

The Parables of Jesus

- The Lowest Seat at the Feast

(Luke 14:8-14)

This parable was given while Jesus was still in the region of Galilee. He was invited to the house of the "chief Pharisee" of that region to "eat bread" on the Sabbath. - Luke 14:1. The text does not specifically tell us why Jesus was invited to this "chief Pharisee's" home. Knowing the "relationship" that has been reported between

Jesus and the religious leaders, it may be safe to say that there was some type of "hidden agenda" involved with this invitation. We may have been given a clue to their motives by our writer, Luke.

We read in Luke 14:1 that when they arrived at the house, the text is very clear as it states that it was "*the Sabbath day,*" and that "*...they watched Him.*" Then in the very next verse we read that there just happened to be a man present who just happened to have an illness. This illness was called at that time "dropsy." This illness/ disease would be one that would make this man to be considered "unclean." In verse 1 it tells us that they specifically "*went into the house.*" It was when they "went into the house" that we meet this man. The question that we might ask would be how or why would this "unclean" man be in the "chief Pharisee's" house? Hmm...

There may be three possible answers. The first possibility was that this man had heard about Jesus and was willing to bypass the ridicule of being unclean by the religious leaders because He wanted Jesus to heal. It may have been, as we have seen in other accounts, that this man just came and went into the house on His own and didn't care what others thought. We don't know if this was the case because we do not hear any dialogue between Jesus and the man and we do not hear Jesus mention anything about this man having faith that Jesus could heal him.

The second possibility is that this was a "divine appointment" set up by God for Jesus to bring forth another healing and teaching. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, could have known that this man would be there and that it was set forth for a "divine" purpose.

The third possibility was that this was a "set up" by the religious leaders to entrap Jesus in breaking the law of the Sabbath. It could have been that they were so intent on trapping Jesus in something that they could accuse Him of that they would be willing to bypass the risk of becoming "unclean" by being in the presence of this, who they considered to be, an "unclean" person. We are not sure which of these possibilities could be the correct one. However, as I had mentioned a clue could be found in verse 1 as it tells us, "*...they watched Him.*" Hmm...

Whatever, it may have been, we do know that this man had an illness called "dropsy." "Dropsy" was the term used in our text for the modern day illness called "edema." Dropsy (edema) is not so much an illness as it is a symptom of a possibly more serious affliction. The term derives from the word "hydropsie," which comes from the Greek word "*hydropikos.*" Persons suffering from "dropsy" experience excessive swelling due to a superabundance and build up of bodily fluids. This is usually a result of congestive heart failure. His body was retaining too much fluid which was causing parts of his body to swell and become severely deformed. It causes swelling of the soft tissues in the body due to the accumulation of excess water.

This man being there did not catch Jesus off guard. Immediately, as the text tells us, Jesus, knowing the thoughts of the lawyers and Pharisees present, asked them if it was lawful to heal someone on the Sabbath. If they were trying to entrap Jesus, He immediately "called their bluff" by putting the onus right back on them. They "held their peace" and did not answer him.

This question by Jesus had placed the Pharisees into a bind. If they had said "No" to Jesus' question, they are denying a neighbor who was in need the help he so clearly needs. By saying "No" to Jesus, they would be seen as either the most heartless of people and it would make them to be liars and hypocrites concerning fulfilling the law of "loving your neighbor. If they had said "yes, it is permissible," it would have

put a big dent in their “man made traditions” concerning the Sabbath and it would have validated all of the healings and miracles Jesus had done on the Sabbath. Therefore, they chose not to answer which really made them look even worse. Jesus healed the man and let him go on his way.

Jesus then turns and brings forth a teaching that would reveal their hard –heartedness as He poses another question to the leadership. In Luke 14:5-6 Jesus asks, *“Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?”* Again they could not, or rather would not, answer him. We see how “hard-hearted” these men were.

After this encounter we can see that it came to pass that it was time for all to be seated. Jesus noticed that the invited guests began scurrying about seeking to sit and dine in the room which would have the most prestigious of those in attendance. This may seem a little comical. Here, after Jesus chastises them concerning the incorrect attitude of their heart and possibly ruining their plan of entrapping Him, they seem to just shuck it off and say oh well, and then go on with what is to them the more important matter at hand being that they were at the “chief Pharisee’s” home. The real important issue for them now was getting the right seat at the right table with the right people and in the right room.

In that time, we must remember, these homes were not mansions. They were homes that would have a few small rooms. When there was a large gathering, it was customary to set up dining areas in the different rooms. Apparently, the custom at feasts or celebrations was that there was an order to the seating arrangements (either at the tables or even sitting in different rooms) according to a person's so called social or religious status. Jesus, in taking this all in, then proceeds with this first of two parables. Actually, I consider this “parable” more of a direct teaching by Jesus, rather than a parable.

The Parable of the "Lowest Seat at the Feast" - Luke 14:8-14 - *"When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

The parable/teaching in itself is self-explanatory. Jesus also gives us the point of the parable/teaching. We must remember, Jesus gave this parable as He was watching the leaders vie for position at the dinner party at the "Chief Pharisee's" home that they were invited to attend to meet with Jesus. We must also remember that this whole scenario came after the account of the healing of the man with “dropsy” and whether it was right to heal and help someone in need on the Sabbath. They are connected.

Obviously, this is a parable/teaching that had to do with their incorrect attitude and hardness of heart. They were more concerned with their own position and carnal things than the needs of others (e.g. the man who had “dropsy”). It was all about them and how they looked to their peers and how their peers had perceived each other. It exposed their pride and their incorrect attitude of heart concerning humility. It exposed them for who they were – self-righteous and uncaring leaders to those whom they were entrusted to care for – God’s people.

It is important to note that Jesus was not coming against anyone's particular position of honor or status. He was addressing everyone's incorrect attitude of heart - from the least to the highest. The attitude of heart of those present was about making appearances of being better than what they may have really been. It was all about “appearances” and who they were "seen" with or "sitting next to." The higher the place and the more prestigious the people they sat with the more important it made them look. It was all about their pride and ego and most of all their self-righteous attitude of heart.

Jesus simply taught that the more a person tried and thought to be someone who they were not, the more embarrassment and shame they would end up bringing to themselves. He expressed that it was more important to have a humble heart and walk in humility and to not think of yourself more highly than you really are. The real moral that Jesus wanted to bring forth is found in verse 14 as He states, *"...For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."* In other words if a person "works" at exalting himself the very opposite will happen. It is humility, a broken and contrite heart that God delights in. That is what will cause a person to be looked upon by others, and most importantly by God, in a most favorable way.

We can see a hint of irony in this whole setting which brings this parable to another level. The lawyers, Pharisees and leaders were so indignant that Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath because healing would be considered an act of "working on the Sabbath." Yet here they were, "working hard" at getting a seat that would be considered a place of honor and recognition within what they considered would be the room set aside for the most honored of guests. Did I say irony or is it hypocrisy??!! Hmmm....

Many leaders within the Body of Christ these days need to revisit this parable and check out what their own motives and attitude of heart is when invited to dinners, meetings or events where other dignitaries and highly respected people in authority within the church Body or community would be in attendance. I have seen leaders push people out of the way and force themselves in, just to be "seen" with certain people. Again I ask, "Is this ironic, or is it out and out hypocrisy, pride and ego?" Jesus was teaching His disciples, both at that time, as well as today, what the correct attitude of heart should be for those who are in any leadership position. It must be that of humility and humbleness. Most importantly their primary concern must be the caring for, and tending to, God's people who have been entrusted to them.

Jesus reveals another incorrect attitude of heart that was within these religious leaders. It seemed that they had their own little "clique" among themselves. Anytime they had a feast they would invite only the "elite," expecting that they in turn would be invited to each other's feasts. It was, if you will, a "quid pro quo" system. Jesus was coming against the attitude of heart of "elitism" which is a form of prejudice and discrimination as well as pride and ego. Leadership, according to Jesus has nothing to do with "status" and the appearance of status but has everything to do with being a true servant to God's people.

Jesus proceeds to teach and give an example of what the correct attitude of the heart should be for those who are in leadership, places of authority, honor or privilege. Jesus now turns to the "chief Pharisee," the one whose house they were in and who coordinated the gathering. It was directed at the "chief Pharisee" for a specific purpose – because he was the "chief Pharisee." He was the leader of the leadership. He should have been the one who should know all of this yet he did not. Jesus would politely, yet directly bring correction to this "chief Pharisee" – the one who everyone was scurrying about and vying to sit at his table or at least be in the same room with.

He states in Luke 14:12-14, *"Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."*

Jesus was teaching the chief Pharisee and all the others who were present, as well as leadership in the Body of Christ today, that they should not be doing things with the "quid pro quo" attitude of doing something with the expectations of getting something in return. The correct attitude of heart is to truly love others who are in need and in desperate situations giving to them even though they have nothing to give in return. With God there is no respecter of persons and neither should there be with any of God's people.

Actually, the correct attitude of heart is that you should have no expectations of being repaid. Jesus was telling them that those who are in positions of honor, wealth or privilege should use whatever they may have to give to those who are in need even though they may never be able to reciprocate.

Jesus tells us that it is this person, who has this heart, who will truly be blessed – not just in this lifetime but in the time to come, at the *“resurrection of the just.”* Notice, Jesus specifically, states, *“...the resurrection of the just.”* Those present were very well aware of what He was expressing. Everyone there knew that there was going to be a resurrection of the just **and** the unjust. They all thought that because they were descendents of Abraham that it was automatic that they were part of the *“resurrection of the just.”* The resurrection of the unjust was for the sinners, the heathen and Gentiles.

Jesus in saying what He said was stating that their thinking in this was incorrect and they may very well be in danger of experiencing the *“resurrection of the unjust.”* Those whose heart is correctly motivated in looking after the needs of others will be blessed and rewarded in the resurrection. In other words, "great will be their reward in heaven." This may be a very important lesson for all of us to grasp, today.

A person may call themselves a *“Christian”* and even come from a good *“Christian”* family and because of that they feel they are assured of heaven. However, if we truly listen to what Jesus is teaching no one should feel *“secure”* just because of their family background or heritage or even because they attend a certain denomination or church or even may have said *“a prayer.”* It is all about walking and living in a personal relationship with our God and expressing the lifestyle in which Jesus taught and role modeled.

This then led to someone in the house to say, *“... Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”* - Luke 14:15 (KJV) Jesus, in response to this person's remark, immediately proceeded to bring forth the next parable - The Parable of the *“Invitation to a Great Banquet”* - Luke 14:16-24. We will discuss this parable in next month's *“Parable of the Month.”* Stay tuned!! 😊