

Parable of the Marriage Feast Luke 14:1-14

The Pharisees, prompted by pride, tried to put Jesus in a predicament by using legalistic traditions. Jesus, prompted by humility, turned the tables to put the Pharisees in a predicament by using the principle of love. The Lord is more interested in our heart's inner motive than our external behavior

INTRODUCTION

There was a young man that I knew that was a very insecure. He hid his insecurity behind his achievements. God gave him the ability to multi-task & be efficient with it without stressing out. As he achieved more things, his ego began to grow. Before he knew it, pride got the best of him. He liked to brag about all that he had accomplished. It was a great feeling to get the oohs and the ahhs from others. People could not believe all that he could complete in a short period of time. Before long, he started looking down at others because they were not able to do what he could do. One of his common statements was, "I am not bragging. It is just facts."

The Pharisee also had a pride problem. Do you know of a person that has a pride issue? Jesus in our passage today will address pride. He teaches us how we can be elevated without making a scene, and how pride can lead to being humbled. Let us turn to Luke 14:1-14 as we continue our series on the Parables. This passage can be broken down into two scenes. The first scene describes the power of Jesus, which provides the context of the parable. And the second scene describes the parable of Jesus. Let me read vv. 1-2, "One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"

A. Scene 1: The Power of Jesus is Seen (14:1-6)

There was a prominent Pharisee that invited a bunch of people over for a meal. This meal was the midday Sabbath meal, which took place after the morning meeting in the synagogue. The Pharisees usually only gather with people that consider equal to them or those who would elevate their status. Let's take a look at who would invited? First of all, there was Jesus, a man suffering from dropsy, and there were other Pharisees and scribes or experts in the law. Let's examine each of these individuals.

Let us first find out a little more about the Pharisees. They came out of a spiritual revolt against the influence of Greek and Roman thought and culture on the Jewish people. They called for a separation. The word "Pharisee" comes from the Hebrew verb meaning "to separate." It is their commitment to return to the adherence to the Old Testament Law.

According to the O.T. one needed to be righteous before God before they could enter into His kingdom. The standard of righteousness was taught by the scribes and Pharisees to follow all of the rules according to the Law. Then they would be accepted. There were 250 commands to keep and 365 prohibitions to observe. That was a lot of rules and regulations to keep. In order for people not to violate these rules, the Pharisees set up additional rules to make sure that they would not even come close to breaking the Mosaic Law.

Unfortunately, the Pharisees had distorted the intention of the Law. They thought that they needed to follow it to be acceptable before God. In reality, Scripture teaches us that the Law is to show us that we are sinners and we stand guilty before God. (Rom. 3:20) "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." They mistakenly thought that through their righteous performance, they could be acceptable before God.

As a result, the Pharisees became legalists. Their spirituality was based on their outward performance. They focused on the external action over the internal attitude. They emphasized external righteousness instead of internal righteousness. They were totally committed to upholding all of the Law. With all the additional rules, it became a burden to the people. The Pharisees, being self-righteous, would impose these teachings to the people.

Therefore, most of Pharisees had become prideful for their knowledge of the Law and for their spiritual obedience to the Law. Many times, they looked down at the common people because they were ignorant of the Law. As a result, these religious leaders felt more superior than everybody else.

APPLICATION: The Bible teaches that knowledge puffs up. Some of us have grown up in the church and have gained a lot of knowledge from the Scripture. It is easy for us to sound spiritual. We can even do all the right things to appear spiritual like going to church, attending a small group, and even serving in some capacity. We have been deceived that God will save us because of our righteous deeds. That is totally false. Sometimes, we are tempted to look down upon others that do not know the Word as well. We are also tempted to judge people because they are not as disciplined as ourselves in doing all the religious activities. We might even impose certain behavior upon those around us. Are we a legalist? Are we basing our spirituality on spiritual performance? Well, the Pharisees were.

There were not only Pharisees present at the meal, but scribes. They were closely related to the Pharisees. The scribes were experts in the law. They specialized in the interpretation and application of the Old Testament Law. The scribes provided the theological basis for the Pharisees' teaching.

1. The legalist and the Sabbath (14:1-2)

Most of the Pharisees and scribes opposed and hated Jesus because they saw what Jesus was teaching was an attack to their religious system and to them. Therefore, they were threatened by Jesus. They look for ways to make him less influential.

The question I have is, why did the prominent Pharisee invite Jesus, whom the religious leaders hate? This dinner looks like a set up to find ways to accuse Him and to make Him look bad. Right from verse 1, this dinner took place on the Sabbath, which is a day to focus on the Lord. However, the Pharisees had added extra rules stating that one should not do any work on the Sabbath, including healing.

The last invitee was the man suffering from dropsy, which is a medical condition where the body abnormally retains fluids, causing swelling. This is a symptom of disease relating to the heart, lungs, kidneys, or liver. The Pharisees saw this as a sign of God's judgment on this sick man and he was unclean.

It seems strange that a very sick man with dropsy was invited to this meal. Pharisees did not like to hang out with the unclean. He was placed right in front of Jesus. That seems to be suspicious. Is this a set up? In verse 1, it also said that the Jesus was being carefully watched, which has a negative connotation of "spying." It is to watch for an opportunity with negative intent. There was something fishy about this situation. This unclean man was brought to this meal only to be used to be a bait to trap Jesus. I believe the Pharisees were setting Jesus up, hoping to catch Him violating the rabbinic laws, which restricted healing on the Sabbath. They knew that Jesus was a compassionate man and if he saw a sick man that he would heal him. The other Pharisees and scribes were invited so that they could bear witness of what Jesus would do.

[Here we see the legalists going to work on the Sabbath. Now, let's turn to Jesus, who is the Lord of the Sabbath, and see what Jesus does.]

2. The Lord of the Sabbath (14:3-6)

a. What Jesus does (14:4): He heals the man.

Jesus knew that the Pharisees were watching him and would object to his healing on the Sabbath Day and He turned the tables on those that sought to trap Him, and instead he trapped them by asking the Pharisees and scribes in v.3, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”

The Law did not forbid healing on the Sabbath. It was only from their traditions and not from the writings of Moses that forbade such activities. If the Law had opposed healing on the Sabbath, these legalists would have said something about it. They could not acknowledge that the Law did not forbid the healing. If they did, it would prohibit the one thing they planned to use to have against Jesus. However, their refusal to answer Jesus’ calculated question had the same effect. Their hands were tied. Instead of putting Jesus in a predicament, Jesus placed them in a predicament.

When the religious leaders hesitated to reply, Jesus healed the man with dropsy knowing that by doing so, the only thing He would be violating would be the traditions of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees probably thought their plot had succeeded. Jesus has violated their Sabbath restriction by healing a man on Sabbath. But before they could accuse Jesus, who knew what they were thinking, He asked them a second question that paralyzed them. Let me read vv. 3-6, “Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. Then he asked them, “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” And they had nothing to say.” Jesus knew that the Pharisees would rescue their animals, and if so, why would they object to Jesus rescuing this sick man on the Sabbath? Jesus was demonstrating the law of love. The Pharisees’ plan had backfired. Instead of discrediting Jesus, it only exposed their hypocrisy.

[We see what Jesus did as He healed the sick and discredited the religious leaders. Why Jesus does it?]

b. Why Jesus does it (14:5-6):

Jesus never encouraged breaking the Sabbath law, but he taught that this law must be interpreted by love. The Pharisees had focused on the letter of the law instead of the spirit of the Lord. As a result, the religious leaders had become legalistic. Jesus taught that everyone was created in the image of God and they were valuable to God.

[Jesus was not done correcting the religious leaders. Jesus took the offensive as He condemned their pride and called for humility as he proceeded to tell them a parable of a wedding feast as recorded in vv.7-14. This starts the second scene of the passage. This section can be divided into two parts: 1) How to be honored as a guest? 2) How to be honored as a host? Let’s read vv.7-9, where Jesus describes how guests behave as they come to a wedding feast. “When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.”

B. Scene 2: The Parable of Jesus Is Heard (14:7-14)

Although the Pharisees were watching Jesus, in reality, Jesus was watching the Pharisee's prideful behavior. Jesus took note as the guests selected their seats. As a result, Jesus used a parable to communicate an important lesson on humility. A parable is not an allegory in which everything has a hidden mysterious message. It is an illustration used to communicate a particular principle. Some describe parables as earthly stories that illustrate heavenly messages.

1. How to be honored as a guest (14:7-11)

a. Negative (14:7-8):

A regular table in a home is in a U-shaped. The host would sit in the middle and the person sitting on his right was considered the most honored person. The person sitting on his left was the next most important person. When the guests entered the room, there was a mad scramble to get to the seats of honor. It was a normal practice of the Pharisees to strive to be seen in an elevated position.

The Pharisees used the principle of reciprocation. The honored guests were those who had honored the host in the past or were capable of honoring them in the future. This whole system is based on self-promotion.

APPLICATION: It is like the principle of if I scratch your back, you scratch my back. The only reason one would do a good act is so that he could get a pay back. This is not based on love. Love is wanting the best for the one that you love. It is unconditional. However, the reciprocation principle is focusing only on self, not on the other person. Why do we do a good act for another? Is it because we love him or do we expect that person to do something back for us? Is it unconditional or conditional?

Jesus explains how this was not a good practice because it could backfire on the individual when the host had someone more distinguished that he wanted to sit in that seat. Then the host would ask the less important person to give up his seat. This was pretty humiliating in front of all the people. Not only that, but everyone would have their seat already and the only seat that would still be available was at the end of the table, which was the least honored place. Don't sit at the head of the table, lest you be removed upon the arrival of someone more important!

[After giving a negative warning to the religious leaders, Jesus gives a positive advice as recorded in vv.10, "But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests."]

b. Positive (14:9-11):

A better course of action for the guest is to go and sit at the last place. When the host notices that you are to be in a higher position, he will move you up. This will give you much honor in front of everyone else. Jesus is not teaching the Pharisees to have good etiquette. It is not about getting applause from men, but getting applause from God. Who are we trying to impress? Men or God? Too often, we want status; we want to look good in front of others outwardly. Jesus wanted them to examine their hearts and not just their actions. God knows our motive behind our action. May we do it to honor God and not ourselves.

[After Jesus show the religious leaders how to be honored as a guest, he goes on to explain how to be honored as a host in vv. 12-14, "Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at

the resurrection of the righteous.” Here Jesus explains who we should invite and who we should not invite.]

2. How to be honored as a host (14:12-14)

Jesus did not mean literally to forbid inviting rich guests, family members or friends, to our homes or to insist that all feasts must be confined to poor people, but to teach that no service is to be done with the hope of personal gain. What Jesus is against is limiting our guest list to those who can repay us with a reciprocal dinner.

Jesus was not giving merely rules of social hospitality; he was illustrating the great spiritual principle of humility and unselfish motives in our deeds of kindness. We are not only to do a kind act so that it can be reciprocated to us. Humility is not serving those who can repay. Humility is serving those who are needy and cannot repay.

ILLUSTRATION: Our small group recently adopted a refugee family from the Ivory Coast. Pen and Janet have demonstrated how to be a great host by inviting them to activities and taking good care of them without expecting anything in return. That is a heart prompted by humility and love.

Jesus is basically saying that we should not be thinking about what is in for us. If there is nothing that I could gain from it, then I will not perform this act of kindness. Unless I receive some benefit, then I do not want to do it. That kind of service is for personal gain only. God is more interested in our hearts than our action. God loves a humble and selfless heart.

ILLUSTRATION: Jesus shows the ultimate humility and selflessness as He offered Himself to pay the penalty of mankind’s sin by dying on the cross. Surely, that cannot be repaid. Surely, we are undeserved for the Son of God to make such a great sacrifice on our behalf when we disobey and curse His name.

I would like to conclude by reading v. 11, which is the key verse of this passage. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” This principle always works. However, this is contrary to what the world says, where they climb up the ladder of success in anyway possible. But God makes it clear that He will reward and exalt those that humble themselves. This can only be done consistently if we recognize that we are weak and God is strong. Too often, we think we can do anything. But in reality, that is not true. God is the one that can do anything. When we humble ourselves before Him, then He goes to work. I will conclude by reading (1 Peter 5:5-6) “‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

The pride young person that I introduced in the beginning of the sermon was me. As I exalted myself, God humbled me. It was a hard lesson to learn. But as I humbled myself to the Lord acknowledging that I am nothing, then God in due time lifted me up.