

The Distorted Values Of The Pharisees

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 14. And I want us to think about all that we read, the two sections, but it's already tied into one.

But thinking about the parable of the wedding feast, and where Jesus at the end of it says, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

But in this whole section we see really the distorted views that the Pharisees had of life. They looked at everything through in the wrong way.

And unfortunately there are always two-faced people in society. It's nothing new. People who appear to be on a surface very different to what they are inside.

That their motives and the kind of people that they are is kind of disguised by an exterior that portrays something else. And the Pharisees, scribes and the Pharisees, by and large, were the master of that.

[1 : 12] As Jesus termed them, they called them painted sepulchres. They were just that their whole values were distorted. They made out themselves to be what they weren't. And the background to this incident and the parable is very simple.

Jesus was often asked to go to places for a meal. It was something that happened right throughout his ministry. And some of the homes that he went to were homes that he loved to go to.

For instance, he loved to go to the home in Bethany, the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. And it tells us that he loved Martha and he loved Mary and he loved Lazarus. And there was a time, any time he spent there was a time where he knew that he was so welcome.

It was a time of fellowship and togetherness and so on. There were others who invited him to a meal, the like of Matthew. Remember after Matthew was converted? Remember how the Lord called Matthew?

And remember the first thing that Matthew did after he began to follow Jesus was he threw a great feast. And he called Jesus to that feast, to the head of that feast.

[2 : 21] But he also called all his old colleagues and all the other tax gatherers. And at that feast there were lots of unsaved people. And of course Matthew, he wanted to celebrate with Jesus his new sense of faith and this new liberty and freedom that he had.

But he also wanted all his old colleagues and all his old friends to come into the presence of Jesus and to dine with him and to hear the words of Jesus as Jesus would interact with them.

And that is such a, it is such a Christian thing, isn't it? That once, when you, when you come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, when you discover the, just the liberty, the peace that's in, in God, in Christ.

When you discover the, the liberty, the freedom, you want that others will know it as well. Once you've come to taste and to see that God is good, you want that other people will have what you have.

It's like the woman of Samaria. Whenever she was converted, the first thing when she came to discover who Jesus was, she went straight back into the village and said, Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did.

[3 : 34] Is not this the Christ? And there's something of that in our hearts as well. When we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we want that other people will also come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you're a Christian today, you pray, you cannot help but pray for those whom you love. You pray for your family. You pray for your friends.

You pray, there are many people, I'm sure, in your prayers, and what is at the very top of the list for them is that they will come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what I pray for. For if I, and it's not for me to make the judgment, but I'm sure there are people, people here today that love the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet they've never publicly professed that Jesus Christ is their Savior.

They've never come and made public profession by sitting at the Lord's table. And yet in the quiet of their own heart, they have come to that place. So it's not for me or for anybody to make that ultimate judgment.

[4 : 46] That, at the end of the day, is ultimately between the individual and the Lord. However, it is something that the Lord asks us to do. But it is something that ministers and elders do is that they pray for those within their congregation and those that they believe are still outside the kingdom.

Because they're saying, Lord, draw them in. Call them in. Draw them in. It's what we do. It's what we want. It's what we decide above all is that people will come to know Jesus as Savior.

But, unfortunately, what we were saying about people inviting Jesus to their homes, like Mary and Martha and Lazarus and Matthew, this wasn't the case here.

Because Jesus was invited to this house. He went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. And they didn't have Jesus' best interests at heart.

Because it tells us, in that verse, that they were watching him carefully. These are kind of sinister words, these. They were watching him carefully.

[5 : 58] Now, as we say, it was the Sabbath day. And as Jesus' custom was on the Sabbath day, it was to go to the synagogue. His custom was to preach on the Sabbath day. And, of course, in the Jewish custom, at that day, the Jewish custom was very strong on hospitality.

Hospitality was a big thing. And so there would be a meal. It was customary that there was a meal after synagogue. Very often in the same way as we have our own, would we tell, maybe, our Sunday dinner.

But it was what the Jews did. And so Jesus was asked to this home. And although the hospitality was extended to him, it wasn't extended with a good heart.

Or with a right heart. But a very twisted heart. A bitter heart. Because they were there watching him. Watching him carefully. And, you know, it's really sad.

Because this could have been a wonderful day for these Pharisees. What a privilege that this ruler amongst the Pharisees and all his friends there.

[7 : 07] What a privilege that Jesus had come into their house. But they weren't going to enjoy the blessing that they could have had. Because they were there with hearts of resentment and bitterness and anger and envy and hatred towards him.

And they were determined to get him one way or another. And so they were going to lose completely the blessing that could have been theirs. And, you know, there's a warning to us that we must always be very careful.

That we don't have the attitude of watching. We talk today of Big Brother. That we're a society that is being watched. Well, I would say that the Christian has to be careful that they don't fall into this trap of just watching all the time.

Looking at one another and saying, right, what's he doing? What's she doing? Because it's very easy to start becoming legalistic and judgmental of everybody. You know, you can do it even in church.

You can come to church and come with a very critical mind. I've known people. I'm not saying of anybody here, but I've known people. And they come to church with a very, very critical heart.

[8 : 21] And some people, they will come and they will listen to particular ministers simply with a critical heart. Critical mind in order to try and find fault with what they're preaching.

As soon as they'll find something they don't do, oh, listen to there he goes again. Well, that's wrong. Because if we go with that kind of heart, we will lose the blessing. You see, when we gather together like this, the Lord has promised his presence with us.

Where two or three gather together in my name and they are in the midst to bless. So if we go with a critical heart and the bad spirit within us, yes, the Lord may overrule that and change that.

But very likely we could miss the blessing that we could have or should have as we gather in the presence of Christ. So we mustn't be going about looking at one another, looking for the fault.

You know, if we go out looking for the faults of one another, do you know what? We'll find them. If you go out looking for my faults, you'll find them. Because we're all sinners. We've all got faults.

[9 : 26] And we've all got failings. But these people were there and they were determined to find fault with Christ. The Bible, in fact, tells us if we're going to be critical of anybody, be critical of yourself.

Let me be critical of myself. No, the Bible says take heed to yourself. Watch yourself. It doesn't say keep watching what your neighbor is doing and seeing the bad things or whatever.

Take heed to yourself. That's what the word of God tells us. However, there were these eyes, critical eyes, watching Jesus. Watching his every move in the hope to trap him.

And you know, the funny thing is, what they were totally oblivious to is that as they were watching Jesus, they were being watched with a scrutiny far greater than any scrutiny that they could give Jesus.

Because we've got to remember that God is watching us all the time. Our lives are an open book to him. He sees our every action.

[10 : 31] He reads our every thought. There's nothing about us that's hidden from him. We are an open book before him. Thou, God, seest me, is what the word says.

You go to Psalm 139. Oh Lord, thou hast me searched and known. Thou knowest my sitting down and rising up. And in fact, as the psalmist began to go through God's knowledge and God's wisdom and God's presence, he had to say, such knowledge is too strange.

It's too high to understand. I can't get my mind around this. And neither can you or I. You know, there are times you stop and you say, I'm going to try and think through this. You can't.

It just reaches a stage and our finite minds can go so far and no further. And we realize how limited we are. How insignificant we are against the might and the presence and the majesty and the glory of God.

So here they are, these people sitting in judgment upon Jesus. And present in that company, there was a man there who had, we're told, dropsy.

[11 : 42] Now we believe that this was a condition where a person retained fluid. And excess, it became, it was something that became really excessive retention of fluid.

And so this person would be incredibly swollen, would be incredibly uncomfortable, would find it really difficult to breathe. Somebody was really bloated out.

And the last place that that person would want to be, would be in a crowd, eating. Because of just how uncomfortable and miserable they would be feeling.

But that man, I believe, was not invited there for his own good or for a Sunday dinner. I believe that man was invited there as bait for Jesus. Because this is what they were waiting for and watching. They were saying to themselves, we believe, let's bring this man here. Let's bring him here and see if Jesus heals him. Because as far as they were concerned, in their own twisted, perverse way, to heal somebody on the Sabbath day, in their mind, in their perverted mind, in their ultra-legalistic mind, was a breach of the Sabbath day.

[13 : 02] And so this was their whole plan, this was their whole idea. And so they were watching carefully, would Jesus. So the first thing they would do, they would say, if Jesus healed the man, they'd say, ah, he's broken the Sabbath, we've got him.

But if Jesus didn't heal him, because they knew that a person with an illness or something wrong couldn't be in the presence of Jesus for long, until the compassion of Jesus would come into play and Jesus would bring healing.

This is what he was doing all the time. So one way or another they would get him, because they would say, if Jesus doesn't heal him and ignores him, they would go around and tell everybody, you know this, see that Jesus, he's heartless.

He was in the presence of this man who was in such distress. And he ignored him, didn't bother with him. That's the first thing they would have gone to do. They would have, because they were so two-faced.

But then if Jesus is through to himself and does what he does and goes to heal him, then they'd say, ah, he shouldn't have done that on the Sabbath.

[14 : 09] And so they watched him. Why they were doing this, I have no idea, because Jesus regularly healed on the Sabbath. He healed a paralyzed man on the Sabbath. He opened the eyes of a blind man on the Sabbath.

He cast out a demon out of a man on the Sabbath. He allowed his disciples to pluck the ears of corn on the Sabbath. There were loads of things that Jesus had already done on the Sabbath. So

why they were wanting more, I don't know.

But they watched him carefully. And then Jesus turns it on them and he says to them, before he does anything, he said, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?

And they knew deep down that it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They knew that God had never made any prohibition anywhere against the healing on the Lord's Day.

In fact, Jesus takes it and he says, and he says, Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath, will not immediately pull him out?

[15 : 14] Of course you will. Even an animal. You will go and help if they're in distress, something's happened to them on the Sabbath. You do that. And are you trying to say that it's wrong to heal somebody?

So he puts this question to them. And you'll notice they won't give an answer. They were silenced. Because they knew they were wrong. And the sad thing for the Pharisees is that the Sabbath had become an absolute burden to them.

The spirit of the day, the freedom of the day, the joy of the day had been completely lost to them. It was a day of prohibitions. A day of absolute legalistic...

You know, you couldn't start a fire on the Sabbath. You couldn't throw a toothpick into a fire on the Sabbath.

Do you know, you couldn't take the bone out of a fish on the Sabbath. If you were going to take a bone, you had to make sure that you took quite a bit of meat or some of the flesh around with it at the same time.

[16 : 26] So that you could take the bone and take quite a bit of flesh and put it aside. But you couldn't just take a bone on its own. That was breaking the Sabbath. So you see how it had become...

It had become such a burden that people could hardly breathe. And as we see all the freedom, the liberty, the joy that the Sabbath is meant to be was lost on them.

God gave us this day as a day of rest from all the toils and all the busyness and all the labors that we have. And how we thank the Lord for the rest of the Sabbath day.

But he's also given it to us as this day above all for the well-being and the development and the growth of our soul. It's a day for our souls to be nourished.

Where we come to his house. Aye, this is what we do on the Lord's Day. Aye, joy it went to the house of God. Go up, they said to me. Because we sit at the gospel table. This is the table that the Lord has set for us.

[17 : 29] We were able to feed on his word and come to know better. And what he's saying to us in a greater way. And so the Lord has made provision for our bodies, our minds and our souls' well-being in this day.

And it is the worst thing that society has done is try and remove this day. Because God in his wisdom has given it to us for our good.

He set the pattern in the day of creation. On the seventh day the Lord rested from all his labors. And he has given us this day. And it was a day that had to be adhered to.

Right throughout the Jewish calendar. It was serious to break the Lord's Day. And we in our society and in our wisdom say, No, we need this day.

We need this day. We need every day. Society is crumbling. Everything is crumbling. Because if you take away the foundations, If you take away what is the foundation of the building blocks of society that God has set in place, Society will crumble.

[18 : 37] And our society is crumbling year in, year out. Getting crumbling more and more. And it will continue to. God has given us this day for the good of our bodies, of our minds, and of our souls.

And it is a day of joy. And it should be a day of joy. But they had turned it into a day of burden. And you know, part of the problem for these people was, The Pharisees, they were missing the blessing. They had set limitations upon God's work. And the day we do that, we are going to miss out so much. But Jesus also noticed something else with regard to the Pharisees.

He noticed that they had an incredible obsession with position and status. In Jesus' day, there was a kind of obsession with the whole social ladder.

And it was very, very important where people sat. Because the closer you sat to the host, the more important you were. And the more important you were, the more invitations you would get to other

places.

[19 : 50] So that if you were the higher seat, or the higher seats were those who were closest to the host. And they would sit in a table shaped like a U. The host would be there.

And those who were closest to the host, they were in the chief seats. They were the best seats. And people would take note and say, Oh, that passion, that passion is fairly up the ladder.

That passion would end up getting more invites. Because they're obviously somebody in society. So their reputation and their standing and status counted far, far more to them than their personal development and character.

This was the value of a person. And the Pharisees valued people by where they stood in society, what they were. And that's why the Pharisees made such an outward display.

They would stand in the street corners. Jesus said that. They would stand in the street corners praying. So people would say, Oh, look how holy they are. They would make great displays of giving things.

[20 : 59] So people would see it. It was all outward. But it was all false. Painted sepulchres. Hearts that were distorted and corrupt. And had no real sense of true value.

And you know, you can have that in society very quickly. Where we lose, where we get a distorted sense of what is of value and what is not. And it's very easy.

And the moment that we begin to look on it as status or where we position in society or all these things. We completely lost the plot. And so Jesus is highlighting to them just how wrong they were. Because shame and honor. They were huge things in Jesus' time in the Near East. And shame and honor really spoke about a person's worth and a person's identity and a person's character.

And if you were demoted, like supposing, as Jesus is using in this parable, you go to the best seat. You say, Oh, I'm important. And somebody else comes in and the host says, Oh, could you get up from there?

[22 : 09] And give that seat to so and so. You go and sit down there. Now, to us, if we did that, we wouldn't think anything of it. We'd say, Oh, I just took the wrong seat there.

But in those days, it was a real mark of shame. Where you were made to get up from what was looked on as a really high seat and sent down to a lower seat.

And so, Jesus is, this is what he's highlighting here. But then Jesus goes on to say that everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

And you know, what Jesus is saying is so true in life in general. But it is particularly true this whole area in the way of salvation. Because the greatest hindrance to salvation is pride.

Where we think we are something. Where people think that God owes them something because of who they are. And you know, there's a lot of people and they look on their life and they think because of their upbringing.

[23 : 14] Or because of their baptism. Or because of some privileges that they've had in life. That God will accept them. There's a lot of people within the visible church.

There's a lot of people in society that think because they've never really done anything seriously wrong. And that they've always tried to be decent folk.

And good neighbours. And that they've done their best in society. And they say, you know, nobody can really point a finger to me, against me. Because I've always done my best.

People think that that will carry them to heaven. Well, it won't. There's only one thing that will take us to heaven. And that is through repenting of our sin and accepting the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Saviour.

Our value, our worth will never be sufficient. Because the Bible tells us very clearly, all have sinned. Not some, not most, but all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

[24 : 20] The glory, what God requires of us, we cannot attain to. That's what sin is. Sin is coming short of the mark.

Missing the mark. And we've all sinned. So every single one of us, irrespective of how nice and righteous, as far as a human righteousness is concerned, and upright and good, it doesn't stand in God's presence.

And that's what a lot of people don't want to hear. A lot of people say, I don't want to hear that.

Because, and you know, that's why a lot of people won't read their Bibles.

Because the truth hurts. They would rather just be left to feel, well, I'm alright in myself. But, you know, it's no kindness to allow a person who is dying of a disease that can be cured.

And just allow them to die. And without telling them, look, there is a way. There is a way to be delivered. And that's who Jesus is, the great physician.

[25 : 29] He's come to seek and to save those who are lost. He's come to bring healing and light and life. And so the only way into the kingdom is by humbling ourselves before the Lord.

And going to Him and saying, Lord, there might have been a day when I thought my own righteousness was sufficient. But I bow down before you, Lord, recognizing my own righteousness is of no worth at all.

In fact, we're told in the scripture, your righteousnesses are as filthy rags. That's it. Something to be got rid of, to be discarded. That's how God looks at our own righteousness.

And the Lord says, you need to be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. So that when I look on you, if the moment you accept Jesus Christ as Savior by faith, God looks at you totally differently. And He's looking at you through Jesus. And He sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus covering you. So that as far as the law is concerned, you're now justified.

[26 : 37] You're free. You're clear. You're in the clear. Never again to be condemned. There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.

So to enter the narrow road, the narrow gate, there's no room for status and all these kind of things and all our own baggage of self-righteousness.

That has to be left. And the only way we can come is as poor, penitent sinners. Asking for God's grace and for God's help.

And you know, the Lord will never, ever, ever, ever, ever turn away anybody who comes like that. There was only one cry that the Lord never listened to. One cry.

I shouldn't say only one cry. There was only one cry that was a real cry to heaven. That the Lord turned a deaf ear to.

[27 : 34] And that was the cry of His Son on the cross. But to every sinner that cries to the Lord for salvation, He will answer. He tells us, call upon the name of the Lord and you shall be saved.

Never turns anyone away that truly calls upon Him. And so this is the only way. It is by the way of humility.

And you know, this is a great thing for everybody. Maybe as a Christian today, you're saying, you know, there's lots of things I would love to be able to do in my Christian life. I would like to be a minister or an elder or a deacon or a presenter or a Sunday school teacher.

I would love to work for the Lord in some way. I would love to be, this is a Christian. Well, there's lots of things that we can't do as Christians. But there's one thing that's in the reach of every single person as a Christian.

That's humility. It is one of the great graces, the great virtues. And it is something that we should seek because it's one of the requirements right throughout the Word of God.

[28 : 36] And we're told to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. Why? So that He will exalt you in due time. And you know, the more that we seek to humble ourselves before the Lord, the more we will begin to resemble Jesus.

You look at all the great saints in the Bible. You look at the Abrahams and the Josephs and the Davids and the Daniels and the Elijahs and all these men.

Pride wasn't what marked their lives, but a genuine humility before the Lord. It's J.C. Ryle in his own inimitable way that he said, And the person who really knows himself and his own heart and who knows God and his infinite majesty and his holiness, who knows Christ and the price at which he has redeemed him, that person will never be a proud person.

And that is so true. And you see, when you become a Christian, you will be like Jacob and say, I'm not worthy of the least of your mercies.

You'll be saying like Job, I am vile. You'll be saying like Paul, I'm the chief of sinners. You will like in the church in the Philippines, Paul says, you will esteem others more highly than yourself.

[30 : 07] That's the nature of humility. And that's what the Lord is saying. This is what we need. If we try and exalt ourselves, be guaranteed.

It's not long before we come down. Pride before a fall is a well-known adage. And it is so true in life. And here we're called to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.

And he will exalt. He will. He's promised it. That's what it tells us in Peter. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. And he will exalt you in due time. When's due time?

His time. Not our time. Our time is always now. I would imagine that Joseph, when he was in prison, going down and down, year after year after year, the forgotten young man.

And I'm sure there were times he felt he was forgotten by God. No, he wasn't. Because God was humbling him. We need to be humbled. And if we don't humble ourselves, God will humble us.

[31 : 11] And it's painful. Nobody ever says, oh, you know, I'm looking forward to it. Looking forward to a bit of humbling. That's not the way it works. That's pride. To humble ourselves is to see ourselves more and more as God sees us.

And that can be quite a disturbing place, disturbing thought. But to see that anything that we are, we are what we are because of God.

Because of his grace. Because of his mercy. Because of his love. But the Lord will lift us up. And maybe some of you just now are going through a humbling time. And you're saying to yourself, Lord, have you forgotten me?

Has the Lord forgotten to be gracious? You know, sometimes we find that sentiment expressed in the Psalms. Lord, have you forgotten all about me? Lord, I'm here. No, he hasn't.

And I'm sure that that's how Joseph was in that prison. Year after year. Lord, have you forgotten me? And then it says in the due time, in the right time.

[32 : 18] And all of a sudden, exultation came for Joseph. Joseph, he was probably, the light probably was almost blinding him as he came out of that prison. But he didn't just come out of the prison and sort of say, right, Joseph, that's you.

You're free. You can go where you want. He was ushered straight into the palace. He would have had to get changed. Hey, Joseph. King needs you. And before the day was almost out or however long, he was second in command in Egypt.

Talk of exultation. That's what God does. Because if we are humbled by him and if we are prepared to humble ourselves under him, he will exalt us.

And of course, the ultimate case of that is a death. And we will all be like Joseph, ushered from this world of humbling into the world of everlasting exultation.

To live with and to be in the presence of the Lord forever. Let us pray. O Lord, O God, we pray that we may seek to live humbly before you.

[33 : 30] Help us, Lord, to have a right view of you and a right view of ourselves. Lord, help us to be biblical in our perspectives so that we do not become bound by human legalism, but that we might know the freedom and the joy that is in you.

And help us, Lord, to have a biblical understanding of our own worth and a biblical understanding of you. And so that you will grant us an awareness of, a right awareness of who we are and our duties before you every day that we live.

May we live well in this world. And may we serve you well in this world. Take us to our home safely, we pray, and do us good, parting us with your blessing, forgiving us our every sin.

In Jesus' name. Amen. We'll conclude singing from Psalm 139. Psalm 139. It's Nara Mugirig.

Psalm 139. The last two verses of the Psalm. Darnar on harjir nichit.

[34 : 50] For emelen hook me gave gubyach, Mar neitje nime amiss. Braus ich mi je mo chriefeig. Mo smontje feig fien mich.

Feig ages avark feen im will. Sliia aen cilolch ym chle. S'awn yn hlea. Hiari chor. Siari chor. Gu jir och trorich mi.

Nara Mugirig. Psalm 139. For emelen hook me gave gubyach. Aen cilolch ym chro. La rorch Breathyment Porth■ Of emelen hook me gave gubyach.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[36 : 28] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.