

Exalted or Humbled?

Luke 14

The Pharisees in Jesus' day were not priests or pastors. They were laymen who organized and controlled the local synagogues. They were highly respected by the Jewish people and were considered holy men of God.

But Acts 23:6 says that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead while the Sadducees did not. The Pharisees were more conservative than the Sadducees since they believed that all the books of the Old Testament were inspired by God. However, they were also like the religious cults and the Roman Catholic Church of today because they considered oral traditions to control how the Bible should be interpreted.

The gospels reveal that the Pharisees were proud men who wanted others to think they were very spiritual men. In the Sermon on the Mount, we discover that when the Pharisees gave to the poor they would have someone blow a trumpet, so others would know that they were giving to the poor (Matthew 6:1-4). They would pray on street corners, so others would see them (Matthew 6:5). As a result, in Matthew 23, Jesus repeatedly rebuked them for being hypocrites. In this study Jesus rebukes, them for a sin that is the root of all sins. Our study comes from Luke 14:1-14.

The Trap Is Baited with Lunch

In Luke 13:31-35, we were told the Pharisees had warned Jesus that Herod Antipas threatened to murder Him. But truth was that Herod was actually attempting to motivate Jesus to leave Perea and move to Jerusalem. Also, the Pharisees wanted to motivate Jesus to return to Judah where they would have a greater opportunity to finally murder Him. Luke 14:1 helps us to understand that some amount of time had elapsed when we are told in John 14:1-14 that Jesus was invited to a meal. Verse 1 states that it was a Sabbath or a Saturday.

It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely. Luke 14:1 (NASB)

Verse 1 says that Jesus entered the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees. Possibly he was a member of the Sanhedrin Council. The phrase “eat bread” was a common phrase for eating a meal together. Bread was a major portion of a meal. The word “they” indicates that a group of people were present and maybe many Pharisees were among them. However, we do not know who or how many were there.

The purpose for the invitation was **not to establish a relationship** with Jesus **or to motivate Jesus to treat them more kindly when He spoke publicly**. The reason this event is described is to help us understand the hardness of the hearts of the Pharisees and to motivate us to realize we are proud and should desire to become humble.

And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. Luke 14:2. In verse 2 we are told that the Pharisees had asked a man with dropsy to be present. Dropsy is an old medical term for edema. The man had swelling in some part(s) of his body. He had a medical need. **This was a trap!** Jesus had cast out a demon on a Sabbath early in His ministry (Mark 1:21-34). Then in the third year of His ministry, He healed a man’s withered hand (Luke 6:6-11) on the Sabbath. Jesus also cast a demon out of a woman on a Sabbath so that she would no longer be bent over (Luke 13:10-17). This time they wanted to catch Him healing another person on a Sabbath.

The Pharisees’ believed that any healing on the Sabbath was forbidden since it was a work according to their list of religious rules. The Mishnah, an oral tradition, contains a list of tasks that were forbidden on the Sabbath. One of the prohibited tasks or “works” described in the Shabbat section of the Mishnah was “grinding.” According to their view, healing involved “grinding” since the preparation of medicines required grinding. Thus, the Pharisees considered Jesus’ acts of healing a violation of their oral law. So, Jesus had been offending them for He was violating their laws and, in the process, embarrassed them.

Consequently, they were looking for more reasons to justify murdering Jesus. Apparently, they had asked the man with dropsy to be at the meal. However, it is unlikely that they had asked him to join them for a meal.

To be able to eat a meal with a group of men who had outwardly opposed you and inwardly had wanted to kill you could appear to be a positive sign. But the last part of verse 1 tells us that the Pharisees were watching Him closely. The Greek word for “watching closely” is *paratero*. It has the meaning of **“to stand beside and watch”** and **“to watch with evil intent as in Mark 3:2.”** [5] This teaches us that the Pharisees were watching to catch Him making a mistake.

They had planned the meal to be the bait to lure Jesus into a trap. They wanted Jesus to heal the man so that they would be justified in finding fault with Him.

Sabbath Laws

We do not know during what part of the day the meal was served. We do not know how long Jesus was there before He spoke. Verse 3 reveals that conversation was in process when Jesus spoke. ***And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”*** Luke 14:3 (NASB)

Jesus asked a simple question, ***“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”*** Jesus may have been replying to a comment; it is also possible that He changed the subject, but we do not know. But the Pharisees did not want to reply because verse 4 states that they did not answer. ***“But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him and sent him away.”*** Luke 14:4 (NASB)

The Greek text indicates the Pharisees refused to speak. Most likely they had agreed in advance to not speak since they expected that Jesus would ask some difficult and embarrassing questions just as He had done before when He healed a man’s withered hand on a Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11). Whatever their reason, they said nothing.

On that occasion Jesus had asked if a lamb fell into a pit on the Sabbath, would not the owner rescue the sheep, even though it was the Sabbath? [6] Then He commented that a man was more valuable than sheep. This time Jesus increases the urgency and importance of the situation by replacing the sheep with a man's son. *And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" And they could make no reply to this.* Luke 14:5-6 (NASB)

Jesus' point is simple. When there are urgent situations, the Sabbath rules need to be broken. As Christians we must remember that in Hebrews 10:23-25 we are commanded to regularly attend worship. One of the benefits is to encourage others in the faith and be encouraged ourselves.

Jesus was not trying to tell the Pharisees that they had the freedom to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath when they felt like it. Nor was Jesus trying to tell us that worship was optional. Some believe that Christians should not feel shame for missing church. Sadly, they miss the command in Hebrews 10:23-25. Serious Christians will faithfully want to please God the Father and worship Him on Sunday. Jesus' message to the Pharisees that when emergencies occur, God wants us to care for the individual in need or in crisis. Early in Jesus' ministry He had said that man was not made for the Sabbath. *Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."* Mark 2:27 (NASB)

The Pharisees had created many rules for people to keep on the Sabbath. The Pharisees had convinced themselves that their rules would prevent someone from disobeying one of God's commandments. Their rules supposedly provided protection against displeasing God. Therefore, they believed the oral traditions were essential to gaining eternal life. Consequently, **they believed Jesus was wrong in what He believed and was a threat.** Their religious system was in danger of collapse. But how did they respond to the obvious need to be compassionate when a son's life is at risk on the Sabbath? Once again Jesus embarrassed them. Therefore, they kept silent. We can imagine that the feelings of embarrassment quickly changed to anger.

But they did not realize that the situation was only going to become worse. Jesus was going to share an embarrassing parable. Jesus often taught in parables to expose the truth to those whose heart was pliable and hide the truth from those with hard hearts. He taught many parables to expose the error of the Pharisees. I believe He did this to set the Pharisees up to do the right thing. It was never His fault that they always chose to do the WRONG thing!!

So, was Jesus trying to condemn the Pharisees with His parables or was He attempting to motivate them to examine themselves and repent? His illustration was excellent and His principle of *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* was correct.

He wants you and me to examine ourself and expose any sinful pride. **Pride is concerned with who is right, but the humble are concerned with what is right.** Pride tends to focus on others, but humility does what is right. Jesus tells us what is right and if we are humble, we will do it. Those filled with pride will object and find an excuse because they think they are better!

Jesus is the perfect example of humility. He humbled Himself by taking on human form and dying on a cross to save us from our sins. We could not and will not ever be able to repay Him. Romans 5:8 said He died for us who are sinners and Romans 5:10 calls us enemies of God. Jesus’ parables call us to humility and to care for others.

This incident also reveals the hatred of the Pharisees for Christ. Most of them rejected Christ and had Him murdered. They were proud people. Proud people rejected Christ because they thought they are better than He was!! Are you proud or humble? If you are humble, then your next step is to become a Christian by believing in Jesus Christ and accepting Him as Lord and Savior.

Bottom line – do a humility check. See what motivates you in life.