

Table Talk
Luke 14:1-14
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As we come to Luke 14, there are three elements that make this text very exciting. Number one, the text involves Jesus invited to eat at the home of a Pharisee. Any time Jesus is invited to eat at a Pharisee's house, you know something exciting is going to happen. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall to watch this unfold.

Number two, this event was exciting because the invitation was for the Sabbath day, which intensifies the event. They wanted to trap Jesus into doing something to break their Sabbath law. Notice I emphasized "their Sabbath" law. It wasn't God's. Jesus never, ever violated God's laws. Jesus broke their man-made tradition and their twisting of the law, not the true spirit of the law or intent of the law.

Number three, this text is exciting because there was a man at the meal who was sick. I believe this sick man was planted at this meal in order to trap Jesus, because He was going to heal this infirmed man. Any time Jesus was in the presence of someone in need, He always met that need.

Jesus used this lunch or dinner opportunity to teach some important lessons. There are three lessons here. First, there is the warning about the danger of religiosity, which is religion without true relationship. Second, Jesus speaks of the need for true humility. And third, we see a lesson that we should live for eternity.

Let's look first at the danger of religiosity, verses 1-6. "Now it happened, as He..." that is, "Jesus" "...went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees..." probably a member of the Sanhedrin or a leader in the synagogue "...to eat bread on the Sabbath..." it could have been either lunch or dinner "...that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him..." meaning he was right in front of Jesus in plain view "...who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'" This was a question Jesus asked. And any time Jesus asked a question, we should pay attention.

Verse 4, "But they kept silent." They didn't know what to say, because they didn't want to incriminate themselves. So they held their peace. "And He took him and healed him, and let him go." I like this description by Doctor Luke of this healing. Jesus put His hands on the man and took hold of him. He "healed him," which means the man was instantly, completely healed, and then Jesus "let him go."

Verse 5, "Then He answered them, saying, 'Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?'" This was the second question Jesus asked. "And they could not answer Him regarding these things." Again, they could not answer Jesus, because it would be self-incriminating. They didn't want to expose

their hypocrisy, their inconsistency and their duplicity.

Now notice, in verse 1, that Jesus went to the house of one of the chief Pharisees. If I were Jesus, I'd say, "No way! You're hostile! You're trying to trap me! You're evil men! I'm not going to have lunch with you!" But Jesus is not like me. And sadly, I'm not like Him. Jesus loved them and cared for them and He even went to the untouchables. So He went to the religious to try to win them to Him. All through the Gospel of Luke, which has as its theme "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), Jesus is reaching out to these religious Jews.

I would have written them off a long time ago, but He is patient and kind and compassionate. Oh, that we would have some of His patience and some of His compassion! Jesus wasn't living in isolation, but He didn't get polluted by them; He tried to influence them and win them, but they were so hardened.

These stories of His encounters with Pharisees, especially at meal times and on Sabbath days, are just a description by Luke to show us the Jewish people rejected Jesus. "He came to His own [people], and His own [people] did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

So Jesus went to be a guest at a meal, "to eat bread on the Sabbath, and they watched Him closely." The phrase "watched Him" means they were staring very intently at Him. They were locked in on Him, staring at Him and waiting for Him to make a wrong move.

The statement that "they watched Him" reminds me that people are watching us. They watch to see how we will act. Sometimes when my wife and I go shopping at The Home Depot or Lowe's, it's usually Monday, so I'm a bit "spiritually crabby." When we go in, she'll say, "John, you never know who's watching; be good." You can't believe what happens to me a lot! I'll get somebody to wait on me in a store, and they don't tell me that they go to Revival until after everything's done. There have been so many times I thought, Whew! I'm so glad I didn't yell at that guy! So pray for me.

There are people watching us. We need to be careful, because they're watching how we conduct ourselves.

Verse 2, "And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy." Dropsy is the swelling of the body with excess fluid. It was caused by organ failure. Some internal organ fails, causing a build-up of fluid in the arms, legs or in the torso. And it could be life threatening. It was very dangerous. So this man was seriously ill.

Verse 3, "And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'" The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews devoted to keeping the law. The lawyers were the scholars who translated the Scriptures and wrote the laws. According to these two groups and their religious traditions, it wasn't lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. But not according to God's law. They said you could stop someone from dying, but you couldn't help them get better on the Sabbath. If someone was bleeding, you could stop the bleeding,

but you couldn't put any ointment on the bandage, because that would be "healing" on the Sabbath. That was a "work," so you couldn't do that. Jesus exposed their inconsistency with the question, so, verse 4, "They kept silent."

I like Doctor Luke's description here: "And He took him and healed him, and let him go." Jesus actually grabbed hold of the man and healed him. In the Greek, the word "healed" here means "to completely, thoroughly and instantly restore." So Jesus made him whole. And then he "let him go." What a beautiful picture of Christ's compassion and power.

Verse 5, "Then He answered them, saying, 'Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?'" They would do this. They said that you can't heal or help anybody on the Sabbath, but if their donkey or their ox fell into a pit, they would pull it out.

This reminds me of a news article this week of a large, bull moose that fell into a nine-foot well. A little boy was out on his farm and saw horns sticking up out of the well. It took about two hours to get him out. They had to get down in the well and strap him up. Then a big crane lifted the moose out of the well, they let him loose and he ran back into the forest. So I thought this verse was pretty cool; "Which of you, having a [moose] or an ox that has fallen into a [well], will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?"

It's sad, though, that sometimes we care more about animals than we do people. We'll go to all this work to save a moose—and rightfully so—but we murder human beings in their mother's womb. How sad. We put more emphasis on animals than we do on even caring for people. That's the result of being "religious" but not having a relationship with God.

Here Jesus is showing them their inconsistency. Certainly they would pull out their donkey or ox from a well if it fell in, even though it was the Sabbath day. When Jesus asked them the question, in verse 6, "They could not answer Him regarding these things." That's because they would be exposed for their hypocrisy.

Jesus manifests love, compassion and sympathy. Compassion is different than pity. "Pity weeps and walks away; compassion moves you to help and stay." You do something about it. When you have compassion, which is closely associated with sympathy which means "to feel with," you have to take action. So as Christians, we should follow Christ's example, and we should have compassion on those who are in need and show mercy to them. The love, compassion and sympathy of Christ is something that we should demonstrate in loving others, serving others, praying for others and helping others in their hour of need.

But avoid legalism; we try to use it on people for our own purposes. In our text, they brought this poor man in to Jesus, not caring for his plight, but just as bait to trap Jesus. They didn't care for this man's soul. But Jesus cared for the man's soul, and so should we.

The second lesson we learn at this meal on the Sabbath day was the need for true humility, verses 7-11. "So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose

the best places, saying to them....” I want to point out that He was speaking to those who were invited. This is His instruction to the guests who He observed when they came together for this meal at the Pharisee’s house.

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. He told this story about what was going on, but it had a spiritual application. It was about the importance of humility. He told them how to be a dinner guest; how not to seat yourself but how to seat yourself. In verse 7, He noticed that those who were invited to dinner were jockeying for the chief seats at the table. There was the seat of honor for the host, to his right would be the person he honored most and to his left would be the person he would honor second to that.

I can kind of see them playing musical chairs for the seats of honor. Have you ever played musical chairs? That’s a dangerous game. You can break your leg or your neck or die playing that. You’re fighting over chairs and falling on the floor. So these guests were fighting over the seats of honor. They are self-promoting or trying to be well-known. They cared more about their reputation than their character.

Jesus was observing this, so in verse 8-9, He’s telling us how not to seat ourselves at a feast. He said, “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place...” or “don’t promote yourself and give yourself the seat of honor” “...lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.”

Here Jesus is giving us some practical advice on how to be a guest at dinner. You don’t walk in and sit in the seat of honor. You need to be careful and not do that, because if you do, the host may tell you, “I’m sorry; that seat is reserved for someone else.” And then with shame, you would have to take a lower seat.

Now Jesus tells us how to seat ourselves as a guest at dinner. Verse 10, “But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’” He’ll promote you. “Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.”

And here’s the axiom of the kingdom. Jesus spoke this multiple times in the Gospels. It is foundational to the Christian life. Verse 11, “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” So humble yourself or you will be abased. Self-exaltation always leads to shame. If you don’t begin with humility, you’ll end with humiliation. Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” So we need to be careful to practice humility.

And it has to be a genuine humility. You can’t say, “Okay, I’ve got it figured out. If I go in and act real humble and sit in this lowly seat, then the host will tell me, ‘Oh, no! That’s not for you; come up higher,’ so I’ll get a higher seat. Then I’ll take a selfie and put it on Facebook. Here I am with so-and-so.” They’ll say, “Wow! You’re awesome!”

Isn't it funny that when we take a selfie, it's always with some famous person or we're doing some amazing thing? We want everybody to know how happy we are. And many times it's just self-promotion or self-advancement. We really don't care about the person or our character; we just care about our reputation. So be very careful.

There's nothing worse than a false or phony humility. I've seen Christians go to potlucks who look around at the food but don't take any food. Someone will ask, "Hey, bro, aren't you going to eat?"

"No; I'm fasting."

"Wow! You're spiritual! Well, I'm not, so get out of the way. I want some mashed potatoes!"

And you come to the potluck with your hair disheveled and you talk softly, because that sounds more humble. You're not more humble or spiritual; you're a showoff. It's a reverse form of pride.

Humility must be authentic and genuine. The humble person does not think less of himself; he just doesn't think about himself. You don't put yourself down; you just don't think about yourself. You think about others. Someone called humility "the queen of all the Christian graces." I say "Amen" to that.

So when you are bidden to a wedding feast, don't promote yourself, don't put yourself in a place of prominence. "I'll be famous if I sit by them, I'll be more popular or I'll have a greater prestige if I sit in this seat." Take a humble spot and then you will be lifted up. The principle is to let God exalt you.

In Philippians 2:3, 5-11, Paul says, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind..." which is your attitude "...let each esteem others better than himself....Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation." We're always trying to enlarge our reputation. "...taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Jesus Christ was humble, and Jesus Christ was thus exalted by God and now sits at the right hand of God the Father. And He is Lord over all.

Jesus said of John the Baptist that "among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). And one day his disciples came to John and said, "Everyone's going to Jesus to be baptized," though Jesus Himself did not baptize His disciples. "Everyone's leaving our baptism and going to Jesus to be baptized. Would you like

us to put some flyers on their donkeys in the donkey parking lot so they'll come to our baptism?" But John said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven" (John 3:27). And then John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

I wish we had that same heart. "God, be magnified. God, be glorified." The only way we can glorify God is to humble ourselves. And we humble ourselves when we see God and we see how God looks at us; when we see how unworthy we are, and we see God's mercy, forgiveness and blessing.

Humility is so important in Christian service; that we don't self-promote and that there is no politicking going on in the church. Promotion doesn't come from the east or the west; it comes from the Lord. Let God lift you up. If you're going to be promoted or recognized, let God lift you up in His time. The Bible says, "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6). And James 4:6 says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." So we want to experience God's grace.

Verse 10 of our text is actually a proverb of Solomon, from Proverbs 25:6-7. Verse 10, "But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.'" And many times in Jesus' teaching He quoted what we read in verse 11: "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." This is what's called "an axiom of the kingdom" or a firm, essential truth of kingdom living. If you exalt yourself, you'll be humbled; if you humble yourself, you'll be exalted.

Many times in the Bible people exalted themselves and God humbled them. How about Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon? "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30). No sooner had the words gotten out of his mouth than God struck him with insanity. He became a wild beast and drabbed in the field for seven years until he came to his senses and humbled himself. Then God reinstated him and lifted him up. But those who humbled themselves, God exalted. It's God's pattern and God's program.

So He warns us of the dangers of religiosity—don't be a legalist. Have a relationship with Christ. Show compassion and love. Don't be a legalist and put tradition above God's Word, don't put tradition above caring for, helping and ministering to people. Do it joyfully and thankfully. And we need to be humble, so God will lift us up. Don't bemoan your lowly spot. Maybe God wants to do a work in your heart. God knows when to lift you up, and God knows when to bring you down. Trust Him.

The third lesson we see in our text is in verses 12-14: to live for eternity. In verses 7-11, Jesus was speaking to the dinner guests, telling them how not to seat themselves and then how to seat themselves. Now in verses 12-14, Jesus is speaking to the dinner host, telling him who to invite to his lunch or dinner. "Then He also said to him who invited Him, 'When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest

they also invite you back, and you be repaid.”

So Jesus was dealing with our motives. He tells us who we should and shouldn't invite. But don't misunderstand verse 12; Jesus is not saying that when you have a dinner, don't invite your family or friends or the rich over. What He is saying is don't habitually, exclusively, only invite family, friends or the rich over. “If I sit there, I'll be famous. If I have them at my house for dinner, then they'll invite me over for dinner. And we'll really look good when they do that.” God knows our hearts. He knows our motives. And our motives aren't pure. So He tells us who not to invite exclusively.

Now He's going to tell us who we should invite. Verse 13, “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” I like this last verse.

There will be a resurrection or life beyond the grave. And Jesus wants us to live with an eternal perspective. Many times as Christians we get locked into the now. But life is “a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). The Bible affirms the certainty of death and the brevity of life. “As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone” (Psalm 103:15-16). So we need to have an eternal perspective.

That's why Paul said, “We do not look at the things which are seen...” because they are temporal “...but at the things which are not seen,” because they are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:18). Get your eyes off the temporal, off the mundane, and get your eyes on the eternal. It will help you to be motivated.

So have compassion, sympathy, humility, care for others, and when you throw a feast, invite people who are poor, maimed and blind. This is what God does. He calls the “foolish,” the “weak” and the “despised...that no flesh shall glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). Then verse 14 says that “You will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” And there is such a thing as the resurrection.

As you live your life in compassion, love and humility, you need to think in terms of eternity. “What am I doing to invest in the eternal? Do I “lay up for [myself] treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:20)?

There will be rewards given out for Christians when they get to heaven. It's called “the bema,” which is the reward seat of Christ, in 2 Corinthians 5:10. Every Christian won't be judged for their sins, but we will be judged for our service.

How do you serve the Lord? Do you do it for His glory? Do you do it to help others? Do you do it humbly? Do you do it in His name? Do you do it in dependence and reliance on the Holy Spirit? Or do you do it to advance your own popularity?

When you get to heaven, you want to hear the Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful

servant....Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matthew 25:21). Live for the eternal. Life goes so fast that when you get down the road further, you start looking around and think, What have I done of eternal consequence? What have I done for eternity? So remember the bema, the reward seat of Christ. When our works are tried in the fire, they will either be "wood, hay, straw" and burned up—but we will still be saved by the skin of our teeth—or we will be rewarded when our works stand the test of fire, because they are "gold, silver, precious stones" (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). They were done for the glory of God in the power of the Spirit.

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector that Jesus gave in Luke 18:9-14, it ends with the same statement He gave in verse 11 of our text. He said, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted." In that parable, the Pharisee and tax collector both went to the synagogue on a Saturday and the Pharisee—just like the one we have in our text—stood up and prayed, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess." You can hear the synagogue applaud the Pharisee for his "good works," and he takes a bow. And the Pharisee loves the chief seats in the synagogue.

Can you imagine praying like that in church on Sunday?! "God, I thank you I'm not like that person over there who looks really messed up!"

But the tax collector who not even lift his eyes up toward heaven. He just beat his breast and said through his tears, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Isn't that a beautiful prayer? Then Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other." It was the tax collector, the man who was humble. And immediately after that Jesus spoke the words, "For everyone who exalts himself..." the Pharisee "...will be humbled, and he who humbles himself..." the tax collector "...will be exalted."

God sees your heart. God knows your heart. We need to show compassion. We need to be humble. And we need to live for eternity.