Text: Luke 14:1-14
Title: Mercy, Humility, and Selflessness
Truth: Jesus teaches his followers three important character traits.
Date/Location: Sunday October 20, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

Jesus is invited into the home of one of the Pharisees for a meal. He uses the event to teach three important truths, each in turn to a different part of the audience: the lawyers and Pharisees, the guests, and the host.

I. A Rebuke for the Lawyers and Pharisees, v. 1-6

A. The meal could have been after a morning synagogue service on that Saturday (Sabbath). It was a large production because it was at the home of a ruler of the Pharisees. Whatever the details of his "position," he was prominent in the society there. There were a lot of people there. Verses 7 and following indicate that people were choosing (jockeying) for the best places to sit, so status was important at this meeting.

B. The Pharisees watched him closely. They were suspicious. They had evil minds. They were not at ease, not going along like normal.

C. There was a sick man right there in front of Him. You could not miss the guy, and his condition was probably evident from massive swelling. The sick man may have snuck into the venue see if he could get close to Jesus for healing. Some interpreters feel that he was a *plant*, brought there on purpose to see what Jesus would do. This is supported by how closely his appearance follows the explanation that the Pharisees were "watching" Jesus. I would not put that past these Pharisees, but the text does not demand that we understand it this way. With the hate-filled Pharisees, cynicism is already warranted aplenty.

1. Dropsy was what they called the condition in which there was swelling or fluid retention in the body. We can be more specific today about the causes of it: heart failure, kidney failure, liver failure; it could be caused by a weak heart, or cancer, or hepatitis, or any number of other conditions. In extreme cases,

it can result in the retention of tens of pounds of fluid. This would lead to other problems including breathing issues, difficulties on the heart, and difficulty in mobility.

2. A prevailing opinion was that a person in this state of illness must be guilty of some sin, otherwise God's blessing would protect him from such a state. This thinking is exceptionally wrong, but we must be objective and admit that some people professing godliness believe this way. Even today among some professing conservative Christians this is *still* a latent belief.

D. Luke says that Jesus "answered" the people there. Luke does not record that they said anything or asked anything, but they did not have to do so because Jesus knew what was on their minds. He knew they were surveilling Him and He knew exactly what they were wondering, something like "I wonder if this guy is going to heal this sick man or not."

E. At the meal were some legal scholars. Jesus posed to them a specific and answerable question: "is it lawful to heal (for instance, a man with dropsy) on the Sabbath?" They were the people that should know the answer to the question.

F. This question is a little more involved when you think about it because it had to do with Jesus's miraculous power. "Is it lawful to heal a man on the Sabbath when it does not take any real effort, just a word or a touch?"

Also, it is a rhetorical question: it should be obvious to anyone that it would be OK to heal a sick man on Saturday. Ask any decent unbeliever, and they would have no question that it is OK to heal someone. It is unlikely they would stop and ask, "Is today your holy day? Maybe you should not do that on your holy day?"

G. Jesus's answer was clear, and no words were needed: yes, it is legal to heal someone on the Sabbath. In fact, since Jesus always did that which pleased God, it was not just "ok" to do. Rather, what He did positively *pleased* the Lord. The Pharisees legalistic attitude about laws that were not even in God's book did not please God.

H. Jesus took the man, meaning he put His hands on him somehow, and healed him. This is another miracle reported as if it were commonplace.

I. Jesus "let him go." The man likely wanted to go to his family to show them he was healed; perhaps he needed time to process what had just happened to him; perhaps his continued presence would cause more drama with others at the meal; maybe he did not fit into the "high society" of this Pharisee and his guests.

J. Next Jesus asked a rhetorical question which served as an illustration showing why their unmerciful attitude was so wrong. If an animal fell into a hole in the ground on Saturday, what would they do? They would not hesitate; they would not delay; they would immediately roll up their sleeves and get moving. They would not be suspicious of someone doing that. They clearly had a deep double standard. They would a) care for the animal more than they cared for the man who had dropsy; and b) they would expend more energy than Jesus just did to get that animal out of the pit. Their suspicious view of Jesus and the healing was entirely out of accord with how they treated their own *animals*. They would immediately rescue an animal on the Sabbath. We could imagine cases where the animal was in life-threatening danger, or where it could stay until the late afternoon or early evening or the next day, but the owner probably would not make that distinction and would rescue the animal in any case.

1. Verse 5 has an interesting textual variant—is it a son, or a donkey? The evidence of all the manuscripts favors the "son" as the original reading. This heightens the point of the illustration. Obviously if you had a son or an animal you would help it in that difficult situation.

2. We might wonder at the motivation of the rescuer. Did they rescue the animal because they loved it? Perhaps. Or did they rescue it because they did not want to incur a financial loss from what the animal could produce, and have to purchase a new one. Jesus healed the man with dropsy because He really cared.

3. What is worse than having a son fall into a hole you dug—or a well that was not covered properly? Or a person with cancer who is suffering?

4. Made-up rules would not stop you from alleviating the suffering. Emergencies push aside the traditions of man—not the laws of God, but made-up traditions can be discarded when there are urgent circumstances. If the Lord illustrated with two animals, the point would be that if we do the lesser, we should obviously do the greater. If the Lord illustrated with a son and an animal, then the point would be that if we would do for our own, we should do for others. In the end there is not a whole lot of difference. The Pharisees loved themselves more than they loved others. They did not care about the man who was sick.

K. Luke reports that they were silent and could not answer Him. They had nothing to say that was going to exonerate them. The case was closed, the Lord's logic was unbreakable.

1. When you are boxed in a corner, just admit it, change your view, and move on. You need not be a bulldog and hold a view that is dumb or fallacious or out of accord with the evidence. Why try to maintain an untenable position—just to prop up your pride?

2. If someone cannot answer a question, then there is something wrong with them. They are hiding something, or are embarrassed about the answer, or know they are wrong, or something similar. These lawyers and Pharisees could not answer a question that they *knew* the answer to. This is because they had to keep up their political game. They faced two options: (1) They would not say Jesus was wrong because their immorality would be obvious in denying mercy to a man in need. They would prove themselves uncaring about human suffering when it could be relieved—by Jesus of course, and they would not want to admit *that*. (2) But they could not say Jesus was right either because that would mean they were admitting they were wrong, or their traditions were wrong, or that they were soft on the "rule of law." They technically only allowed healing in case life was in danger, but this technicality is not found in the words of Moses. It was a made-up tradition.

The whole thing clearly demonstrates their deep unrighteousness.

3. If you are faced with a question from someone, and you cannot answer, or answer clearly, or you become angry, or you feel like you must hide the answer, or you simply will not answer because you are stubborn or "want to win," there is a problem—*in you*. In each of these cases, the remedy is to repent. Recognize that you are in the wrong, and say so to God. Ask Him to help you overcome your own pride. Confess the sin and He will cleanse you through Jesus Christ.

L. Other applications drawn from the text include: if you elevate animals above people, you are morally deficient. If you care more about your power or reputation than about helping someone in need, you are morally deficient. If you are watching a decent person with suspicion and looking for a reason to "get" him, you have a moral deficiency. If you have a religious ritual, like legalistic Sabbath observance, that overpowers common decency to help another person, you have another moral deficiency. Remember in this case: the Sabbath was made for the benefit of man, not man for the benefit of the Sabbath. The Lord was teaching the Old Testament lesson of Hosea 6:6, that **God desires mercy and not sacrifice**. He desires mercy instead of legal obedience to man-made tradition. (See also Matt. 9:13, 12:7.)

II. A Lesson for the Guests at the Dinner, v. 7-11: Humility

A. Many of the guests at the dinner were so self-centered that they were more concerned about the prominence of their seat than about the man in desperate need of help.

B. The Lord teaches them to **be humble**. Pick the lowliest seat and, if God has better for you, let someone else give you that honor. And if no one gives that honor, God will honor you in the end. But if you are envious and self-seeking and try greedily to get the best seat, you may well be humbled by being asked to move down so that someone more important than you can take the spot you snagged.

C. God works that way. He humbles those who exalt themselves because that character flaw needs to be put in its place. He exalts

those who are humble, because humility reflects the character of Jesus and deserves to be honored.

Please note: the Lord Jesus is not teaching a lesson in etiquette, as if He is an ancient version of Emily Post. He is teaching a timeless truth about humility and consideration of others above oneself.

D. The host determines the seating—not the invitees. In the kingdom of God, and its meals, it is not for you to choose the right hand or the left of the Lord (Matt. 10:21-23). Instead, God will put you in the place and job assignment that He desires. Just be faithful now, and let him determine where He will place you. Your high-mindedness or assertiveness is not going to make it any better.

E. We need to search our own hearts to see if we desire to have a prominent place at a public event. Do we want to be recognized, seen, exalted, and honored? Do you feel you *deserve* that? This desire arises out of a flawed character. Search deeply in your mind, and do not allow yourself to be deceived. Do you think yourself better than others? Do you look down upon them because you have a superior intellect (you think), or a better work ethic, or more cogent political views, or more wealth?

F. This hypothetical story was directed at "those who were invited." The Lord had something to say to the guests. But he also had...

III. A Lesson for the Host of the Dinner, v. 12-14: Selflessness

A. For those able to give hospitality: do not invite all your rich friends with the hope that you will be invited back by them—so that you are part of a mutual atta-boy society. You will have your reward, namely nothing, because you are selfish. This is not actually a giving type of "hospitality" because it hopes for something in return.

B. If instead you want to cultivate a life of **selflessness**, then invite those who cannot repay you, you will be blessed. Because they cannot repay you, this is true one-sided hospitality, and you will be relying upon God to reward you, and God will bless that faithful action at the resurrection of the just.

C. I have thought over the years: how can we apply this—individually and as a church—in a way that will make known the name of Christ and not just *our* name? And, how can we apply this in a way in which God will bless us in the future, where we are not looking for a temporal blessing?

D. All of us can offer hospitality. If we can feed ourselves, we can feed another person from time to time. In fact, we probably do that with family without even thinking about it! But hospitality is a gift we can give to other people that doubles as an opportunity to share our faith with them. Let us use it.

Conclusion

We have learned again the Christian teachings on humility and selflessness—and true concern for those in need. It *is* lawful to heal on the Sabbath, and Sunday, and any other day of the week. In fact, it is not only lawful, God *encourages* it. We cannot maintain such rigid views of the Sabbath (Jewish people) or the Lord's Day (Sunday, Christians) that we cannot help those in spiritual or physical need.

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