingly move through life like your Teacher would were He at the wheel. To put it bluntly: I expect your likeness to Me to go much deeper than the sign on the bumper or the shine of the paint-job. My influence on you has to be an inside-the-cab, under-the-hood reality.

In Luke 6:43, Jesus uses an organic metaphor to drive this point home. **No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.** In other words, people aren't going to come to you for fruit if they experience you as a prickly, jabbing person, but only as they encounter you as someone whose heart is filled with good. As Jesus goes on to say: **Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and evil people bring evil things out**

**of the evil stored up in their heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.**

Have you ever heard the statement: "*Who you ARE speaks so loudly that I CANNOT HEAR what you are saying?*" Our ambition has to be to have people feel: "*Who you are makes me want to LISTEN to whatever you are saying.*" For this reason, Proverbs 4:23 says: **Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.** So much of Jesus' teaching is aimed at helping us look at the condition of our heart and take the steps needed to strengthen a Christlike beat there.

Some years ago, I had an experience that provides a helpful metaphor for this process. I traded in my pretty old car for a 4-year-old model with a body so beautiful and an engine that looked so clean that I could hardly believe it had high mileage on it. I'd had the car for less than a week, however, when I noticed it stuttering a little bit and an amber service light come up on the dash. I'd heard my dealer was legendary for quality service, so I took the car back immediately. The mechanics popped open the hood and unfastened what I then realized was just the *dust cover* for the actual HEART of the car, which I'd never actually seen before. Mr. Goodwrench I am not! Underneath was an engine block that looked all of its age. Within 60 seconds, however, one of the mechanics had nailed the problem. "*Look, here,*" he said. "*A hose is coming loose. Let's get to work on fixing that.*"

I think that we, sometimes, pay too much attention to the look of the bumpers and upholstery and dustcover of our lives and not enough to whether our engine is good. Jesus told us how our heart should work if everything was running according to the Dealer's original specifications.

He said that we would see ourselves as servants and stewards instead of masters and consumers<sup>1</sup> He told us we'd be far more concerned with asking how we could *be a good neighbor* to others than with judging their neighborliness.<sup>2</sup> Jesus said if our heart was good, we'd be willing to take up a cross at times to bring forth the best, rather than run from sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> He said we'd be oriented more toward investing the gifts we've been given for the purposes of God than with hoarding and burying them.<sup>4</sup> He told us that we'd generously forgive others, rather than keeping tallies, simply because we knew how great a debt God had forgiven us.<sup>5</sup> He said that rather than having our engines racing with anxiety and fear, we'd face difficulties and even death itself with a sense of peace, knowing that we're in the loving hands of God himself.<sup>6</sup> You can find the Bible references to all of this in the Sermon Notes on our website.

When our engine is running the way the Dealer originally designed it to run, those orientations will be thrumming in us like a fine-tuned V-8 or a premium electric motor. We will move through life with grace and power. ***Is this the way your heart is operating?*** Here's the truth: Life's miles take a toll on our hearts. Maybe the sludge of pride or anger has built up in you. Perhaps deceit or gluttony, or sloth have clogged

the system. Maybe lust or envy have corroded your heart connections. We take in a lot of tainted fuel in this world. Life's seasons can be harsh on our heart.

Maybe you've been ignoring the warning lights on the dashboard of your relationships or health, trying to tell you that something's wrong. Perhaps you tell yourself: "*It can't be happening already,*" or "*I'll get to it one of these days.*" Or just maybe you've been driving the way you have for long enough and in a lane next to so many people with the same kind of performance that you think: "*I guess, this is how life is supposed to work.*" It takes humility and courage to face the reality that your engine's stuttering. But that's the first step in making things better: Admit your need.

The second step is to Bring the engine into the shop for repair. That's part of what our campuses are for. We come here to get our heart tuned up and re-calibrated to God's rhythms. We come to get our heart cleaned and lubed with the oil of God's grace. It's not that we can't do some maintenance ourselves at home. We can and should. But there are some things about our heart's condition that we just can't see or fix, because we're using the broken things to see with. As Jesus says, we've got a plank or log in our self-awareness. We need the community here or a small group of Christians out there to help us see what's wrong and help us to set it straight.

Sometimes, what we need is not a tune up but a whole new engine. We need the Dealer to take out a heart that is badly corroded or has seized up almost completely and give us a fresh start. God will do that for you if you ask Him. Many years ago, King David of Israel suffered a complete moral breakdown. He slept with another man's wife, impregnated her, and then conspired in the murder of her husband to cover his tracks. Not small stuff. In Psalm 51:10 he confesses to God that he needs not a little fine-tuning but a major overhaul. He says: **Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.** Maybe you are in a place like that right now. Repair isn't enough. You need a heart replacement. OK. So... Ask for a new engine today, if that's what you need.

The final step is to... Make sure the hoses are connected securely. God – the Divine Dealer -- made each of us in such a way that His power only flows fully through us when certain spiritual circuits or disciplines are firmly in place. Perhaps you've been driving so fast for so long over rugged roads that some of these key spiritual hoses have gotten dislodged, or never got connected properly in the first place. Maybe you need to attach the hose of regular rest or solitude. Perhaps it is a pattern of daily prayer or study of God's Word that needs to be set in place. There are many spiritual practices the pastoral staff here can help you with if you ask us.

But here is the bottom line of what Jesus says to us in our Scripture lessons and our major takeaway from today: Jesus loves us enough to sit AT THE TABLE with us and offer us not only GRACE but TRUTH. First, he challenges us to not be hypocrites. I believe he wants us to stop putting so much energy into being traffic cop and mechanic

for others and seek, first and foremost, to deal the sins that are afflicting us and compromising our Christian witness. And secondly, I believe – that when we sit at the table with others -- he wants us to know that it is OK to ask the hard questions that help others confront the brutal facts of their lives and reconcile the difference between what they say and what they do.

If you and I – and the people we sit with -- get serious about caring for the health of our own heart there will come a day when, to paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. we will be able to say with both integrity and joy: *I may not be the person I should be. I may not be the person I want to be. I may not be the person I'm going to be. But thank God Almighty, this I know as I sit at this stoplight – I am not the person I once was.*

May that be so – to the glory of God and the blessing of those Christ still wants to touch with his life-changing love. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 21:33-41

<sup>2</sup> Luke 10:25-37

<sup>3</sup> Mark 8:31-37

<sup>4</sup> Luke 12:16-31; Matthew 25:14-30

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 18:23-35

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 31:6