

The Way of Humility

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Date: 08 August 2021

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[0 : 00] Okay, but while the children are doing that, I have 10 minutes, I've got 10 minutes with you to speak about this fantastic story here from Luke 14.

Now, the key to understanding Luke 14 is context. Context, context, context. What is the context of Luke 14? Can anyone tell me? Context of Luke 14 is Luke 13. Very good.

Luke 13. In Luke 13, Jesus was asked a question. And the question was, will only a very few people be saved?

And it was a question asked by somebody who assumed they were part of that very few. Jesus responds by saying this. He says, the way to heaven is through a narrow door.

The way to heaven is through a narrow door. He says, one day that door will be closed, and there's going to be a lot of people on the wrong side of that door. Now, let me read a snippet of Luke 13 to you.

[1 : 09] Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will be outside knocking and pleading, Sir, open the door for us. But he will answer, I don't know you or where you came from.

Then you will say, we ate and drank with you. We ate and drank with you. And he will respond, I don't know you. That's the context of Luke 14.

In Luke 14, Jesus is invited to a party to eat and drink. And he's invited by people who assume they are in with God, but they're actually on the wrong side of the door at this point.

And Luke 14 is about why these people are on the outside. And we're going to see it's because of self-righteous pride. So let's take a closer look.

Jesus is invited to a very, very important lunch with very, very important religious people. Were they keen to learn from Jesus? Is that why they invited him? No.

[2 : 07] We see in verse 14, it says there, they were watching him carefully. Watching him carefully. So something funny was going on, wasn't it? All of a sudden, in the middle of lunch, there is a man with dropsy there.

This, of course, was a trap. One of the Pharisees had found this man with this terrible disease and had arranged for him to make an appearance at this lunch.

He was just a puppet in their plan to trap Jesus. The religious elite wanted to see what Jesus would do with this man. Would he break the Sabbath rules and heal him on the Sabbath?

See, the Pharisees had turned this beautiful thing, the Sabbath, into this legalistic nightmare of rules and regulations. And they loved the rules because it fueled their pride.

Now, before we get into how Jesus responded to the trap, let's stop for a moment and think about this disease. Dropsy. It's not an irrelevant detail.

[3 : 09] It's a disease that presents as bloating. Your body swells up because you're retaining too much fluid. And one of the problems of dropsy is cruel.

One of the problems of dropsy is insatiable thirst. Whilst you're retaining too much water. And ultimately, what's behind it is organ failure.

So here's the irony. The Pharisees had picked a man with the disease that mirrored their own spiritual state.

They were bloated with pride. Thirsty for more attention and status. Unable to be satiated. And the whole time it's just feeding their pride.

And it's killing them. And behind it all was a heart problem. Back to the story. So the Pharisees, they let this man with dropsy pop by.

[4 : 08] He's just standing there. Pharisees are all sitting around. His heartless grins on their faces. What's Jesus going to do? What's he going to do? What's he going to do? What's he going to do?

Of course, Jesus knows exactly what's going on.

And he throws a spanner in the works by asking a question. He says, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? Silence.

Silence from the Pharisees. This is not like how this is meant to go. The Pharisees, they don't know what to say. Because, you know, if they say yes, well, they're soft on the law.

If they say no, well, they're cruel. So what happens? Well, first, Jesus heals this man. Sends him away. And again, nothing from the Pharisees.

There's no, wow. There's no, this is amazing. There's no, God is here. There's no, no repentance. No, praise God. Just silence.

[5 : 10] And then Jesus asks another question. Which of you, having a son, daughter, or an ox that has fallen to a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull them out?

But, of course, it's a no-brainer. Of course, they're going to pull their child out of a well. Even if it's on the Sabbath.

But the Pharisees, again, remain silent. They don't say, that's a really great question. We've been exposed. It makes perfect sense. We're frauds. Jesus, help us.

They don't. Spiritual dropsy. They're bloated with pride. They're never, they're never going to admit they're wrong. Remember the scene here.

A man with an awful disease. Jesus sees this man and loves him and heals him. He sees him as someone who's treading water at the bottom of a well. And he rescues him.

[6 : 14] The Pharisees, to them, this man, he's just a prop. He's a prop in their plan to discredit Jesus and ultimately have Christ killed.

So that's the first half of the reading. That's the first paragraph there. And what do we have? What do we see? In summary, we have a great contrast.

A contrast between the immense love of Christ and the ugly hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the religious elite.

Now, Jesus doesn't want to leave it there. He wants to diagnose the problem with the Pharisees. What is wrong with them? And that's what the second half of the passage is about.

Verse 7. Let me remind you of it. Interesting, isn't it?

[7 : 23] And again, it's another irony in the passage. In verse 1, it says that the Pharisees were carefully watching Jesus, but it turns out there was a much keener eye watching them. Then Jesus tells the parable.

When you're invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down on a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished be invited. And he who invited you both will come and say to you, give your place to this person.

And then, well, you've got the walk of shame, don't you? Verse 10. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place so that when your host comes, you may say, friend, move up higher.

Then you'll be honored in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.

So I do a few weddings, and when I officiate a wedding, if I'm invited to the reception afterwards, I'll say to the couple, look, you don't need to put me at a great table. I don't need any special spot.

Actually, feel free to put me at the table with all the odd bods. Just put me at the table with all the people. You don't know what to do with them. The folks that don't fit in, put me at that table. So all that to say, if you have ever sat at a table with me at a wedding reception, well, that's just something to think about.

[8 : 37] I thought I'd let you know. Back to the parable. Jesus had watched how these Pharisees had chosen where to sit at this luncheon.

At these meals, there were three couches, and the couches are called, do you remember what the couches are called? Tricyliums, I think. Tricyliums, I think. That's the technical name for them. But they arranged three couches, arranged in a U like that.

And the host sat in the middle of the bottom couch. The best place to sit is either side of the host.

And then it gets sort of less status as you go up the arms of the U.

Now, remember verse 7 again. Now, he told a parable to those who were invited when he noticed how they chose the places of honor. Jesus had noticed, before they sat down at the start of the meal, this undignified scramble for the best seats, in order for these religious men to sort of assert some kind of power, to sort of claim some kind of status.

And Jesus sees this. Hence he tells them the parable of the wedding seating. Now, a sort of a flat reading of this parable would be, take the low seat when you go somewhere, hoping to get moved up.

[10:19] Otherwise, you might be in an embarrassing situation where they have to move you down. No, Jesus hot tips on social etiquette at parties, right?

So that's a fairly flat reading of the parable. Is that what this is about? No, this is not about social graces. It's not about phony humility. Jesus is trying to impart to these prideful people, Jesus is trying to impart an eternal spiritual principle.

He's trying to impart an eternal spiritual principle, which is summarized in verse 11, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

And he who humbles himself will be exalted. Pharisees craved significance, craved attention, craved status.

They wanted the best seats in the house. And it's pride, and it was poisoning them. And here's the thing. They had fooled themselves into thinking that they were in control of the seating.

[11:27] That they could hustle or earn their way into the best seats in the house. And the parable says, no. Ultimately, where you sit, your status comes down to the host's decision.

Now, I think you realize here the parable is talking about our eternity with God. It is talking about the principle behind salvation.

And using sort of the picture of the wedding feast, the party here, what we're supposed to do is we're supposed to humbly come to the host and say, look, I don't belong here.

Perhaps I could sit way in the back somewhere. And God, the host, says, no, friend, friend, come and sit with me. That is the principle behind salvation.

That's what salvation actually looks like. That's the eternal principle he wants them to understand. That is the genius of the gospel. It is the beauty of the gospel.

[12:35] The Pharisees thought they could hustle their way into heaven by meeting standards and rules they had set for themselves. And their fruit, the fruit of their efforts was pride, was not salvation.

This is a very difficult thing for us to get our head around. Because we want to own our salvation. We want to be in charge of it. We want to say we participated in it.

Jonathan Edwards is very good here. He says this. You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.

Say that again. You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary. We have to arrive at this humbling realization in order to be saved.

Folks, that is the way through the narrow door. That is the narrow door. And it's narrow because our hearts don't want to believe that. But on the other side, I'm finishing up here.

[13:51] On the other side of that door, we will meet Jesus. And the Bible says it will be like a banquet. And we'll be sitting in the kid's table in the corner somewhere.

And he will see us. And he will welcome us up the front. Or if you prefer the kid's story. It will be like the prince spotting his secret best friend from childhood.

And stopping everything. And shouting out to us. And looking us in the eye. And reaching out to us. And saying, my dear friend. My dear, dear friend. Come and sit up here with me.

It's an impossibly beautiful gospel. It's an impossibly beautiful story. But it is beautiful only to the ears of the humble.

So, folks. Do everything you can to rid yourself of spiritual pride. So that you can experience the beauty of the gospel.

[14:58] Amen. Amen. Now.