

Luke 14:1-6
January 5, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: From the Jewish perspective, what do you think it meant for them to “keep the Sabbath?” [Let people engage]

Transition: At this particular time in the life of our Lord Jesus, He is only months until His death. They were good. They were moral. They were extremely moral and into outward righteousness. The Jewish people were sure they were God’s favorites and knew the way to heaven. And they were fastidious about God’s law, especially as it related to Sabbath. Jesus decides to challenge the Pharisees on what is “lawful” on Sabbath. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

Jesus at a Pharisee’s House

14 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.

5 Then he asked them, “If one of you has a son (Ps 118:26) or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” 6 And they had nothing to say.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Jesus exposed the false piety of the Pharisees and the scribes. They claimed to be defending God’s Sabbath laws, when in reality they were denying God by the way they abused people and accused the Savior. There is a big difference between protecting God’s truth and promoting man’s traditions. We need to know the difference!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 228-229). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Sabbath Day hospitality was an important part of Jewish life, so it was not unusual for Jesus to be invited to a home for a meal after the weekly synagogue service. Sometimes the host invited Him sincerely because he wanted to learn more of God's truth. But many times Jesus was asked to dine only so His enemies could watch Him and find something to criticize and condemn. That was the case on the occasion described in Luke 14 when a leader of the Pharisees invited Jesus to dinner.

Jesus was fully aware of what was in men's hearts (John 2:24–25), so He was never caught off guard. In fact, instead of hosts or guests judging Jesus, it was Jesus who passed judgment on them when they least expected it. Indeed, in this respect, He was a dangerous person to sit with at a meal or to follow on the road! In Luke 14, we see Jesus dealing with five different kinds of people and exposing what was false in their lives and their thinking.

The Pharisees: False Piety (Luke 14:1–6)

Instead of bringing them to repentance, Jesus' severe denunciation of the Pharisees and scribes (Luke 11:39–52) only provoked them to retaliation, and they plotted against Him. The Pharisee who invited Jesus to his home for dinner also invited a man afflicted with dropsy. This is a painful disease in which, because of kidney trouble, a heart ailment, or liver disease, the tissues fill with water. How heartless of the Pharisees to "use" this man as a tool to accomplish their wicked plan, but if we do not love the Lord, neither will we love our neighbor. Their heartless treatment of the man was far worse than our Lord's "lawless" behavior on the Sabbath.

This afflicted man would not have been invited to such an important dinner were it not that the Pharisees wanted to use him as "bait" to catch Jesus. They knew that Jesus could not be in the presence of human suffering very long without doing something about it. If He ignored the afflicted man, then He was without compassion; but if He healed him, then He was openly violating the Sabbath and they could accuse Him. They put the dropsied man right in front of the Master so He could not avoid him, and then they waited for the trap to spring.

Keep in mind that Jesus had already "violated" their Sabbath traditions on at least seven different occasions. On the Sabbath Day, He had cast out a demon (Luke 4:31–37), healed a fever (Luke 4:38–39), allowed His disciples to pluck grain (Luke 6:1–5), healed a lame man (John 5:1–9), healed a man with a paralyzed hand (Luke 6:6–10), delivered a crippled woman who was afflicted by a demon (Luke 13:10–17), and healed a man born blind (John 9). Why our Lord's enemies thought that one more bit of evidence was necessary, we do not know, but we do know that their whole scheme backfired.

When Jesus asked what their convictions were about the Sabbath Day, He used on them the weapon they had forged for Him. To begin with, they couldn't heal anybody on *any* day, and everybody knew it. But even more, if the Pharisees said that nobody should be healed on the Sabbath, the people would consider them heartless; if they gave permission for healing, their associates would consider them lawless. The dilemma was now theirs, not the Lord's, and they needed a way to escape. As they did on more than one occasion, the scribes and Pharisees evaded the issue by saying nothing.

Jesus healed the man and let him go, knowing that the Pharisee's house was not the safest place for him. Instead of providing evidence against *Jesus*, the man provided evidence against the *Pharisees*, for he was "exhibit A" of the healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord knew too much about this legalistic crowd to let them escape. He knew that on the Sabbath Day they would deliver their farm animals from danger, so why not permit Him to deliver a man who was made in the likeness of God? Seemingly, they were suggesting that animals were more important than people. (It is tragic that some people even today have more love for their pets than they do for their family members, their neighbors, or even for a lost world.)

Jesus exposed the false piety of the Pharisees and the scribes. They claimed to be defending God's Sabbath laws, when in reality they were denying God by the way they abused people and accused the Savior. There is a big difference between protecting God's truth and promoting man's traditions.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 242)

b. Jesus' teaching that many outcasts and Gentiles will be in the kingdom (14:1–6)

This section continues the thought of 13:22–35 but explains it from another angle. Rather than the excluded ones being the main subject, the ones included in the kingdom are now discussed. Contrary to His hearers' expectations, Jewish outcasts and Gentiles will make up a large portion of the kingdom's population.

14:1–6. Jesus had been invited to eat on the Sabbath at the house of a prominent Pharisee where there was also a man who was suffering from dropsy. Dropsy is a condition of excess fluid in the tissues of the body, caused perhaps by a type of cancer or possibly liver or kidney problems. The man was probably invited to the Pharisee's house in order to see what Jesus would do. Jesus immediately took the initiative in the situation and asked the host and other guests whether it would be lawful to heal the man on the Sabbath. Apparently, Jesus' question disarmed the crowd, for all of them remained silent. Jesus went ahead and healed the man. He said that the guests would help a son or an ox in distress on the Sabbath, so it was totally appropriate to heal this poor individual. Jesus was setting the stage for the discussion to follow concerning those who were considered ceremonially unclean and therefore unable to enter the kingdom.

Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 385-387). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

Luke brought together a block of three episodes critical of the Pharisees (14:1–24) that center around eating. They serve to illustrate the hostility official Judaism displayed toward Jesus and his gospel (cf. 13:1–35). The first, found only in Luke, is filled with favorite Lukan expressions such as "when he went to eat" (14:1); "there ... was a man" (14:2); "Jesus asked" (literally answering he said, 14:3); "remained silent" (14:4); "he asked them" (literally he said to them, 14:5); and "had nothing to say" (14:6). The account has no link with what precedes ("One Sabbath"). It involves Jesus' third and last Sabbath healing (cf. 6:6–11; 13:10–17) and by pointing the readers' attention to his opponents' desire to trap him ("he was carefully watched,"

14:1) recalls the summary of 11:53–54 (cf. also 6:7). This incident illustrates the rejection of Jesus referred to in the preceding lament (13:34–35). Once again Jesus raised the question “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” (14:3; cf. 6:9; 13:16). When he rephrased the question (14:5), the response, silence, was repeated as well. In 6:11 Jesus’ opponents “were furious.” In 13:17 they “were humiliated.” Here they “had nothing to say” (14:6). Jesus’ defense of his Sabbath healings could not be refuted, yet the hostility remained. This pronouncement story (the emphasis is more on the pronouncement than on the healing) demonstrates that once again Jerusalem refused to be gathered to their Messiah (13:34).

Comments

14:1 One Sabbath. On some unspecified Sabbath, Jesus was invited to be a guest in the home of a Pharisee. Visiting speakers were often invited to a Sabbath meal after the synagogue service. For a Lukan introduction similar in form, cf. 5:1.

To eat. Literally to eat bread. Compare 14:15. Luke often showed Jesus’ participation in various meals.

The house of a prominent Pharisee. Compare 7:36; 11:37. Josephus, *Life* 21 speaks of leaders of the Pharisees.

He was being carefully watched. Jesus’ opponents were seeking to find fault with him (cf. Luke 6:7; 11:53–54; 20:20). Luke did not say whether the ruler himself was involved, perhaps even staging this opportunity in order to find fault (cf. 14:3, where other Pharisees and lawyers were present). It was not relevant to Luke’s purpose.

14:2 There ... was a man. We are not told whether he was an intruder, a guest, or a plant. That was not important for Luke, who frequently introduced parables in a form similar to this one. See 16:19–31, “Context.” The addition of “in front of him” (literally behold), however, makes this somewhat different.

Dropsy. “Dropsy” is literally *hydrōpikos*, probably edema in which various parts of the body become filled with fluid.

14:3 Jesus asked. “Asked” is literally answering said. This can be understood idiomatically, i.e., spoke, or more literally in response to their thoughts he said. Compare 13:2, 15, where the same terminology is used to describe Jesus’ response to his opponents’ statements (not questions).

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? Compare 6:9. This was not merely a rhetorical question, for Luke revealed that a response was expected in 14:4; “but they remained silent.” Here, as in 6:9, the question preceded the healing, in contrast to 13:15–16, where it followed. The emphasis was less on Jesus’ authority to perform miracles on the Sabbath than on his opponents’ concern for rituals and traditions above their brothers and sisters.

14:4 But they remained silent. Compare 6:9; Mark 3:4. The silence was not due to uncertainty about whether this man’s life was in danger but reveals that they had no answer to Jesus’ argument. No matter how his opponents tried to catch him in his words and actions (Luke 11:54), Jesus was their Master (cf. 13:17; 14:6).

14:5 Jesus justified his healing by giving examples of less lofty Sabbath deeds that even his opponents would deem legitimate, such as rescuing a son (the best texts support the reading “son”) or an ox from a well (cf. 13:15; Deut 22:4; Matt 12:11).

Will you not? The “not” (*ouk*) assumes a positive answer. See comments on 13:16.

14:6 They had nothing to say. Luke used even stronger language here than in 14:4 in order to underline how irrefutable Jesus’ wisdom was (cf. 13:17; 20:26; Acts 4:13–14; 11:18).

The Lukan Message

The hostility that official Judaism had toward Jesus and his teaching is illustrated once again in this Sabbath healing. Under the guise of piety, his opponents sought to censure him for his Sabbath behavior. A similar incident was related in 13:10–17. This incident gave Theophilus another reason for Jerusalem’s desolation (13:35) and the giving of the gospel to Gentiles. Such hardness of heart (6:7; 11:53–54; 14:1; 20:20) revealed a resistance to the Spirit (Acts 7:51) that excluded the possibility of faith.

Two other themes can be seen in this account. One involves Jesus’ greatness. His unparalleled wisdom became manifest once again, as the one greater than Solomon (Luke 11:31) continued to confound his adversaries (14:4, 6). Jesus clearly was his opponents’ master. A second theme involves the ethical implications of Jesus’ teachings. As elsewhere (13:10–17), Theophilus saw that God’s commandments were not about external conformity but about acting with love, justice, and mercy. What better way to honor the Sabbath than to do good and to heal. What the law requires is love in action (6:27–36; 10:25–37), not appearances (11:37–52).

Context

In the context of Jesus’ dining with a Pharisee (14:1–6), **Luke introduced two unique sets of ethical teachings illustrating Christian attitudes and behavior. The first set (14:7–11) was directed to partakers of a meal and the second (14:12–14) toward the hosts.** The first set of teachings is called a “parable” (14:7), which is somewhat surprising, for what follows does not appear to be what is traditionally thought of as a parable. Luke intended for his readers to understand that the following ethical teachings involved more than just instructions about how to behave at a meal. That the instructions should be taken literally is, of course, true. However, they were also metaphorical and teach a general attitude toward self and others appropriate to members of God’s kingdom (cf. 14:15). Meekness and humility are basic to the proper attitude believers should display in their relationship toward God, and service to the needy is characteristic of the proper attitude one should have toward others. It is in this manner that these sayings function as a parable. How one should behave among others at a banquet, whether as a guest or as the host, is how one should behave before God.

Both sets of teachings are structurally quite similar. They are tied together by the common theme of an invitation to a meal. The key term “invite” is repeated five times (14:8, 9, 10, 12, 13). Both accounts also have “When[ever] you ...” followed by “do not ...” and a “lest ...” (14:8, 12, RSV). They are then concluded by “but when[ever] you ...” (14:10, 13) and a less exact “so that when ...” (14:10) and a “you will be ...” (14:14). The parallelism between these two sets of teachings is quite strong.

The teaching in these verses was inspired by Jesus’ observation of how various guests maneuvered themselves at a dinner (cf. 14:1) in order to sit in the positions of greatest honor. Pragmatically, Jesus pointed out the risks of so doing. It was not worth the disgrace and loss of face that would result from having to give up a place to one more worthy in front of all the guests. Similarly, believers were not to seek status from others but should wait in humility before God, whose praise alone is important. The first set of teachings ends with a proverb (14:11) that appears again in 18:14. Similar teachings are found elsewhere (see “Comments” on 14:11).

The second set of sayings turns to the case of a host who was self-seeking in his selection of guests. Hosts were challenged not to invite guests who were able to reciprocate. Four groups were mentioned: friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors (cf. 6:32–35). One should,

instead, use the banquet as an opportunity to help those who cannot reciprocate. Again, four groups were mentioned: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. The one who did this would be rewarded not by the recipients (cf. 16:3–7, where a steward acted with this purpose in mind) but by God at the day of judgment.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 14:1-11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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