

Teaching on Sabbath Laws and Social Conduct

Luke 14:1-14

Luke 14:1-6: Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. 2 And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. 3 And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" 4 But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him, and let him go. 5 Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" 6 And they could not answer Him regarding these things.

Background Notes

A leading Pharisee invited the Lord and other guests to have lunch in his home on the Sabbath. Why did this leader of the Pharisees invite Jesus? Was he a secret believer like Nicodemus? Probably not, because he and his friends were watching Jesus closely - not so they could praise the Lord if He healed the man with dropsy, but so that they could find fault with Him for healing on the Sabbath. In fact, there's a good possibility that this invitation was a set up, and the man with dropsy was a "plant" by the Pharisees to try to catch the Lord saying or doing what they believed was contrary to the Law of Moses. This was one of the primary motives of the scribes and Pharisees, as we see in Luke 11:53-54: "*And as He said these things to them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to assail Him vehemently, and to cross-examine Him about many things, lying in wait for Him, and seeking to catch Him in something He might say, that they might accuse Him.*"

The Lord put the ball in the Pharisees' court by asking them if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath (v3). What could they say? If they said yes, they had no case. If they said no, the Lord would have said, "Where does the Scripture say that it's illegal to heal on the Sabbath?" There is nothing in the Old Testament Law that said healing on the Sabbath was illegal. So they kept silent, and the Lord healed the man.

Dropsy, by the way, is a condition in which excess fluid is retained in the tissues and this results in swelling in various parts of the body. Dr. Luke correctly diagnosed this man's medical problem.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord taught the Pharisees the right view of Sabbath law.

The Old Testament Law did not forbid practicing medicine on the Sabbath. It was only the rabbinic tradition of Judaism that (wrongly) forbade going to the doctor on the Sabbath. After He healed the man, the Lord effectively silenced His critics by saying, *“Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?”* (By the way, some translations have “son” instead of “donkey” because of a difference in some manuscripts.)

According to Deuteronomy 5:14, people and animals were to rest on the Sabbath, but not a single one of the Pharisees would have considered rescuing a person or an animal as work or a violation of the Sabbath. How much more would healing a person be the right thing to do on any day of the week, including the Sabbath? In fact, because he was healed, the man was able to celebrate the Sabbath the way God intended it to be celebrated. He would be able to truly rest and worship and praise the Lord.

In Mark 2:27 the Lord said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,”* Man was not created so that he could legalistically keep the Sabbath by keeping a strict set of rules, but the Sabbath was made by God for man’s benefit. God knows that people need a break from work, and God knows that people are not fulfilled if they don’t take time out to worship their Creator. So the Sabbath day of rest was ordained for the benefit of mankind, not the other way around! The Pharisees had many wrong concepts of the Sabbath, so the Lord taught the Pharisees the correct view of Sabbath Law.

2. The Lord taught the Pharisees the right rules of social conduct.

Verses 7-14: So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: 8 “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; 9 and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. 10 But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. 11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” 12 Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

The rules for social conduct that our Lord gave to the Pharisees are just as good today as when the Lord gave them. Take the humble place at a formal dinner, and perhaps you will be invited to move up to a more prestigious seat (rather than the other way around!). And don't invite to your home only the people who can invite you to their homes in return – be sure to invite less fortunate people! These rules for social conduct are very applicable today.

Notice further verse 7: *“So He told a parable to those who were invited.”* Jesus was giving His audience a parable, a story with a deeper meaning. In other words, the wedding feast (v8) represents the future Messianic banquet when the Lord returns, and unity now is the key to promotion and reward in the Kingdom then. In Luke 3: 30 the Lord said, *“And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last.”* Notice, in verse 14, what will be the result if you follow Christ-like rules of social conduct in this life. You will be rewarded at the resurrection of the just or righteous ones!

When does the resurrection of the righteous take place? For the Church, it will be when the Lord returns at the Rapture of the Church. For the Old Testament saints and the martyrs of the Tribulation period, it will occur at the end of the Tribulation. (Some Christians feel that both Old Testament and New Testament saints will be taken up from this earth at the Rapture, but based on Daniel 12:2, I take the position that Old Testament saints will be resurrected at the end of the Tribulation period.) In any case, all believers will be at the Messianic banquet of the Kingdom of our Lord on this earth, and there will be special reward and position for believers in that Kingdom.

In Luke 13:24, we saw that entrance into the Kingdom is by the narrow gate, which is Jesus Christ, and entering by that Narrow Gate is of utmost importance. Here in chapter 14 we see that position and reward in that Kingdom are important as well. Following God's rules of social conduct doesn't get you into the Kingdom because we can only enter the Kingdom through the “Narrow Gate.” But if you're following God's rules, that's a good indication that you are a true believer, and you will be rewarded in the Kingdom. The Lord taught the right rules for social conduct.

Practical Application

1. Are you moving up in God's Kingdom?

“Moving up in society” is what many people think life is all about, including many Christians. For a large percentage of our society these days, being a “young urban professional,” (a “yuppie”) is where it's at. Just look at the ads on television, for example. But as far as God is concerned, moving up in His Kingdom is what it's all about.

Are you moving up in God's Kingdom by humbly serving others, or are you only interested in moving up the rungs of the corporate world ladder - or some other ladder the world has to offer? Don't wait to realize your mistake until it's too late in life. Are you moving up in God's Kingdom?

2. Seek service, not status!

In the wedding feast parable, the Lord's emphasis was directed at those who were invited to the feast. He told them not to try to get the best seat at the table! Take the humble place and don't seek to be recognized for their status. The application was obvious for those who were listening: *"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

So don't seek status! If we do, we will be humbled. Instead seek ways to serve others. After the Lord gave the parable, He went on to make these comments to the prominent self-righteous Pharisees who had given the meal where Jesus was attending: *"Then He also said to him who invited Him, 'When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.'"*

The Lord is not saying here that dinner with your family and friends is wrong, but that having dinner with family is generally not service that is worthy of unusual reward. But if you invite needy people – "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" and other needy people, the Lord used this as an example of truly serving others because they can't repay you. However, you will be repaid in the future when the Lord passes out the rewards. The Lord said that serving others was the way to be great in the Kingdom (Mark 10:42-45).

Galatians 5:13-14 says that we should be actively looking for ways we can serve others. *"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The fact that our Lord's comments here in Luke 13:13-14 are more a command than an option emphasize that we should be *actively* seeking ways to serve others. The question is, are we? Seek service not status.*