

Challenge 2015: Harmony of the Gospels

Week 34: Acknowledging Christ before Men (August 23-29)

Woe to the Pharisees and Lawyers: *Luke 11:37-54; Genesis 4:8; Leviticus 27:30; 2 Chronicles 24:20-21*

"Woe" is one of those words that almost never is followed by good things. "Woe is me!" we often say when things go wrong. And, in this case, Jesus pronounces "woes" against the Pharisees for the sins that they practice in the name of God.

The word itself is used more than 80 times in the scriptures and it is always used to speak about sin. That said, it is typically not a word that pronounces final judgment, like a curse might bring. Instead it is a word spoken of and to those engaged in sin and it carries with it an implied call to repentance. Further, in many cases, there is also an implied blessing for those who are not engaged in said sin.

In this particular case, Jesus is condemning the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and the lawyers (teachers of the law) for their legalism. While much of this language has become part of our modern vernacular (calling someone a white-washed tomb, for example), we should read these woes closely and take seriously their criticism lest we fall into the same sin these scribes and Pharisees fell into.

One further note on this passage... Jesus comments about the prophets murdered by the Jewish authorities up to Jesus' own day. Specifically Jesus mentions two prophets by name: Abel and Zechariah. Sometimes people are tempted to assume that Jesus is speaking of completion because the alphabet goes from A to Z. Yet, that is the English Alphabet...not the Hebrew, the Aramaic, or even the Greek Alphabets. In the Hebrew and Aramaic alphabets, for example, "Z" is the 7th letter (the same is true, for that matter, in the Greek alphabet). The fact that A and Z are first and last letters of the English alphabet is purely coincidental. Instead, Abel is the first martyr recorded in the Bible (Genesis 4) and Zechariah (mentioned in 2 Chronicles 26:5) who is traditionally seen as the final prophet martyred for the faith during the Canonical record. Thus it reminds us not only was Able a prophet in Jesus' eyes, but that he did not recognize the Jewish Apocryphal books as Canon, though they did exist in Jesus' own day.

The Leaven of the Scribes and Pharisees: *Luke 12:1-3*

Leaven, or yeast, is a common enough analogy, but Jesus uses it in a variety of ways. When he speaks of the church, he speaks in a positive sense, teaching that while the church is small (think how small a volume of yeast goes into baking a loaf of bread!), the effect of the church can be felt throughout the world (Luke 13:20-21). Yet, he also uses the term in a negative sense (as here) — how the sinful ideas can creep into one's fellowship and then lead the whole body astray. Here was the threat of the scribes and pharisees, but this is a threat that is still present with the church today.

It is because this threat still remains that the church must be ever vigilant in studying God's word, knowing the scriptures inside and out, and understanding the system of theology that comes out of the Biblical text. And while this is ultimately the job of the church pastor and Council, this is also the job of every church family — to search the scriptures and examine what is being taught under the light of the Word of God.

Fear God and not Man: *Luke 12:4-7*

Here we find Jesus returning to a principle that he has already taught on, but just in a different context. And the principle is a simple one, though is often difficult to live out. That is, fear God, not man. Man may persecute and kill the body, but after the body is dead, God can cast your eternal soul into the fires of Hell.

Acknowledge Christ Before Men: *Luke 12:8-12*

In short, it is a sin to not acknowledge Jesus before men. That notion is one that people often find uncomfortable, but nevertheless it is true. Further, Jesus goes as far as to say that those who acknowledge Him before men, he will acknowledge before the Father. Further, those who deny Jesus before men, Jesus will deny before God. Not the kind of position that any of us should want to be in.

Further, this passage also contains two themes we find elsewhere in Jesus' teaching. The first is that during times of persecution, the Holy Spirit will prompt us with the words that we ought to be saying in the moment — and as I have already mentioned, this is not an excuse to neglect study, but is a reminder that God will bring our study to bear in times of crisis. The second is the notion of the sin against the Holy Spirit which will not be forgiven. This is language recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), though this is a different context than the others. While Jesus is somewhat vague in his comment about the "Unforgivable Sin" or the "Sin against the Holy Spirit," these criticisms seem to take place in the context of folks challenging his healing miracles — essentially saying that Jesus was doing what he did through the use of evil spirits rather than through the work of the Holy Spirit. Beyond that we must be careful not to speculate in areas in which the Bible does not speculate.

Parable of the Rich Fool: *Luke 12:13-21; Exodus 2:14*

Jesus' answer to the brothers debating over their inheritance is fascinating. He begins with the language of "who made me judge over you?" But then, given the the opportunity is given, Jesus proceeds to judge them. Of course, Jesus is the judge over all mankind (and all of creation for that matter!), so we should see this as Jesus given the men the opportunity to confess him as their Lord. They do not do so and thus Jesus addresses them in their sin, warning them against covetousness.

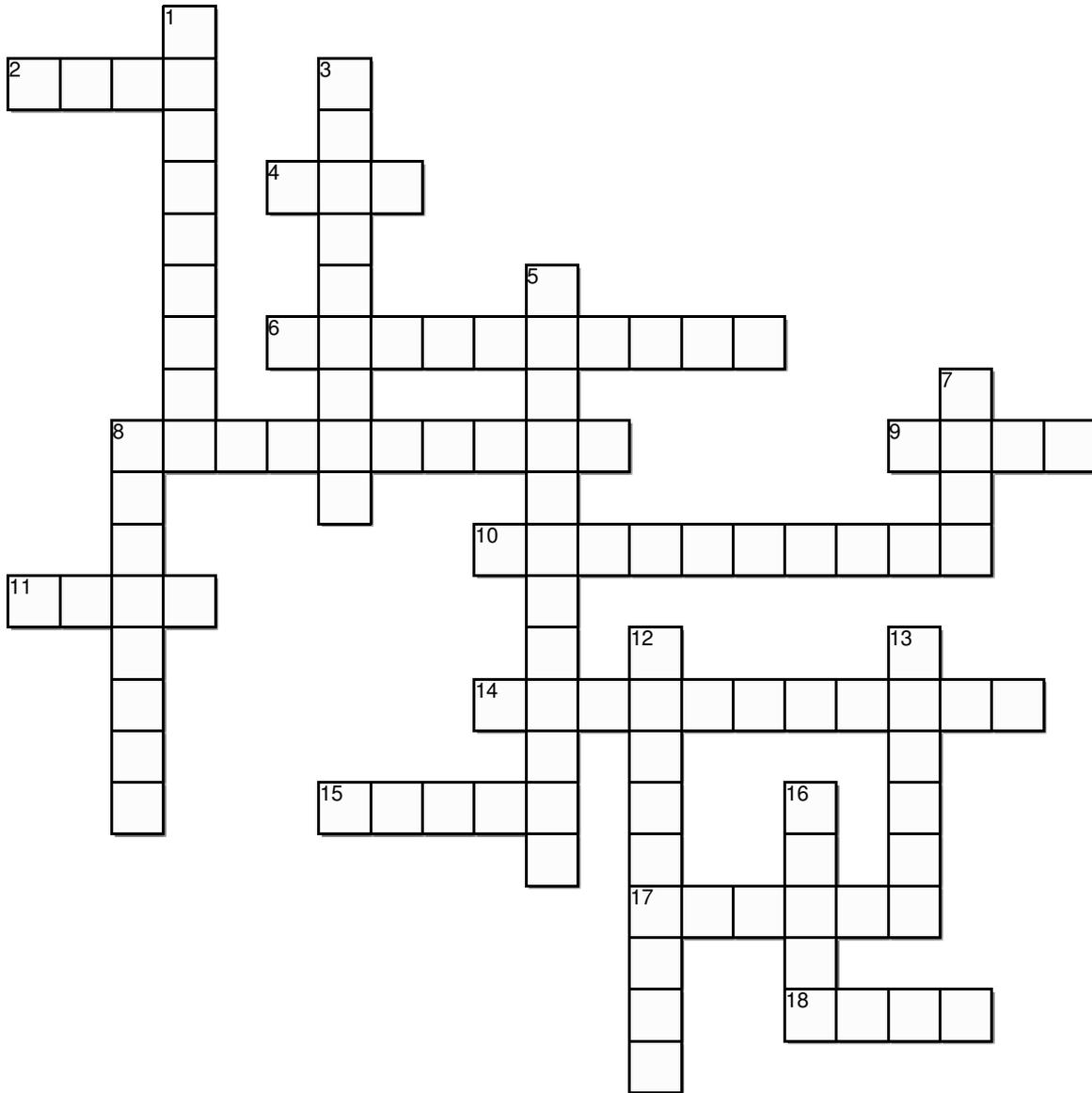
Then, Jesus offers a parable about a rich man whose harvest was remarkably good, so builds larger barns with the intent of relaxing in luxury. He is a fool because he does not number his days and does not know that God will be taking his soul that very night. Why a fool, you might ask? Well, remember, Jesus is speaking in the context of covetousness. If God provides a uniquely abundant harvest, rather than build barns, what an opportunity it is for the wealthy man to show his generosity with those who were poor and with the church. Note, this is not a parable condemning wealth, only condemning the hoarding of wealth for personal comfort when instead much more good could be worked through generosity. Ultimately, it is in heaven where we must find our greatest wealth.

Do Not be Anxious, but Trust God: *Luke 12:22-34; 1 Kings 10:4-7; 2 Chronicles 12:27; Psalm 147:9; Daniel 7:14*

Jesus follows the previous parable with one more reminder not to be anxious for the things we might need — God will provide for us. As always, this is not teaching a health and wealth gospel, but in the context of the whole — we must work faithfully trusting God for the produce of the labor of our hands. That principle applies not only to the minister and the farmer, but to all professions. Too often people are consumed with stress because they will not let go of worry. Do what is right because it is right, and trust God to work through the results. Further, it is only the pagan that has the right to worry for the pagan gods can do nothing; we worship a God who hears our prayers and who has ordered all things according to the council of his own will.

Week 34 (Acknowledging Christ Before Men)

Complete the crossword below



Created on TheTeachersCorner.net Crossword Maker

Across

2. Do not fear those who can kill this.
4. This word refers to a warning to repent from sin, not an actual curse.
6. The parable of the rich fool is ultimately a parable about _____.
8. The Pharisees also liked the best seats here.
9. God even provides for this flower.
10. Blasphemy against him is defined as the 'unforgivable sin.' (2 words)
11. 'Whatever you have said in the _____ will be heard in the light...'
14. Jesus introduces the parable of the rich fool because brothers were fighting over this.
15. God even has this numbered.
17. 'He gives to the beasts and to the young _____ that cry.'
18. This son of Adam was a prophet.

Down

1. The leaven of the Pharisees is this.
3. Jesus says that the Scribes have taken away the key of _____ from the people.
5. This is the sin of the brothers who were squabbling before Jesus.
7. The Pharisees tithed this but neglect justice.
8. Five of these were sold for two pence in Jesus' day.
12. This is the last of the prophets martyred in the Hebrew Scriptures.
13. Those who deny Jesus will be denied before the _____ of God.
16. This 'Queen of the South' visited with Solomon and was amazed by his wealth.