

Deconstructing Unbelief, Part 3

Luke 11:45-54

In our study of Luke's Gospel, we're in Luke 11. Jesus is deconstructing unbelief. He's deconstructing the unbelief that is informing their religion. He's pulling back the curtain and he's going back there and he's saying, this is what explains your hypocrisy. It's unbelief. So he's going to deconstruct the unbelieving scholarship, you might say, of the law experts and the lawyers and the scribes. Unbelief obscures the law. Not only does unbelief obscure the law, but it hates the prophets. It's manifest in these lawyers, who study God's Word with a heart of unbelief. And absent of the fear of the Lord, human pride is left unchecked. And all that's left when you boil everything away, all that's left is the idolatry of self-love.

They've obscured the law of Moses behind man-made traditions. And they ignore the message of the prophets, whose whole purpose of the prophets is to confront and expose that unbelief and point them back to the law. It's so ironic, isn't it? Because it would seem on the surface, that the lawyers, the

theologians, they are all about God's Word. They love the Word of God. Their daily occupation is to study Scripture, teach Scripture, regulate and assign assignments from Scripture. They are deep into the exegetical details of the text and the prophets. Can anybody show any more respect that they do?

I mean, look at verse 47, "Woe to you," Jesus says, "For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. And so you are witnesses and you consent to," or you agree with "the deeds of your fathers, for they killed them, and you build their tombs." Okay, so on the one hand, Jesus is saying the only prophet you honor is a dead prophet. You don't like the living ones so much. Kill them, and then honor them.

Living ones, verse 49, you kill, you persecute; the dead ones, you enshrine. Their fathers, fathers of these scribes and Pharisees, the fathers of the Jewish nation, they hated the message of the prophets, so they killed them. But listen, the children hated the message of the prophets, too. And so they made their message, and they made the prophets remote and out of touch beyond reach by enshrining them in elaborate tombs. They made them an ornament, rather than something to actually listen to.

It's like all the, Christian bookstores. You know, you go in these Christian bookstores, and you see all this Jesus junk, all these trinkets, all this gobbledygook. Ornaments of religion. It has nothing to do with truth. Can't find one good book in there, not one. You might be thinking, though, what's wrong with building tombs and memorials for prophets. I mean isn't it showing honor, right, to call attention to the martyrs? I mean, isn't it good to build monuments, pictures, and everything else for martyrs, prophets? Does building a tomb for a prophet endorse the unjust execution by a past generation, because that's Jesus' argument here.

The answer to that question becomes abundantly clear in the next few verses. And just to summarize. He says, listen, if you really want to honor the prophets, you're not going to keep yourself busy with memorializing them. You're not going to be spending a bunch of money to build and beautify their tombs. Preoccupation with honoring the dead body is proof positive you've failed to grasp the prophet's living message, which is God's living Word. You want to honor them? You do what they said.

That's the problem. Look at the next few verses. Start in verse 49. Jesus says, "Therefore also the Wisdom of God said, 'I

will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation," just to expand on that, "from the blood of Abel," verse 51, "from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary." Jesus says, "Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation." Frightening, frightening words.

If you're living in that generation and you hear that heaviness come upon you, rules and regulation and burdens that they provided you; can amount to what Jesus just laid on them. The blood of all the martyrs. The blood of all the prophets from the foundation of the world until Zechariah. Incredible burden. Incredible weight. "The Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles.'" The idea here is that wave after wave of messengers came from God over time. They spoke revelation from God. They came with increasing clarity and ever sharpening focus generation after generations.

And the revelation they brought is always progressing generation after generation. And it comes all the way to its crescendo and its culmination and fulfillment in Jesus Christ at this moment in the text. And Jesus is laying the guilt of the

sin for the slaying of all of God's messengers. His prophets, those who spoke with authority the Word of God, all the apostles, literally the sent out ones. All their blood is charged to the generations standing right in front of him.

Why? Because they have had the privilege of biblical, historical perspective and they have refused to heed the message. They've refused to repent and believe, to turn from their sins and embrace salvation in Jesus Christ. Instead of obeying the instructions of grace and truth and law of Moses. Instead of learning from the prophetic commentary on the law, instead of heeding the repeated warnings of the prophets who pleaded with the people, pointed to the coming Messiah, this generation, led by the Pharisees, led by the scribes, they're following in the bloody footsteps of their fathers. And they're about to kill yet another of God's messengers. This one, "the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth."

Jesus started with Abel, going back to the foundation of the world, goes to Abel, he ends with Zechariah. And he's not doing that because he's talking about the first and last martyrs of history chronologically, but because they're the first and last canonically. The Hebrew Bible, the canon of the Old Testament, it begins, as our does, with the book of Genesis. So

that makes Abel understandable as the first martyr who spoke with a prophetic voice.

But unlike our Bibles, the Hebrew Bible ends with the Chronicles. 2 Chronicles chapter 24, Zechariah is the last martyr. So again, this is bitterly ironic because what did the scribes do if not paying attention every single day to everything between Genesis and Chronicles? They prided themselves in their biblical knowledge. Their view of honoring murdered prophets, build tombs for them.

Jesus' view of honoring murdering prophets, read what's written about them, listen, obey their voice. Repent of your sin; turn back to the law. Turn back to the grace that's found in God and God alone. The account of Abel's righteousness we read in Genesis. We can see it pictured before us in the narrative text. He offered a pleasing sacrifice, a blood atonement. He recognized the need for that animal to die as a vicarious substitute for himself.

We can only presume that that clarity came by revelation from the Spirit of God. And in fact, the writer to the Hebrews helps us to see that more clearly. In Hebrews 11:4 it says, "By faith Able offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain through which he was commended as righteous. God commending him

by accepting his gifts and though his faith, though he died, he still speaks.” According to Genesis 4:10, the voice of Abel’s blood cried out to God from the ground. It’s not merely Abel’s offering that Cain hated. He hated Abel’s prophetic voice. He didn’t like the message. He killed him for it. That’s a first prophetic martyr of human history and really sets the pattern, sets the, the mold for what’s going to follow as God sends prophet and apostle, prophet and apostle all through the generations.

In 2 Chronicles, 24:20, we read about the last one in the Hebrew canon, which would penetrate the hearts of the scribes. It had to. It says there, “Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, ‘Thus says God, “Why, why do you break the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you’ve forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.”’” Next verse says they conspired against him. “By the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord.” That murder happened in the temple court. No place is safe. No place is protected from murderous conspiracy from those who hate the prophetic voice.

Thousands of years of prophetic witness has landed at the doorstep and at the feet of these Pharisees and scribes. All those words coming to their fulfillment in this one person, Jesus Christ. And this generation is about to join the generations of their fathers, but putting their own Messiah to death. That's why building and beautifying tombs, while ignoring divine words of confrontation, that is so offensive to God.

Beloved, how do we apply this? Learn to love people who confront you for your sin. Learn to love people who speak with prophetic voice, like the prophets did to the people of their own time. learn to love biblical confrontation. Learn to love having your sin exposed. Not because we glory in our shame. No. Love actually covers over iniquity and sin. But we want our sins to be identified so that we can repent. So love those who help you to see what remains in your life in sanctification. Learn to love those who love the truth, who want to bring it to bare in your life. They're doing that because they love you. Those who fear the Lord, hating sin.

These are the ones who oppose this lawyer-like pride, resist it, this pretention of showing honor for God's Word while actually walking in utter disregard to it. Those who fear the Lord, hating sin, loving truth, loving righteousness, they grow,



they mature in discernment, they learn to spot this kind of scholarly unbelief. So an evil heart of unbelief obscures and misrepresents the law. It obscures the law by piling opinion and regulation and rule on top of the pure, holy, good law. Unbelief hates, persecutes, murders the prophets. Unbelief rejects the Gospel. It obscures the law. It hates the prophetic voice and it rejects the Gospel.

Back to the Pharisees, they're uncleanness and impurity in verse 44. Why do they keep spreading this contagion? Why do they keep infecting others with their own defilements? Because their teachers, the lawyers, rejected God's saving Gospel. They've barred the door to salvation, which means they remain impure and unclean and trapped in iniquity. So defilement is all they have to share with other people.

Look at verse 52, "Woe to Lawyers! For you've taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who are entering," or trying to enter, is how you could better translate that. Instead of using the key that they have, instead of using that key of the knowledge of salvation, instead of using that key to open the door to salvation, they stick it in the lock, and they break the key off in the lock. They bar themselves and anyone else from entering into God's

kingdom by means of saving truth. And now we come to the cruelty found in unbelief. It is so cruel. The pride of unbelief is not just a matter of distasteful arrogance and hubris that we all can't stand. This is deadly. It is eternally consequential.

Imagine for a moment in your mind's eye there's a fire burning in a high-rise building. Flames roaring. Smoke ascending. People are exiting their offices. They're taking the stairs down to the main floor so they can escape the building. The security guards are down there on the first floor. They hold the key to the front door, which is a very, very important key right now. Imagine now, the unimaginable. Security guard, he has the key of escape from a burning building, choking smoke. The key to rescue and the fresh air outside. Imagine the guard uses his key to lock himself in, break the key off in the lock, locking everyone else in, as well.

Now they're all there locked together inside of a burning building. No escape. They all die together. Building comes down on top of them. What derangement, right? What a sociopath, what a psychopath! Who would do that? Evidently the scribes would. This is the unforgiveable sin of unregenerate biblical scholarship. Unbelieving academics who get paid to interpret Scripture, paid to write articles, paid to publish in journals

and write books and be the scholarly opinion at every conference and show and everything else.

They teach in the seminaries. They speak at the conference and seminars. They churn out unbelieving pastors into unsuspecting churches. May God spare us. The lawyers, the scribes, they piled on tradition on top of tradition. They created rules and regulations. They added prescriptions. They built barriers layer after layer after layer of man-made opinion and preference that obscures the plain truth of God's Word from common people.

So enamored were they with their own scholarship. So intoxicated with how complex they could make everything. They failed to understand the point of everything. God has spoken that we may be saved. Have we missed that, that God has spoken that we might know him. That through his son, he came to save us from our sins, which are many. Folks, that's the point. That is the message. That is what the historical record is all about. The law, the prophets, the Gospel. "In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we've loved God," we haven't. "But that he loved us, sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Propitiation, real big word. It just means satisfaction of wrath. So much wrath piled up for our so many sins. All satisfied. All taken away in Christ. That's about lifting burdens, beloved. That is about lifting burdens, not adding them. That is about understanding the law of God. And understanding how guilty we are. It's about understanding and honoring the prophets, heeding their words, saying, boy, I am guilty. You're right. I'm guilty. That points us to salvation. The only hope of salvation which is in the Gospel of God by faith in the Son of God. That's what it means to use the key of knowledge to open the door of salvation, to open the way of eternal life of God, eternal God with God.

Just a brief postscript on this scene. Look at verses 53 to 54. Jesus went away from there. The scribes and the Pharisees evidently did not repent, but instead they began to "press him hard and provoke him to speak about many things, and they're lying in wait," they're settin' up an ambush, "to catch him in something he might say."

When Jesus said, "Therefore also the Wisdom of God said," he's not pointing back to some specific text in the Old Testament. There isn't one that actually makes this exact statement. He's not referring to some unknown ancient book he

once read called The Wisdom of God. He didn't read that. This isn't Luke's insertion into Jesus' conversation or even worse, it's not the Christian community, at some time later in the future inserting the wisdom of God back into this speech of Jesus, reading something back into his words.

All those, by the way, are various commentators and their views on this text. I didn't make them up. When Jesus personifies the wisdom of God here, he does so, in the spirit of, like Proverbs 8, personifying wisdom speaking, and it speaks prophetically. He speaks as someone who is intimately familiar with the ways of God because he is. "For," Luke 10:22, "all things have been handed over to me, by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, who the Father is except the Son." The omniscience of the father is known by the omniscient son. The omniscient son is known by the omniscient father. He knows his father. He knows his father's ways. He knows his father's wisdom. So when Jesus gives a voice to the wisdom of God, he's talking about the wisdom of God, and the delight God has in his wisdom of subverting the expectations of men.

He's referring to God's pleasure in thwarting human wisdom, in stymieing human power, in accomplishing his eternal decree in

a way that is completely contrary to human expectation. So verses 53 and 54, that postscript on this scene, what's that gonna end up with? The death of Jesus Christ. What did God accomplish with the death of Jesus Christ? In spite of all their anger, in spite of their hatred, in spite of their unbelief, he used the wisdom of men, thwarted it, subverted it, and he used it to his ends to accomplish the wisdom of God providing us with salvation.

That's exactly the message of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Go ahead and turn there as we close to 1 Corinthians chapter 1. While you're turning there, I'll just mention this growing animosity scribes, Pharisees, all of this accelerated after this encounter. Jesus doesn't sit down with them again in the rest of Luke's Gospel. It's gonna culminate in the crucifixion of Christ. And as I've said, that's the very means used of God in his wisdom to provide the once for all sacrifice for sins. Save his people, Jew and Gentile alike.

Look at chapter 1, 1 Corinthians, verse 18. "For the word of the cross, it is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise?

Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, "it scribal wisdom, Pharisaic wisdom, any other kind of wisdom, "it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs, Greeks seek wisdom, we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, folly to Gentiles, but to show who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Beloved, it is so, so important that we avoid listening to the wisdom of the world and avoid any influence from unbelieving scribes and lawyers and experts who try to obscure and ignore the law of God. Try to reinterpret it. Try to shave off the hard edges for a weak, sensitive, paper-thin skin culture. We've got to reject that. We've got to reject those who reject the prophetic voice. We've got to reject those who turn us away from the only salvation that's found in the Gospel.

If we're to follow Paul's example, resolved, as he says in the next chapter, 1 Corinthians 2:2. "Resolve to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified." Listen, we are going to

preach law and Gospel. And we're gonna do that with a prophetic intensity and voice. Because people do not understand the solution without understanding the problem. That means we got to speak prophetically. We got to speak in penetrating words. We got to confront the actual sins people are actually committing.

Not the sins of somebody else some time ago. Not isms and schisms, we gotta speak about what people are doing right now in their life. Point to their accountability before a holy God. Beloved, we may never, never, never obscure the law. Let us never do that. Let us never be ashamed of it. Let us never hide the law from view with our own opinions. May we always cultivate a heart of reverence and fear of the Lord. May we love prophetic confrontation in our own lives.

May we listen to, heed God's voice. May we take comfort in the Gospel and the Gospel alone. And let us, then, having learned that for ourselves, make use of God's Word to point many lost and dying people to what truly matters. Use the key of knowledge to open the door of salvation to many other people. Salvation in Christ alone, to which all the law and the prophets point.