

The Pharisee In Me

If you do an internet word search on the word *hospitality* you will come up with 2,200,000 hits. I decided not to look up every one up individually but as I scrolled through I noticed something very interesting. Everyone had something to do with a business. Restaurants, hotels, resorts, products, services, employment.

Now, obviously there's nothing wrong with those industries per se. But there is something missing if hospitality only involves caring for people when we get something back for it.

The Bible commands us to show hospitality. In the books of I Timothy and Titus we're told that one of the qualifications of an elder is that he be given to hospitality. In I Peter and Romans all believers are commanded to be hospitable to one another.

The dictionary defines hospitality as: *Disposed to treat guests with warmth and generosity.*

I wonder when it comes down to it how many of us are truly hospitable. I can imagine that most of us in this room, because of our Christian faith, wouldn't steal, lie, or cheat. We'd take God's commands in areas of overt sin very seriously.

But sometimes His commands for positive obedience seem to slip by without us really being aware. One of those clear, positive commands is to show hospitality.

We've been in a study of the gospel of Luke now since December of 2000. Along the way we've been able to develop a clear picture of the character of Jesus Christ. We've seen how He's responded to critics, how he's dealt with people in need, and how He's taught His disciples.

Our study has also unfolded a portrait of Jesus' priorities. One of them was biblical hospitality.

Turn with me to our passage for today and we'll see how Jesus develops this theme for us. He does it, as He often does, in an unexpected way.

Luke 14 pg 1010 Read vs 1

In the South there used to be a tradition of inviting the preacher over for chicken dinner after church on Sunday.

Actually that didn't originate here. That was something that the Jewish people of Jesus day practiced.

It was customary to invite the "visiting preacher," in this case, Jesus, and other guests to dinner after the synagogue service.

Since this was the Sabbath, and God had commanded that no work be done by the Jewish people on the Sabbath, all the food would have been prepared ahead of time for this rather large dinner.

Included as guests, would have been, Jesus' disciples, Jesus, the host, and his fellow Pharisees. Since making or tending fire wasn't allowed on the Sabbath itself (which began at sundown Friday night) food was prepared on Friday, and then kept warm for one of the three Sabbath meals. Friday evening, one on Saturday morning, and a light meal following the time of Saturday afternoon prayer.

We're not sure which meal Jesus was invited to, but I would guess it was the Friday evening meal which would be the most elaborate of the three.

As we've seen over the last several chapters Jesus has caused quite a stir among these religious Pharisees. He's pointed out how hypocritical most of them were and, quite frankly, they were getting tired of it.

They were plotting and scheming ways to trap Jesus. So here He is with a dinner invitation. Luke lets us know they didn't invite Him because they were hospitable. Instead *they watched Him closely...*

Literally the Greek construction Luke uses says *they kept on watching Him closely*.

Now let me ask you: How many of us would accept a dinner invitation when we knew we were going to be the main course? Someone wanted to chew us up and spit us out?

Jesus accepts this invitation. Why? It isn't that He doesn't know what they're up to. He knows perfectly well they're scheming right now. But Jesus goes because He wanted to do two things.

Number one: He wanted to expose the distortion these religious men had made of God's truth. He wanted people to see that there was a difference between mere religion and God's truth.

Jesus faced the same thing in His day that we've got going on in our day. People claim to believe in God. They may even go to church. But it's all outward. There's no personal relationship with their Creator. They know about God but they don't know God.

That's where most of these Pharisees were.

The second reason Jesus went to this meal was to add to their charges they were accumulating against Him. He wanted to give them some more ammunition.

Now the Pharisees would ultimately oversee His crucifixion so at first this might sound a little strange. Why help build the case of those who were plotting your death?

But see, that was the point. Jesus was headed into the final phase of His life. His purpose wasn't to die of old age. It was go to the cross to die as our substitute. It was to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

The whole Bible points to the cross. All the way back in the first book, the book of Genesis the first two people, Adam and Eve, sin against their creator. They disobey God. They realize their naked, and they sew aprons of fig leaves together to cover themselves.

There's some problems with fig leaf clothes, isn't there?

They don't wash up too well for one thing. They're a bear to iron. But more importantly they quickly dry up and crumble. They can't do the job.

God judges them for their disobedience. He condemns them for their offense. And then He does something very important.

Gen 3:21 *...for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.*

God slew an animal and made them clothes. Right from the beginning God was establishing some principles: the wages of sin is death; the idea of substitution (that the innocent would die for the guilty); and the truth that man's ways are inadequate. Only God can truly cover sin.

6000 years later Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled those truths when He hung on the cross in payment for our sins.

So while these guys are plotting against Him and think they're being pretty slick about it, Jesus is the one whose really in control.

As we move through this passage today we're going to see Jesus confront three falsehoods. False religion. False pride. And false hospitality.

A True Disciple of the Lord Puts Mercy Above Tradition **Read vs 2-3**

The guest list for this meal had been carefully prepared to include a man who suffered from a physical disease.

He is described as suffering from *dropsy*. The Greek word is *hudropikos*.

(a) *Hudor* is the Greek word for "water."

(b) The second part of the word has to do with looking or seeing.

It means "looking watery."

Dropsy, or edema, as we would call it today, is an abnormal accumulation of fluids in the body due to a faulty heart or kidneys. It manifests itself in the bloating of the face and can also cause swelling in the arms and legs. Discomfort can be only temporarily relieved by puncturing the patient with a hollow needle and siphoning off the excess fluid.

Every time the man did this, he would become ceremonially unclean. It was the teaching of the rabbis that a man who had this kind of disease had committed a grievous sin.

I believe this was all a setup. We've seen this scenario before. Sabbath day. Pharisees. A person whose sick or in need of help.

In the other passages where Jesus has healed a person on the Jewish Sabbath the religious leaders criticized Him. So Jesus sees this one coming and He gets the jump on them.

He asks the question, "*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?*"

That sounds like a strange question doesn't it?

Actually the Sabbath was what we call Saturday. In Jewish reckoning Sunday is the first day of the week.

Here's pretty much the extent of God's command to the Jewish people about the Sabbath: Deuteronomy 5:13-15 *Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor the stranger who is within your gates. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*

That's pretty straightforward and uncomplicated, isn't it? God said, "Jewish people, this is my covenant with you. Rest on Saturday and remember as you do that I brought you out of the slavery of Egypt and gave you rest."

Here's the danger that's inherent in rules. They tend to grow. The rule itself may not be bad at all, but sinful people tend to distort God's truth.

Over the centuries the Jewish scholars had developed a complex system of man made rules to help them keep God's rules.

God's intent was clear. In other places we're told, God made the Sabbath for man, not man for the Sabbath. In other words, God meant for the Sabbath to be a day when people could center their thoughts on God and rest from the week's work. Genesis tells us that after taking 6 days to create all things, that God rested on the seventh day. He didn't rest because He was tired but to show He was finished.

The Sabbath rest illustrated the rest we have in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Hebrews 4 says: *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*

Instead of seeing the intent of God's rule, the Pharisees, in their zeal legislated a legalistic system to make sure people would observe the Sabbath lawfully. It went into great detail about what could and could not be done. How many steps a person could actually take before they were on a journey. Work was forbidden on the Sabbath, so the Pharisees decreed that a scribe couldn't even write one word down or he'd be working.

Jesus says, "How about miracles?" Great question. Could a miracle be forbidden on the Sabbath? That wasn't covered in their laws.

They said, a doctor could not treat a patient on the Sabbath but he could give you something that would keep you from getting worse.

So Jesus asks, not so much to get an answer, but to challenge their thinking: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" No answer. So he grabs the man and heals him.

The other times Jesus healed on the Sabbath they condemned Him. This time they couldn't condemn Him because He asked and they had no answer.

A True Disciple of the Lord Puts Mercy Above Tradition.

Tradition isn't always a bad thing. Tradition can give us a link with the past.

One of the weaknesses of our age is the disconnect we have with history. We're very focused on the here and now and most people have little interest in history.

When it comes to Christianity, you can't ignore history. We have a historical faith. In our postmodern age we tend to see everything as only relevant to us if it's current.

Unless you're talking to a history major most college students give you a blank stare when you talk about Jesus death 2000 years ago. I've had them say, "What's that got to do with me?"

Jesus came at a point and time in history. He was a historical person who lived and died in time and space. Religion is not whatever you want to make it out to be.

True faith asks what are the facts and then believes those facts. Tradition lets us know that Christianity didn't just start with us. God has always had a people and we can learn from their wisdom and understanding.

There is a potential problem with tradition though. Sometimes we put so much emphasis on tradition that we put it above God Himself.

God commanded the Jews to keep the Sabbath. That was a historical command and they should have obeyed it. But they constantly added to that command. They constantly said, "Here's what 'no work' really means." To the point of being critical of Jesus' desire to help someone in need.

We can easily get bound up in our own form of traditions. We need to be real careful that the traditions we hold to are always secondary to ministering to people.

Read vs 5-6

He turns to the lawyers who were knee-deep in the Scriptures, and to the Pharisees, who were so proud of their ability to interpret Scripture and says, "Listen, it's easy for you to stand back and to be detached, and to be theologically precise about what's happening. But this man is suffering. And he's much more important than any animal. And you know that the Law says that if an animal falls down a well, you can pull him out on a Sabbath. But if a man is suffering on a Sabbath, according to you, we can't get near him."

Jesus evaluates their lives- how they're treating strangers, how blind they are getting, how much selfishness is creeping in, how picky they are being. And he says, "Listen, I know if that were your ox, he'd be out of that well in a heartbeat! You wouldn't care if it were Saturday, or Thursday- he'd be out!

Now notice that they never answer or say a word. In fact, they don't even thank God that the guy was healed. There isn't a word about them rejoicing that Jesus the Messiah has come and healed this sick man in front of their very eyes.

All they saw was that he was breaking the Law, he was working on the Sabbath. Actually, He was breaking their traditions, but that was all they saw.

What's really amazing is, he walks in to eat anyway. All this pressure and conflict going on, and he still goes in and says, "Let's eat."

- I. *A True Disciple of the Lord Puts Mercy Above Tradition*
- II. *A True Disciple of the Lord Puts Others Before Themselves*

Read vs 7

At 1st century banquets the basic item of furniture was, the *triclinium*, a couch for three. A number of such couches were arranged in a U-shape around a low table. Guests reclined on their left elbows and eat with their right hand.

Leonardo da Vinci painted his masterpiece, "The Last Supper" 1500 years after Christ. In his painting he pictures Jesus and His disciples sitting at a table. That never happened. The last supper, just like this Sabbath meal was eaten while reclining.

The place of highest honor was the central position on the couch at the base of the U. The second and third places were those to the left of "center."

At this particular feast there was a rather noticeable push for the places of honor. Again, this is why Jesus accepted this invitation in the first place. He knew what would happen and He wanted the opportunity to challenge these men.

It would have been interesting to know where they were going to seat Jesus, wouldn't it?

Read 8-10

Jesus gives some practical advice: Don't grab the best seat in the house in case someone more important than you comes and you're embarrassed when the host moves you.

The best way is to take the least place and let the host move you up.

Remember that this is a parable. It's not a lecture on manners and table etiquette. It is designed to teach spiritual truth. That truth involves pride and humility.

Here's the biblical principal: **read vs 11**

The way in which to enter the kingdom of God is through humility. It's through recognizing that you're unworthy to enter God's kingdom. It is by confessing that you're a guilty sinner and that you can't be good enough to merit any good thing from the hand of God.

The Bible is clear that just like Adam and Eve's fig leaves couldn't cover their sin, neither can our religions. religion ultimately leads to pride because it says I can be good enough to please God. I can do something that God is so pleased with that He forgives my sins.

The Bible says: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

This isn't a false humility. This isn't just putting on a show. This is real humility that comes to God trusting Him alone for forgiveness.

Now, if we've come to God that way, then it ought to be a given that we'll approach all of life that way. If we have a biblical view of self that says, "I'm nothing in and of myself. Every thing I have, and are, and ever will be I owe to Him." Then we'll live truly humble lives.

God glorifies the humble. Why? Because the humble man does not try to take God's place. The humble man is willing for God to be God.

Here's the biblical mandate from Philippians 2: *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name...

Here's one we all battle with because we're all prideful people in our own way. the challenge is serve God and others and let God take care of the exalting part.

- I. *A True Disciple of the Lord Puts Mercy Above Tradition*
- II. *A True Disciple of the Lord Puts Others Before Themselves*
- III. *A True Disciple of the Lord Gives When Others Can't Give in Return*

Read vs 12-13

Here's a great test of your Biblical interpretation skills. Today we have study Bibles of every type imaginable. It's overwhelming for most people trying to decide which one to buy.

Did you know there's even *The Skeptic's Annotated Bible*. Actually it isn't in print yet, but there's an online version at skepticsannotatedbible.com. It's stated purpose is: *...help those who believe in the Bible to honestly reconsider that belief. It will help those who are unfamiliar with the Bible to resist the temptation to believe. And it will help those who have already rejected the Bible defend their position.*

As I looked over any number of references and notes I realized that most of the critiques were of verses taken completely out of their context.

As Hank Hannegraff often says: *A verse out of context is a pretext.*

Here's a great example of how that might happen. If you just took these verses and pulled them out of their context you could argue that the Bible says you can't your friends and family over for dinner.

That is obviously not the point. Jesus' point is this: Don't only help those who can reciprocate. *A True Disciple of the Lord Gives When Others Can't Give in Return.*

This is a continuation of the parable. The lesson's one about giving. The point is that when we give to those who are able to reward or repay us in some way, we are not really giving. We are only making a self-centered investment. Real giving involves giving to someone who can't pay us back.

Here's the pressing question: What are our motives in doing good? Is it to have good returned to us? It's easy to do good to good people. It is easy to invite cultured people to cultured events. It is easy to accept religious people into the church.

But Jesus reached out to the people considered outcasts and the misfits. He invited the unchurched. And He shook things up when they came.

When the Son of God became flesh and visited the planet, He was accused of not being religious enough. He didn't conform to religious standards. He went around talking to prostitutes and hugging lepers. He not only mingled with sinners, but here was the kicker, He seemed to enjoy their company.

One man wrote: "Jesus didn't die between two cathedrals. He died... between two thieves. On the town garbage heap. Amidst cursing and gambling. Within a metropolitan area. in an area whose international culture mandated that the sign above His cross be written in three different languages.

Why? Because that is what He is all about. He came as the only One who was totally clean and perfect and He came into a dirty world to make us clean again. Jesus was holy. But He was also approachable."

You know, these categories- the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, are also a picture of our spiritual condition. We can open our lives today to those who are poor in spirit, to those who are bankrupt, to those who are crippled by legalism and strange teachings, to those who are lame because of sin which has crippled them so that they

can't move as you and I expect them to. And those who are blind we can set free by telling them the truth.

We can open our lives and love strangers. Jesus says, "The reason that I want you to do this is because this is the concern of my heart. This is why I came. I want you to serve them."

This is real hospitality.

And Jesus says even though they can't pay you back, there is a payback. **Read vs 14**

You'll be blessed, because you always are when you do anything in Jesus' name, but there's a future blessing too. It's obviously not our main motivation, but it should be an incentive.

There's extra blessings in eternity for those believers who committed themselves to living like Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you this morning, what is it that may be keeping you from being hospitable? Remember, hospitality isn't an option.

Could it be tradition? I've never done anything like that before! Me Help out in a rescue mission? Me take over the nursing home ministry? Me, mentor someone at the detention center?

Maybe it's pride and position. "I don't associate with people like that. I need to keep up my image!"

Or maybe it's that it's hard to reach out to someone whose different than you. It's hard to touch people's lives when we don't have anything in common.

Even in church we gravitate toward the people who are most like us.

But Jesus gave us the example. He could hang out and eat with the religious. He could enjoy His time with the wealthy. But He could also be at home with the people that the rest of His society despised.

Where are you today on this whole issue of hospitality? God wants us to have the mind of Christ. To think and act like His Son.