

International Sunday School Lesson Study Notes

Lesson Text: Luke 14:7-14

Lesson Title: Showing Humility

Introduction

The great English preacher of the 19th century, Charles Spurgeon said, "Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self." Obviously, the religious leaders of Jesus' day had an estimate of themselves that was contrary to God's Word. The Pharisees and Sadducees were two groups of religious leaders who prided themselves on their external works and adherence to rules. Today, we call them legalists.

A legalist is someone who attempts to relate to God through rules rather than relationship. A legalist tries to control externals. It's easier to do something than it is to be something. A legalist presents a false picture of God. God is not a harsh taskmaster waiting to damn anyone and everyone who sins. Perhaps the most damaging characteristic of a legalist is pride. The Bible says, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). The religious leaders of Jesus' day were not only destroying their own souls, they were also destroying the spiritual lives of the people who followed them.

Jesus did not come to this earth to clash with the religious leaders or win a spiritual argument. He came to redeem people from their sin. However, when legalism, tradition, and the Pharisees and Sadducees teaching conflicted with truth, Jesus confronted error.

In Luke 14, Luke tells us of an occasion when Jesus went to eat at the home "...of one of the chief Pharisees." It was the "sabbath day" and Jesus was closely being "watched" by those in attendance (Luke 14:1). In addition to the Pharisees and scribes, there was also a man there "which had the dropsy" (Luke 14:2). That was an abnormal collection of fluid causing the body to swell. A man in this condition would not have normally been invited to such an occasion. The words "before him" (Luke 14:2) suggests that this sick man had been intentionally positioned before Jesus in order to test him.

Jesus asked the Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day" (Luke 14:3)? There was no answer so Jesus healed the man. Before the Pharisees' could say a word Jesus asked another question. "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day" (Luke 14:5)?

The answer was obvious. The Pharisees would have pulled the ox out of the ditch and they knew they would, so they kept silent.

Our Lord's questions while certainly unconventional for a gathering such as this were nonetheless brilliant! He put the Pharisee's in a public "no-win" situation. He laid a foundation upon which He will now teach a parable on humility.

Jesus' Word to the Guests (Luke 14:7-11)

Verse 7-9

"And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room."

This particular supper Jesus was attending was attended by some whose purpose in being there was to "*watch him*" (Luke 14:1). Now, the tables are turned as Jesus "marked how they chose out the chief room." Instead of them watching him, he was watching them! Jesus observed that they were picking out for themselves the "chief rooms," or "places of significance." These invited guests were "jockeying for position."

Almost every culture has rules of etiquette for meals, seating positions, etc. In Jewish culture, the most honored guest usually reclined to the left of the host while the next honored guest reclined on his right. Beyond that, it was sort of on a first come first serve basis. Therefore, there was the very noticeable choosing of the chief places by the invited guests.

Noticing the emphasis these guests placed on being in the right place and around the people, Jesus responded by saying, "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him..." In other words, "If you are invited to an important event, such as a marriage, don't assume you are to have the seat of honor. If you do, someone more important than you may have been invited and you might have their seat and be asked to move."

Jesus is referencing Proverbs 25:6-7, "*Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the*

prince whom thine eyes have seen." While this bit of practical wisdom from Solomon is useful in our day to day activities, Jesus had much more in mind when he referenced it. Jesus used this proverb as a warning about the eternal consequences of pride. The Pharisees judged their own worth to that of their peers, not only to determine where one might sit at a wedding, but to judge worthiness in God's eyes. Jesus wanted them to know that is dangerous. He wanted them to know that pride always results in disgrace.

In their minds, the Pharisees were at the front of the line spiritually. But with God, they were going to be asked to go to the rear of the line if their hearts were not changed!

Question: How important is it to you to be invited to the right places, sit with the right people, and be in the right position? Do you base your acceptance in God's kingdom on your acceptance by people in the world?

Verse 10

"But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee."

In verses 7-10, Jesus is teaching how pride and embarrassment can be avoided. Now, he is teaching the proper way to be honored. When someone is "bidden" to a wedding or a supper, Jesus said, "go and sit down in the lowest room." Don't position yourself or assume that you are the most favored one there or the one to whom everyone else should take a back seat. If you assume the position of humility, the one who invited you may say, "Friend, go up higher." Jesus' point is this. In God's kingdom, bowing low puts the humble on the fast track to the top. And Jesus is not just teaching. He lived the very truth He is teaching here. Jesus subjected Himself to the humiliation of the cross for the sake of sinners. He lowered Himself to become our Servant and is now highly exalted (Philippians 2:5-11).

"Then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee" means if you act in humility, everyone sitting at the table with you will honor you for your actions. No one likes to see people push their way to the front or assert their superiority over others. It is demeaning. Again, Jesus is teaching more here than social etiquette. The Jewish people had been subjected to the spiritual superiority of the Pharisees and religious leaders for decades. The message of pride

and position they portrayed was contrary to the message of humility taught by Christ.

Verse 11

"For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

These words of Jesus are an unchangeable principle of truth. Humbling the proud and exalting the humble is an essential kingdom principle. Mary, the mother of our Lord stated this same principle when she said, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:52). The individual who promotes himself above others will ultimately be "abased." The word "abased" means "leveled, brought low." The individual "that humbleth himself" will be "exalted" or, "honored." Luke's use of the word "shall" twice means God will see to it that it happens.

Jesus used these same words again in reference to the scribes and Pharisees as a prelude to his seven woes against them in Matthew 23:12-13. The truth of the proud being brought low and the humble being lifted up was ignored in Jesus day and it is still ignored today. How many politicians believe Jesus' words? How many professional athletes believe Jesus' words? How many businesses and corporations advertise that they are looking to hire an employee who will "humble himself?" And lest we be quick to criticize the world we must recognize that nowhere is this truth denied more than in the church. If the preacher is to be successful and his ministries flourish then he must promote himself. Humility is not what the average search committee is looking for. God help all of us!

The Apostle Peter wrote, *"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time"* (1 Peter 5:5-6).

Note: If one pursues humility with the goal of being promoted and honored, that type of humility is just another form of selfish pride. True exaltation belongs to those who do not only take the lower place, but are willing to occupy it.

Jesus' Word to the Host (Luke 14:12-14)

Verse 12

"Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee."

After a scathing rebuke to the guests attending this meal, Jesus now focused His attention on "him that bade him," the host. This host was "one of the chief Pharisees" (Luke 14:1). Because of his official status and position, Jesus urged him to not invite people for political gain. Just like today, this host had called his "friends, brethren, kinsman, and rich neighbours" to this meal. Jesus was not telling the man he couldn't feed his family and friends or have fellowship with "rich neighbors."

"Lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee" simply means inviting people to our dinner so one day they can return the favor. You know, "I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine." Jesus forbids this type of activity. It is nothing less than selfish pride.

Question: Do we operate like this in our churches? Do we invite people to join our church because they have money? Do we by pass the house of the poor or those with no talent in order to build our church rolls with those who can make us look good?

Verse 13-14

"But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

Jesus now tells the host who should be invited when he has "a feast." He is to "call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." This is not a very attractive guest list. The "poor" is a reference to those who are destitute, beggars. The "poor" have nothing to bring to the feast. The "maimed" are the disabled. The "maimed" are people who are missing something and their condition would be visible. The "lame" is also a reference to someone who can't function in certain areas. The "blind" is a reference to not just inability to see physically but could possibly be a reference to mental blindness.

Jesus told the host that if he invited this group of people he would be "blessed." The host who invites this group of people will be highly favored of God. This group of people "cannot recompense thee." These people can do nothing to build

up the social standing of the host. They won't be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned, "at the resurrection of the just."

The phrase "thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" was a stake in the heart of the Pharisees. Pharisees believed the doctrine of the resurrection and they believed God reserved eternal reward for those who obeyed the law and did good deeds. Jesus wanted the host to know that if he expected to be at the "resurrection of the just" or receive any reward at the "resurrection of the just," he must live in humility and not spiritual pride. There must have been an uncomfortable, awkward silence as Jesus spoke these powerful words.

Conclusion

Jesus' teaching on humility and how we must live is certainly a different approach that was the custom of the day among the Pharisees. His teaching is also a different approach from much of our current ministries. There is nothing that ruins lives, churches, and Christian ministries more quickly than spiritual pride.

Like the Pharisees, most of us live within the radius of our little world. Maybe it is our little county. Maybe it is our little city. Maybe it is our little family and few friends. Maybe it is our little denomination or spiritual click. We invite who we want to be in the kingdom. The "poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind" can't help our church, so we don't invite them. The only people we invite or treat special are those who can contribute to our treasury, make our choir sound better, and add to our standing among the world.

As we come away from the truth of this lesson, let us once again be impressed with our Lord. Jesus never checked the color of any man's skin, the money in any man's pocket, or the ability a man may or may not have had. He had compassion on sinners. He humbled himself and served without prejudice. May God help us to do the same!

Amen.