

The Pharisee in Me

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[0:00] Well, have you ever been invited over to someone's house for dinner, but maybe you wondered! why you were even invited, because things between you and them haven't been great. Maybe! there's been conflict between you and them or tension in the relationship. And part of you doesn't even want to go, but then maybe part of you is hopeful that with this next connection, things will be better than last time. This morning, as we return to the story of Jesus, we find him in a place that we might not expect him to be. He's at the home of a prominent Pharisee. And we heard just last week about how the Pharisee said to Jesus, leave this place, go somewhere else. So it's kind of surprising that now he's been invited over to the house of a Pharisee for dinner. And with the tension between them, amazingly,

Jesus goes to this Pharisee's house. Last time he went to the home of a Pharisee, things didn't go well. We read about it in Luke chapter 11. Jesus sat down at the table to eat in the home. And the Pharisees were judging Jesus right out of the get-go because he didn't do a certain ceremonial washing before the meal. And from there, Jesus began to rebuke the Pharisees, saying they were full of greed and wickedness and hypocrisy, that they were hindering people and they were leading people astray. And that meal ended with Jesus walking out the door and then the Pharisees swarming him with all kinds of attacking questions. And so we can only imagine and wonder what Jesus might be feeling as he gets another invitation to go to the house of a Pharisee.

Let's listen in as Luke tells the story in Luke chapter 14, beginning in verse 1. One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.

Already, we feel the tension, don't we? First of all, it's the Sabbath day, and we know that that has been an issue. It's come up many times already. Maybe you remember Jesus walking along with his disciples and his disciples picking grain in the fields and the Pharisees saying, why are you doing what's unlawful on the Sabbath? We also heard about it back in chapter 6.

They were ready to accuse Jesus of working on the Sabbath day when he healed the man with the shriveled hand. We skipped over this in chapter 13, but not too long ago, Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day and he healed a crippled woman. And Luke tells us there that the Pharisees were indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. The synagogue leader said, there are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.

[3:38] So here we are now in Luke chapter 14, and again, it's the Sabbath day. And Luke says that they are watching Jesus closely. No doubt some of them are gathered here and they're ready to find fault with Jesus. As we'll see next week, at least one guy at the table might have a softer heart.

There in front of Jesus was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. We almost wonder if this has been planned or a setup. Did they invite this guy just for the purpose of seeing if Jesus would heal him so that they could accuse him of working on the Sabbath? Maybe.

We don't know. The main thing we know about this man is his condition. Luke says he's suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. The word used here specifically refers to dropsy, what we now call edema. Basically, it refers to excess fluid building up in parts of your body.

And what we know about this today is it has lots of different causes. The swelling itself is not a disease. It's a symptom of something else that's not right in the body. Could be something very serious like a problem with the kidneys or the liver or the lungs or even the heart. It could also be a temporary or minor thing that shows up sometimes in pregnancy for women or in a situation where someone is in the same position for a really long time. For this man, we don't know the cause. We don't know the severity. Probably it was severe enough to be visible to everyone and noticeable by everyone there. And here's this guy right in front of Jesus in the house of the Pharisee.

Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they remained silent.

[6:34] They wouldn't answer his question. They couldn't answer the question. It's a very simple question.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Yes or no? Is it against God's law to do this on the Sabbath day? That's all Jesus is asking. The Sabbath commandment that God gave to the people of Israel long ago was that they should do no work on the Sabbath day.

They were to take one day in six to rest. And it was a rest from the work that you would do to provide for your family, but also the work of the household.

They were to take the day before, Friday, to make all their preparations. And then Saturday, the seventh day, could be a day of rest to the Lord. And so it's a very simple question.

[7:32] Is a person breaking that commandment by healing someone on the Sabbath day? And they wouldn't answer it. They couldn't answer it.

Let's think for just a moment what answers they could have given. The first option they could say, well, yeah, of course it's lawful.

Why wouldn't it be permitted to heal a person on the Sabbath day? But did they actually believe that? We don't know. Were some of them truly unsure?

Like we don't know, maybe. But did they know deep down inside? Yeah. That's something that you can do on the Sabbath day, probably.

They were unwilling to say, yeah, that's lawful. And I think the reason why is because then they'd be agreeing with Jesus that as he's been going around and healing people on the Sabbath, they'd be agreeing that that's good.

[8:43] That's right. And they don't want to endorse or affirm Jesus in any way. The other option they had, of course, they could have just said no.

It's not lawful to heal on the Sabbath. That goes against what God has commanded. But then the problem with that answer is if they really believed it, that would make them seem pretty heartless. Pretty lacking in compassion towards those suffering or in need of urgent medical help. There were already many crowds of thousands surrounding Jesus.

And the last thing they wanted to do was to lose even more influence and favor with the people. And so they chose to remain silent. And so what does Jesus do?

He heals the man. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. It's almost surprising how little Luke says about the miracle here.

[9:50] I mean, this is awesome. He miraculously cures the man of his swelling right in front of their eyes. But this isn't the main thing in the passage.

I mean, imagine what it would have been like. I don't know what part of his body, whether his leg or his arms or what, but imagine what it would have been like to just watch that swelling disappear in that moment.

And you can imagine the guy that was healed and just the stunned look on his face as he, you know, feels that skin and no more squishiness. It's the swelling is gone.

It's back to normal. Luke doesn't say a word about that. Jesus has already healed so many countless numbers of people. And Luke's already described these kinds of things more than once. What's at the focus here is Jesus and the Pharisees. After healing the man, Jesus asks another question. Verse 5.

[10:58] Then he asked them, If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out? Another very simple question.

If your son, or maybe you don't have a son, then if your ox, if your son falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?

And they had nothing to say. Again, the same options are before them. They could have said, Well, yeah, I would pull my son out if he fell into a well on the Sabbath day.

But then, what would Jesus say in response? Why shouldn't I be helping and healing these people on the Sabbath day then? What's the difference?

Or I guess they could have said, No, I'd leave my son in the well on the Sabbath day till the next day to honor the commandment. But then deep down inside, I think they probably all knew that's not what they would do.

[12:20] I mean, is God that heartless that he would expect us to ignore the injury of the person right in front of us to avoid doing work on the Sabbath? And if they did say, Yeah, yeah, I'd do that.

I wouldn't lift a finger to get him out of there on the Sabbath. I'd wait till tomorrow. I mean, how would that look to the people? That would kind of show the true colors of the Pharisees, wouldn't it? That they really are heartless. They really do lack love and compassion. And so again, they decide to say nothing. They had nothing to say.

And what's masterful about this question that Jesus asks is that it really, no matter what they do, what they answer, it exposes them.

It shows what's really going on in their hearts and in their thoughts. Because even refusing to answer the question, I mean, it shows that they're heartless.

[13:26] That they're lacking in compassion. That they're overly concerned with what everybody else thinks. I mean, Jesus just asks a room full of people, If one of you has a child that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?

And nobody in the room could bring themselves to say, Yeah, I would. This is what was wrong with the Pharisees and the experts in the law.

Their devotion to God was not authentic. It wasn't sincere. They were all about putting on that religious show for others to see.

Keeping the laws and the commandments outwardly when people were watching. But there was very little love for God and there was very little love for other people in their hearts.

Theirs was a religion of ritual and ceremony and religious habit they did not have a real relationship with God.

[14:39] As Jesus said, they were truly wicked on the inside. They polished the outside to make their words and their actions look good.

But on the inside, Jesus said they're filthy and wicked and greedy and the list goes on. They couldn't even bring themselves to say out loud at the dinner table, Yeah, I would pull my son out of the well if he fell in there on the Sabbath day.

Because saying that would affirm that Jesus has been doing right. He has been doing good when he heals people on the Sabbath. This wasn't a trick question.

There was a clear right answer. And if they really were experts in the law, they should have been able to answer this easily. Maybe some of them knew the right answer deep down inside and yet the stubbornness in their hearts.

I'm not going to give Jesus the satisfaction of agreeing with him. Well, it's one thing for us to sort of look at this and analyze the Pharisees and understand the problem with them.

[15:59] But if this is to be any benefit to us today, here and now, we have to think about how does it relate to us. We live in a very different cultural moment than we see in this passage.

The majority of people in our community don't even bother to put up a religious front anymore. I mean, there are some communities and there are some churches still where that's, they're the exception and rules and traditions are very strictly followed and how you follow them and keep them becomes the measure of righteousness even if your heart is cold towards God.

But for most people in our community today, we just don't see too much of this problem of pretending to be devoted to God but in a hypocritical way.

And so probably the more important question that we can ask is the question that we should ask the Lord. Lord, am I in any way like the Pharisees here?

What things have I been doing that fall into that same sort of category? Maybe it's how we pray. Do we really only pray out of routine?

[17:26] perhaps before the meal or when called upon by someone else to pray before bed and is my heart really engaged in that prayer?

As though I'm speaking to God or am I just saying the same old things, parroting the same things? God is gracious, God is good, let us thank Him for this food, amen.

without even thinking about what I'm saying anymore. Or is it time to pray for some people?

Okay, Father, please bless and be with and bless and be with and bless and be with and bless and be with and bless and be with, amen. We can be like the Pharisees sometimes.

We can slip into that. Maybe it's in how we go to church or we just, you know, coming on Sundays because I have to to be a good Christian. That's my Christian duty.

[18:30] There's lots of other things I could be doing and I maybe think about them all throughout the service but if I miss or if I attend less, I mean, what will people think? My spouse really wants me to be here or my parents said that I have to come.

but my heart isn't in it. We can be like the Pharisees. Maybe it's in how we read our Bible.

Am I, you know, just opening it up to check off the box in my reading plan and feel good that I'm doing what Christians are supposed to do?

Or as we talked about last week in Sunday school, am I opening it up in order to draw near to God and to hear His voice speak to me? Is my heart ready to respond to whatever He would say?

Is my heart engaged as I do these things? Am I doing these things for you, Lord? To seek after you, to be with you, to be obedient to you.

[19:45] Lord, would you expose the Pharisee in me? Do you have the faith and the guts to pray that prayer?

Lord, would you expose the Pharisee in me? Well, this isn't the end of the meal yet.

Jesus hasn't left yet. They haven't driven Him out yet. And so Jesus continues on and He exposes more in the Pharisees. Let's look at verse 7. When Jesus 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 person your seat.

Then humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 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.

[21:06] Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled. And those who humble themselves will be exalted.

So Luke says that the people that were invited to this meal, Jesus took notice of how they went and found their seats. He was watching and he noticed how some of them went for the places of honor. We don't get all the details, but you could almost imagine that there's a bit of a rush or a scurry to those better seats in the house, the seats of greater honor. This is kind of foreign in our culture today.

I mean, if you think at your table at home right now, do you think of one seat or another seat as having more honor than another? Probably not. But maybe if we think about a wedding, we still have a sort of a, you know, we've got the head table and if we have arranged seating at the wedding, maybe you've been to a wedding that had arranged seating, sort of the closer your relationship to the bride or groom, the closer you get to sit to them.

Of course, the best seats at the wedding go to the maid of honor and the best man. They get to sit right beside the bride and the groom on their special day.

[22:37] But that doesn't happen very often. Most of our meals in our houses, even at the community, town hall, they come and go and sit where you please.

But back in this day and in this culture, where you sat at the table mattered a little bit more. The seats on the left and the right of the host were considered the seats of honor.

And those seats that were a little closer to the host were considered seats of honor. And what catches Jesus' attention here is how some of the guests just sort of make a beeline for those seats and they rush to take them before someone else gets there.

Once in a while, we do see this kind of behavior in public. Could be at the grocery store as we watch people sort of push their way past everybody else in the line and ask if they can go first.

Could be at a sale or a giveaway or in the waiting room at the doctors. And probably for us, though, it's less about honor and it's more just about being first and not wanting to have to wait for our turn.

[23:47] And Jesus, he gives them a little wisdom in the form of a parable here. I'm not going to explain every detail because I think it speaks for itself.

He basically poses the question, isn't it better not to assume that you're the guest of honor by pushing your way to that best seat? I mean, do you know who all has been invited?

Maybe somebody more distinguished than you has been invited, a closer friend or family member.

And think about what's likely to happen in that case. I mean, if the host of the banquet sees their best friend come in the door and the only seat that's left open is way at the far end of the table, he's going to look at who's sitting next to him and give him the bump.

He's going to ask you if you might be willing to give up that seat to his best friend and then the only seat left will be that one that's furthest away. The best friend will be honored in front of everyone by the host and you will be humiliated as you make your way to the worst seat.

And so Jesus gives them some wise advice. Verse 10, he says, but when you're invited, take the lowest place so that when your host comes, he will say to you, friend, move up to a better place.

[25 : 12] then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. Now there's a right way to take these words in a wrong way.

Jesus is not saying, you know, here's a great trick that you can do to get more attention and praise and honor for yourself. You know, take the lowest seat on purpose so that you end up getting asked to move up and then you'll get the praise that you do.

No, he's not saying that. It's not a party trick to get more attention for proud people. The right way to take this is to realize what Jesus means by the whole parable.

He's saying, don't be proud. Don't assume that you are the most important compared to others.

Because if you do, it's just a matter of time before you find yourself publicly humiliated.

As the ancient proverb in the book of Proverbs goes, pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

[26 : 24] And so take the lowest seat means humble yourself. Don't assume that you're the most important. Sincerely consider others as more important than yourself.

Let them have the better seats. I'm not going to take that seat because I want you to enjoy it. You be closer to the host. I'm not going to push my way to the front of the line because even though I feel like my time is important and my business is important, well, so is yours.

Your business might be even more urgent than mine. I could rush through this door because I know that if I do, I'll get served first at the till.

I won't have to wait as long but hold on. Let me hold the door open for you. Who says that I'm more important than you?

You go ahead. I'm borrowing loosely from Pauline Phillips, the author of the Dear Abbey newspaper column. The way she said it I think is worth reflecting on something to the effect of do I walk into the room with an attitude of hey guys, here I am or do I walk into a room with an attitude of oh, there you are.

[27 : 53] Do you see yourself as the most important in the room, the wisest, the smartest, the strongest? Are you eager to share with others what you think, your opinions on things, your experiences or are you eager to hear from others about what they think and their opinions, their experiences, to learn from them?

The lesson in the parable for everyone is this, verse 11, for all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

This is just the reality of how it will be. It's how things will always eventually go. It's true when we look back through history, God sees that it goes this way.

It's true when we look ahead to the future through prophecy, this is how it's all going to end with the full arrival of God's kingdom. God tells us that everything's going to be turned upside down.

Those who were first, they're going to be last and those who were last, they're going to be first. The lowly will be honored by God and the proud will be humbled by God.

[29 : 26] Again, it's one thing to recognize the fault in the Pharisees. We can beat up on them for scurrying to the seats of honor, but we have to think about how does this relate to us.

And again, I think the question that's most important is the one that we ask the Lord. Lord, Lord, am I in any way like the Pharisees here? What things have I been doing which sort of fall into that same mindset as they had?

Have I been thinking much of myself and little of others? Am I willing to take the lowest seat or do I feel like, no, that seat should, that's better for someone else?

Jesus really did set the example for us here. He was in very nature God and yet he made himself nothing and became the servant of all.

He's the king, the son of God and yet he got down on his hands and knees and washed the dirt off the disciples' feet. Now we may never literally do that to another person washing their feet.

[30 : 52] We just don't really do foot washing in our culture. But how about washing the dirty dishes of another? When I'm at home with my family, what does it look like to take the lowest seat?

to be humble and to serve others? Do I just walk by that piece of garbage on the floor and silently hope and expect that someone else will pick it up?

Do I wrinkle my nose at the side of the toilet or the bathroom when it's become untidy yet expect someone else to clean it? Do I rush to the fridge to get the best leftovers for my lunch for tomorrow? Leaving the least desirable stuff for others in the family? Do I watch that last piece of chicken in the bowl like a hawk? And as soon as there's just one piece left, snatch it for myself?

Or do I consider that someone else around the table might be just as hungry as me and desire it just as much as me? And do I sincerely offer it to them first? With a willingness to actually let them have it.

[32:08] This stuff of humility and pride, it isn't just abstract religious principle. I mean, it really does relate to every little detail of how we interact at home, in public, at the grocery store, line up, while driving on the road.

Finally, Jesus gives another word of advice, this time to his host. Let's look at that quickly in verse 12 to 14. Jesus said to his host, when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your 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. When's the last time you invited someone over to your house for a meal who couldn't return the favor?

Pride has a way of blinding us. We kind of just get used to thinking about ourselves and we stop caring or seeing others who are on the outside looking in, wanting to be part of things.

[33:41] The lonely, the orphan, the widow, the outcast, those with mental or physical disabilities who are unable to do things and sometimes we can see them as though they're just takers.

They don't really contribute or they're just less enjoyable to be with. But humility runs the opposite way.

We see them as people and we realize that we could just as easily be in the same situation as them. And maybe God has put me in their life with means not so I can indulge myself but so that I can meet their needs and be a friend and a brother to them.

One of my favorite things when it comes to special occasions like Thanksgiving and Christmas and Easter, we often do have a big meal and invite family and friends over.

One of my favorite things is on those occasions when a family makes their gathering less comfortable or less predictable by inviting someone over who doesn't have family to gather with.

[35:02] Maybe somebody who's lonely or an outcast or just not someone who people want to be with. Maybe they're going through a really rough time and they're just downcast and it's hard to be with them.

I've been that person who's been invited over for a Thanksgiving weekend while away from family. A poor college student, nothing to contribute and it meant the world to me to be welcomed into someone else's home and family even just for a weekend.

This is the kind of thing Jesus is talking about. And hey, Thanksgiving is just three weeks away. Do you think Jesus really means for us to do this?

Lord, would you show us the Pharisee inside of us? we want to be like you Jesus.

[36:14] We want to follow your example. We want to see that beautiful humility that you had. Please forgive us of every moment where we have been proud, where we have been like the Pharisees and faked it in front of others.

Forgive us for those moments where we have just been self centered and put ourselves ahead of everyone else. Lord, we pray and ask that you would give us humble hearts.

Teach us that way of humility. And we ask that you would give us eyes to see the poor and the lonely and the needy around us right here in Davidson.

Give us courage to invite them to the table. people. To your name be the glory. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.