

Jesus dines with the Pharisees

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn again just for a wee while to the chapter we read, Luke chapter 14, and we read verses 1 to 14. Well, we're not going to read them again, but I just want again, just following through this gospel, to look at this section. We'll just read that at the beginning one Sabbath when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. They were watching him carefully.

And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy, and so on. Now, as we've been going through Luke, we find that Luke is highlighting over and over again Jesus' healing on the Sabbath day. And Luke is trying to show his readers that despite Jesus' many demonstrations of his power and of his compassion, of his grace and of his love, that so many of the people, and particularly the leaders, still didn't get the message.

You see, their blindness, their hardness, and particularly their prejudice against Jesus was really quite extraordinary. And we've got to remember that prejudice, if we have prejudice within our heart towards anyone, we will not be able to see any good that person does.

It will color our judgment, our assessment, and our view of that person. And I believe it's one of the great sins of life. People may not think that much of it. But as you and I look into our lives, we've got to ask ourselves, are we prejudiced against people irrationally and unreasonably? Because if so, it will affect our assessment and our judgment of that person greatly. And it's particularly dangerous within the church. If we find ourselves prejudiced against a minister, against an elder, against a deacon, against a member, against anyone within the church, it will affect the fellowship. It has a stifling, choking effect upon people.

And so we really need to guard against it. And you see how this generation in the life at the time of Jesus were missing out. Here is Jesus. And he's ministering to all these people. He's teaching them. He's living with them. He's eating with them. He's drinking with them. He's healing. And every day they are in contact with him. And all these days went by and they derived no benefit, no good, because they were so prejudiced. It should have been the high point of their lives. They should have been able to look back in years to come and say, these three years were the most wonderful years of my life. For three years, I was in contact physically with Jesus. I saw him. I even touched I shook hands with him. I sat at a table and I ate with him. I drank with him. I talked with him. I listened to him. And these people ought to have been able to tell their children about these great days.

[3 : 3 9] But they couldn't, because prejudice has blinded their heart and their mind, and they got no benefit. Not one scrap of good did they get from the ministry of the Lord Jesus. As John, at the beginning of his gospel, says, he came to his own, and his own received them not. So you see how dangerous prejudice is.

And if ever we discover it within our own heart, within our own life, let us seek to pray against it. Pray that it might be rooted out. Now we see at the beginning of the chapter here that as Jesus came to dine at the house of one of the leading Pharisees, and it was a Sabbath day, it tells us that they were watching him carefully. You know, it's an awful thing to be under scrutiny all the time, and particularly to be under scrutiny where people are trying to find something wrong.

It's an awful thing that any people or any group of people or any individuals would be homing in and watching, watching, watching people in the hope of finding something.

Ah, see what he's doing. See what she's doing. Watching it again. Taking note of all that they're doing. It's a dreadful way. It's a sin. Because it is a breach of the very heart of the commandment, which says that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, our soul, our mind, our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. And if we are loving our neighbor as ourselves, we most certainly will not be doing that. It is a total breach of God's law, where we are sitting, watching, in order to find fault, to pick on all that is wrong in people's lives.

The Word of God tells us that there are two people that we should be looking at. One is ourselves. Take heed to yourself. That's what the Word of God says.

[5 : 48] And the other that we are to look at is the Lord. These are the two key places. Take heed to ourselves, and we are to look. And I would say to look to the Lord first of all.

So it was terrible for Jesus, because all these religious leaders, they were watching him like a hawk. Not watching him with eyes of love. Not watching him thrilled that, ah, here's Jesus, wonderful.

They're watching his every move. Let's see, is he going to do something that we don't agree with? Is he going to do something wrong? Do you ever find that spirit within you?

As you look at other people? As you look at Christians? As you look at office bearers? If you look at ministers? If so, it's our own spirit. Let us remember that there is one eye that is watching us all the time.

And that eye is one day going to bring out before us everything that we've done, and every attitude that we've ever had. Everything about us as we appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

[6 : 56] Now, there was a man here, as we see present, who had dropsy, and that really is quite simply a condition where bodily fluids were retained.

This person was retaining the bodily fluids, and he would, I would imagine, been dreadfully swollen, and in a lot of pain and discomfort. People who maybe have had fluid and had to have fluid, maybe taken off their lungs or taken off anything, know themselves how difficult and distressing and sore these things could be.

So here is this person, and he's absolutely, you could imagine, totally swollen as he's retaining the body fluids. And Jesus, seeing the condition of this man, is going to heal him.

But before he does so, he asks all who are present, he asks them a question. And he says very simply, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?

And notice the response. They all, but they remained silent. There wasn't one present who would give an answer. You see, the problem for the Jews was that they had made the Sabbath an exclusion day.

[8 : 13] And in order to safeguard the Sabbath, they had added loads and loads and loads of laws. And the Sabbath, rather than being, and let's remember this, God gave us this day as a day of liberty, a day of refreshment for body, mind, and soul, primarily for our soul, in order that we may, it's a day of worship, but it's a day, it's this wonderful day that is set aside.

He didn't mean it for us to be a day where we're bound. But that's what the Jews had done. They had piled all these laws in their determination to try and keep it holy.

It was almost impossible to move. It was, those people had become shackled and burdened. And Jesus had spoken to the Pharisees often enough about how they were burdening the people, not just by regarding the Sabbath day, but in lots of the different areas of life.

And we must always guard against making what God isn't wanting to be a burden, making it a burden for us.

But you see, what they had done was by adding all these laws to God's day, they were defining the limits of God's work.

[9 : 34] You know, it's an incredible thing. By their defining limits, they had set these limits on Jesus. You know, when you think of the arrogance of these people, they had worked out what Jesus could do and what Jesus couldn't do.

And on the Sabbath day, the hypocrites that they were, and Jesus exposes their hypocrisy, these people who were quite willing if their son was in trouble to go and help him, even if their cow was in trouble, they would go and help him.

But Jesus mustn't help somebody else. So you see how they had, this is how Jesus was always highlighting their hypocrisy. They had laws for themselves and they had different standards for Jesus.

We must guard against that as well. Because there has to be a consistency right through our life. This was one of the great things about Jesus. He was always consistent.

And if we, and you know, sometimes we can be guilty of the same thing, of defining the limits of Jesus' work. We have already worked out where Jesus is going to work, when he's going to work, how he's going to work.

[10 : 50] And you know, if we do that, we're going to miss so much office work. Because we're not going to see it. We're sheltered in this, or we're living in this wee world where we worked out, this is how God is working.

We're missing out his big picture. And that's what we need to see. We need to, we need to be delivered from being shackled and bound to being able to have a broad vision.

And ask the Lord for that. Lord, help me to see beyond the, the perimeters of my own wee world because that's the way we are. And I fall into that trap and I'm sure we all fall of being bound just to where we are.

Lord, give us a vision. Give us, Lord, to be able to see far and wide. Lord, help us to see what you're doing day by day. not just in my world, but in the world at large.

And you know, it'd be a wonderful thing if we're able to see and be given the spiritual eyes to see God at work. Because he is at work. And so these people were, had worked out in their own mind when Jesus was to work, where he was to work, what he was to do, what he wasn't to do.

[12 : 09] The Lord will follow his own purposes and his own plans. And it doesn't matter how arrogant people may be. And you know, it's still the same today. People, you find every so often, and by and large you'll hear it from people who never think of God from one end of the day to the other.

And then some great tragedy happens. And all of a sudden people are pointing against God and saying, what kind of God is this? What kind of God is that? People can be so arrogant in their assessment of who God is.

God does according to his will. We're the armies of heaven and we're the inhabitants of the earth. And who can stay or hold his, or halt his hand.

And so Jesus heals the man. He's not going to take his, he's not going to take his agenda from these people. He's following the Father's will. And you know, that's what we've got to do.

Follow the Father's will in this world. And that's why we mentioned it already, Jesus challenges them and says, look, if your son or even your animal goes into difficulty, would you not?

[13 : 19] Will you not immediately pull him out? In other words, you don't sort of say, I wonder if I'm ready. They will go and do it right away. And they could not reply to these things.

Now then, at this feast, Jesus, that he was invited, he saw that some of the guests were scrambling, we see this from verse 7, to get to the places of honor, the seats of honor.

In other words, they wanted to get to the place where maybe the more distinguished guests might go. And Jesus rebukes them for this very thing.

Because he says, look, don't be doing that. You might be saying to yourself, I want to get, I suppose if you were going to look at it, say, if we were to put it into modern day terms, we look at our wedding reception.

There's your top table. And here's this person comes in and says, that's where all the main guests are going to be. And goes and sits at the top table. Now it's going to be very embarrassing because all a wee while later, the bridal party will be piped in or whatever.

[14 : 29] And this person who has taken their place at the top table will be told, hey, go on, you're a way down, a way down somewhere else. This is not your place. And Jesus is saying, you can see the disgrace or the shame of that person having to get up and saying, oh, I went to a place that wasn't my place.

I went to a station, as it were, above myself. Now maybe we don't grasp, I mean, sometimes we can see things in a quite humorous way, but in the Near East, honor and shame were key issues to a person's identity, a person's worth, and a person's character.

And Jesus, from this, spells out a very clear message. And he says, everyone who exalts himself, now it's everyone who exalts himself or herself, will be humbled.

In other words, recognition eludes those who demand it. And while this is a principle universally, it is particularly so in the gospel.

Because there are many people, and if we can grasp what Jesus is saying, because Jesus was always homing on this, he was saying to the Jews, look, you think you have a divine right to the kingdom because you're Jews.

[15 : 55] You think because you're a Jew that automatically you are one of the kingdom. Well, Jesus is saying no. And he's saying the same to ourselves as well.

Because some people have the mistaken thought that because of their background or because of the privilege or even because of their position in the church or something, that automatically they will get entry into the kingdom.

No. It is only by personal faith in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Somebody said there is no entry through the narrow door for the one laden with status symbols and a sense of their own importance.

It is coming by the way of humility, coming recognizing our own nothingness, our own need of our saviour. That's the way we have to come.

There is only one way of coming into the kingdom. Not parading ourselves and saying, well, Lord, please, may I get into the kingdom because of my background, because of my privileges, because I had a granny who, from the time I can remember, I was at her knee and she used to read Bible stories to me and she was an old, in fact, she was a member for 80 years.

[17 : 17] Therefore, I should be included. While these are great privileges, don't get me wrong, wonderful, wonderful privileges.

And I just thank the Lord for all those who went before us, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, people who took an interest in us and taught us and prayed for us.

These are the most wonderful privileges and blessings. And these privileges so often bear fruit. But the fact is that we personally have to respond to the call of Christ.

We personally have to respond to the invitation and personally accept him as our Lord and our Savior. And it is doing so recognizing Jesus as a Savior.

The only one who can save, because that's what a Savior does, saves us. saves us from our sins and saves us to everlasting life.

[18 : 23] And Jesus says those who, and here's this principle, that those who exalt themselves, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. Now that doesn't mean everyone who is exalted in life.

Many people are exalted in life. Exalted by other people, exalted through the situations and providence, and God exalts many people. We're not talking about, we're not talking here about anybody who gets on in life, anybody who gets promoted, anybody who moves up, as it were, a wee bit here, are they?

That's not what Jesus is saying. It's those who exalt themselves. Those who have a higher opinion of themselves than they should. Those who think themselves something that they're not.

Jesus said, they're heading for a fall. That's where the word says, beware, let him that stand, beware lest he fall. That means who stands in his own importance, in his own strength.

Look at me, I can do it. We've got to guard against these things. And so that is why we must come by way of humility.

[19 : 35] And the Lord, remember, will see to it. And for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled. And he who humbles himself will be exalted. This is the rule. In other words, if we come pleading before the Lord, come with his humble spirit, Lord, help me.

He will. He will raise you up. We sang that in Psalm 113. This is what the Lord does. He exalts his people. He lifts them up into the kingdom.

Now, there are many things that could be said here, but there's one other thing that I want us to focus on. Jesus notices something about those who are invited to the feast.

And it tends to be only people of a certain station or place in the social ladder. And Jesus is tying all this into the humility, and he's tying it into the whole spread of the gospel.

And Jesus is saying, if you ask unto a meal only those who can return the favor, then in a sense you're missing out at the very key of Christianity.

[20 : 54] Now, don't get me wrong here, Jesus is not saying, don't ask your friends, because when you read this, when you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors.

Jesus is not saying, you're never to ask family members to a meal. Jesus is not saying, you're not to ask somebody who's well off to come for a meal. He's not saying to you, you're never to invite your friends.

Of course you do. That's not the point of what he's saying. But he's been observing and he's been observing and he's been observing the way that these people worked. And all the time it was only one lot out of the social ladder, those who were way up there.

They never asked, and that's what it goes on to when Jesus gives that from verse 17 or verse 16, the man who gave a great banquet, and goes out into the highways and hedges and compels to come in, the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind and all these.

See, this is where Jesus is thriving at. And Jesus is saying, God is watching, and the principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ is this.

[22 : 13] You love, not in order that you will be loved in return, you love for the sake of love. You do, just because that's what a Christian does. And that's something we've got to examine ourselves about.

Jesus is not saying, as we said, you're not to invite those who will invite you back. Of course we do. And that is part of the whole culture that we grew up in.

That is part of the wonderful thing about the culture that we belong to, where community thrives and operates in this principle. You help me, and I help you.

You used to see it in the people taking home the pizza, the whole community. All the neighbors would be involved. And everybody would be gathered with this family as they took their home. And then they would be gathered with the next family as they took them home.

There was this community involvement. And that is right. And there is still something of that. And let us thank the Lord for that. And Jesus, in other places, shows the importance.

[23 : 17] The New Testament church was operating on that very principle. A wonderful principle. But what Jesus is saying here is, as he was looking at these people, and he was seeing them neglecting those, as he would term, on the lower end of the social ladder.

In other words, you know, it's a good thing to have friends in every rung of the social ladder. Never neglect those who cannot help themselves. And Jesus is saying, when you make a meal, invite those who can't ever repay you.

And that's what Jesus did himself when he came into this world, and he was so criticized for it. Yes, he was in the synagogue. Yes, he went to the meals with the rich and with the famous of the day.

But you also found him down with the down and outs. You found him with those that the religious leaders wouldn't even look at. He was with the prostitutes, he was with the drunks, he was with people who were the outcasts, the notable sinners.

church. And Jesus was there with them. On every rung of the social ladder, Jesus was there. And he's saying, that's what Christianity is about. That's how we are to be involved.

[24 : 34] And because we, by nature, so often operate on the principle that we do something in order to see what we can get out of it, Jesus says, throw that out the window.

That's not how we are to live life. Yes, we still do things helping one another and they in turn, but we're not to do it in order that they'll help us back or in order that we get something out of it.

We do it because it's what we ought to do. And the great thing is that the Lord is taking note of it and at the day of the resurrection, he will, that's what we're told, the resurrection of the just, the Lord will reward.

He's taking note of all these things because they're done in the name of Christ and with the spirit of Christ. You know, even what we do within our own congregational life, is it in order that we as a congregation will rebuild up, do we have just this mentality of pure exclusiveness?

Now I know that at one level we can see it, the important thing in bringing the message of the kingdom is that souls will be saved. That's what's important. And Jesus is showing to us that we've got to go anywhere and we've got to be prepared to be anything in order that the gospel of Jesus Christ will go out to souls and that people will be saved.

[26 : 02] We need to pray for the grace to have that spirit because it doesn't come naturally. Our own self-seeking wants to do in order that we will get return.

Jesus came into this world and see the mess and Jesus just gave himself, gave and gave and gave and gave and gave himself.

That's how Christianity is so radical, so altogether different. May the spirit of Christ then be in our heart and soul.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, we pray that we might be brave with regard to what Jesus calls us to be.

And sometimes we are called into places which where we may feel uncomfortable. But we pray, Lord, for this spirit that will follow Christ and will have this spirit of being prepared to be nothing, not self-seeking, because love is not self-seeking.

[27 : 12] Love seeketh not its own. So often that is how we are motivated in what we can get out of. We pray then that true love will operate in our heart so that we will do because we love.

Lord, bless us, we pray, and take us all to our different homes safely. Guide us and keep us and forgive us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Amen.