

38. The Healing of a Man on the Sabbath

Luke 14:1-14

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Jesus was visiting various towns and villages north of Jerusalem, slowly moving south to the city where He knew He would be crucified in a few months. When Christ humiliated his opponents in the synagogue where He had delivered and healed the crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17), the embarrassment reached the ears of those in the Sanhedrin, the seventy most powerful religious elite in Jerusalem. They decided to send out the big guns. In their opinion, this Man must be stopped! A prominent Pharisee along with experts in the law as well as other Pharisees invited Him to lunch.

The Healing of the Man with Dropsy

¹One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ²There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. ³Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" ⁴But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. ⁵Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" ⁶And they had nothing to say (Luke 14:1-6).

During the 1980's I had several opportunities to visit different towns and villages, preaching in various churches in England. It is very customary in England for the visiting preacher to have dinner after the service, either with the local pastor or in a home of one of the leaders in the congregation. This custom was also held in Israel. Jesus was probably the visiting speaker in the Shabbat morning synagogue meeting, and so was now invited to lunch. This healing of the man that morning was before they took their places to recline around the low triclinium table.

Question 1) How come this man sick with the dropsy managed to get into the house of this prominent Pharisee? Why does Luke tell us: "He was being carefully watched?" (Verse 1).

The Greek word that is translated *carefully watched* literally means to watch on the side, or watch insidiously. In other words, they were watching out of the corner of their eyes, hoping to catch Jesus on something that He said or did. Was this a set up? I can't imagine that this Pharisee had it in his heart to invite this man with dropsy to enter his home without a reason; somehow I don't think the man's health was the motive. Luke tells us that he was a "prominent Pharisee." It is likely that he was one of the members of the Sanhedrin, the elite ruling body of 70 individuals that would soon convict Jesus of blasphemy (Matthew 26:63-66). Christ is always open to eat with whomever invites Him to their home (Revelation 3:20). The Pharisees were known for their opposition to him, yet he still reaches out to them around a table of food. As it was the home of a law keeping Pharisee, the food would have been prepared before the Sabbath had started. The Jewish people could keep the food hot by having just a small flame under the main dish. Of course, though, it had to be lit before the Sabbath started. Any cooking would have been breaking their interpretation of the Law.

Let's try to enter the life and pain of the man with dropsy. Today, this condition is called *edema*. It is a swelling up of parts of the body to grotesque sizes, due to fluid buildup. We could say that he was drowning in his own body fluid. Edema is often caused by organ failure, the heart, kidney or liver. With such a sickness, he was not far from death. We are not told what parts of his body had swelled up, but it was obviously visible to all that were there. If it was in the legs he would have found it very difficult to walk or even to stand. It seems that he was not cared for by the religious crowd, their only interest was to use him to trap Jesus. The Lord saw the ambush coming. A man with a condition such as this would not be invited to eat with the experts in the Law and the Pharisees. This poor, sick man was just the bait in their trap. It is very likely that he was looked down upon by the religious Jews. The common thinking of the Pharisees concerning the poor, sick and ill was that their sin was being visited on them by God. The crippled, lame, sick and blind were forbidden to serve as priests because of their physical imperfections (Lev 21:17-23), this led the Pharisees to believe that sick, deformed and ill people were sinful and cursed by God: **“But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them”** (John 7:49).

Christ's heart went out to the man. He would not compromise His value that people come first. People are precious to Jesus. The creator of the Universe (John 1:3) left the glories of Heaven to come to minister healing and help to men such as this, and people such as ourselves. What would He do? The room grew very quiet as Jesus took up their challenge. We read in the Gospels of seven incidents of Jesus healing on the Sabbath day (John 5:9; John 9:14; Mark 1:21; Luke 4:38; Luke 6:6; Luke 13:13; with the seventh being this passage, 14:1-6). The Pharisees felt that their authority was being insulted by Jesus. He did not care for their interpretation that healing a person on the Sabbath was viewed as work. The Pharisees believed that you could only help someone on the Sabbath if his life was in danger of being lost. Healing people on the Sabbath would be breaking the fourth Commandment, you shall not work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10). How this must have grieved the heart of Jesus! We are to use things and love people, but the Pharisees used people and loved things. We, as God's people must put people before rules and regulations of men. We are to love what God loves—people. The more helpless they are, the more His heart aches to reach them and minister to their needs. He wants to use us, the Body of Christ, to heal their hurts and pain.

Jesus shifted the focus of attention from Himself to the Pharisees and lawyers gathered. The Lord has a way of asking a question to make bare a person's heart. Looking around at them, He said, **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”** (v. 3). The Greek word translated as *lawful* means to be authorized, permitted or is it proper? He wasn't asking if it was lawful according to the law of Moses, He was asking them to give their opinion on what was proper. They did not anticipate this question. They were perplexed as to how to respond. If they would have spoken up against healing on the Sabbath in front of this very needy man, the state of their calloused hearts would have been revealed, and no-one would have come to that synagogue again!

They certainly did not want to give Him permission to heal on the Sabbath after thinking that they had Him in a trap. They knew that the Word of God had no limitations to acts of compassion on the Sabbath.

⁴But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.
⁵Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" ⁶And they had nothing to say (Luke 14:4-6).

I wonder what Luke means when he writes that Jesus took hold of the man? (v. 4). We must remember that to the Pharisees, the man with dropsy was unclean. It is possible that Jesus loved on the man, healing him by wrapping His arms around him and giving him a big hug. He had healed a leper by laying His hand on the leper and healing him (Mark 1:41). It's also possible that the words mean that he laid hands on him to heal him. All we are told is that He took hold of the man, healed him, and sent him away. The man was obviously not an invited guest because Jesus released him to go home. He was certainly not wanted at the lunch by the religious elite.

He appealed to their common sense, saying that if their animal was drowning in a well, wouldn't they get it out? He was appealing to their economic need first, saying that they would have to buy another ox if they wanted to plow their fields. Then again, if their son had fallen down a well and was drowning, wouldn't they do what they could to release their son from drowning? This man before them had been drowning in his own fluid, and was someone's son. Shouldn't this son be released from drowning? How can they believe that God is like that? This distorted view of God is something that Jesus had come to challenge. The passage ends with Luke telling us that they had nothing to say.

[Question 2\) In what ways do people have their view of God distorted? Has this happened to you?](#)

The Importance of Humility.

⁷When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:7-11).

After the man healed of dropsy had departed, Jesus noticed the scrambling for position at the tables around the room. The guests "picked the places of honor at the table." Vying for position and the honor of men indicates insecurity and lack of faith in God, compelling them to push themselves forward. G.K. Chesterton once said, "It is always the secure that are humble."

Helen Keller once said, "I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker."

In Church, politics, and business, people push themselves forward, seeking to gain positions of power and influence. Jesus had to deal with this dog eat dog attitude in His own disciples:

³⁵Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. ³⁷They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." ³⁸"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" ³⁹"We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." ⁴¹When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴²Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:35-45).

If we see this attitude within our own hearts, (and who does not see it, for we all have it), the best way to uproot it is to serve others. If you want to be great in the Kingdom of God, take the humble way of service to others. This pleases God because it is the way of Christ; it is the crucified life of laying one's life down for others. This is true Godliness. To the degree we serve others, is the same degree we are becoming truly Christ like. We are being conformed to the image of Christ through humble acts of service.

When a person knows just who he or she is in God, there is no need to be pushing ourselves forward. Jesus, at the Last Supper, when He got up to wash His disciple's feet, could do so because He knew who He was.

³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist (John 13:3-4).

We are sons and daughters of God. The God of the universe has chosen us to receive His life! (Colossians 1:27). He has a purpose and plan for every one of His children; we do not need to push our way into position. The King of Heaven is well able to make a way for us to be exactly where He wants us to be. We can take a lower seat, preferring others above ourselves because we know who we are; we are King's kids! We do not need to seek superiority, we are empowered to allow others to take the seats of honor, because we know that the One whom we are to please will see and honor us in His good time and in His way.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:9-10).

Question 3) In what arenas of life today do we see people scrambling for position? How does true humility differ from this mind set? Do you think some people have a false view of humility?

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant. He humbled himself....and became obedient to death (Philippians 2:7-8).

It is a spiritual law of the universe, just as the Law of Gravity is a physical law of the Earth, that whoever humbles himself will be exalted. Booker T. Washington, the renowned black educator, was an outstanding example of humility. Shortly after he took over the presidency of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, he was walking in an exclusive section of town when he was stopped by a wealthy white woman. Not knowing the famous Mr. Washington by sight, she asked if he would like to earn a few dollars by chopping wood for her. Because he had no pressing business at the time, Professor Washington smiled, rolled up his sleeves, and proceeded to do the humble chore she had requested. When he was finished, he carried the logs into the house and stacked them by the fireplace. A little girl recognized him and later revealed his identity to the lady. The next morning the embarrassed woman went to see Mr. Washington in his office at the Institute and apologized profusely. "It's perfectly all right, Madam," he replied. "Occasionally I enjoy a little manual labor. Besides, it's always a delight to do something for a friend." She shook his hand warmly and assured him that his meek and gracious attitude had endeared him and his work to her heart. Not long afterward she showed her admiration by persuading some wealthy acquaintances to join her in donating thousands of dollars to the Tuskegee Institute.¹

Humility is not taught in Bible schools, or our institutes of higher learning. The only place one can learn humility is by experiencing what life throws at you, and responding with the character of Christ. This is one of the reasons I am writing and studying the life of Christ in the Book of Luke. Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and **learn from me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). We are seeing the character of Christ on display as we mull over what Luke has written. The Spirit of God operates on our heart as we watch Jesus live His life.

To be a good leader, not only in the church but in the business world, it requires that we learn how to interact with people. Andrew J. Holmes said, "It is well to remember that the entire population of the universe, with one trifling exception, is composed of others." Therefore, having a right perception of ourselves is key to being a leader. If you want to win hearts and minds, be ever thinking of others. When the Salvation Army had a conference many years ago, they asked William Booth, their leader, who was sick at the time, if he would like to say anything to all the leaders present. He sent back one word, "others." People will follow a leader who puts others in front of themselves. There are many examples of such leaders throughout history. Napoleon was a leader who was greatly loved by his people. One of the ways he endeared himself to others was by visiting the sentries on duty. He knew them all by name and asked about their families. Alexander the Great led from the front, when his army had to walk, he walked; when he was brought a drink and his army was thirsty, he poured it out on the ground. He did not want to experience anything his men were not experiencing. People that walk a life of humility listen to others and are open to correction, they readily admit when they are wrong.

Question 4) Have you known someone who exemplified both greatness and humility? Can you think of other times when Jesus gave us an example of both His greatness and His humility?

¹ Our Daily Bread

As they sat reclining at the table, Jesus turned His attention to giving them some instruction as to inviting people to dinner. Keep in mind that our next study after this carries on this thought as Jesus shared with them the Parable of the Wedding Feast. He previews the parable by a few words of instruction.

Payment Delayed

¹²Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:12-14).

The Pharisees and important people reclining around the table were those who gave out invitations to be invited themselves. Their goal was to meet business people or using such contacts to advance themselves in society. Invitation lists were carefully thought through for maximum advantage to climbing the ladder of society. The Lord instructs them to have an eternity mindset, having no other motive but to bring glory to God by meeting the needs of the poor. This is what we are doing with www.groupbiblestudy.com Our goal is to spread a spiritual feast before those that we don't know all over the world. We won't know until eternity who have reached onto the table and have been fed by the Word of God. We don't do what we do to receive a reward, we do it because we ourselves have received freely so we freely give (Matthew 10:8). If a man values the Word of God coming to him, he in turn will want to give it to others. Having an attitude of serving others before oneself will be greatly rewarded at the coming of Jesus. Jesus turns his attention to his host, the prominent Pharisee. He tells him, and us, to do acts of service that give no advancement in this world. Feeding the poor is lending to the Lord. **He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done (Proverbs 19:17).** When we are kind to those with needs, we are laying up treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can damage our investment.

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21).

Treasures in heaven are acts of kindness to those who cannot help themselves, such as having a banquet for the hungry. God is pleased with such investments. We should be careful that our motives are pure in what we do, that our acts of righteousness are not done before men, to be seen by them (Matthew 6:1), for God sees and knows the thoughts of every heart. William Barclay, the commentator, writes: "A man may give because he cannot help it. That is the only real way to give. The law of the kingdom is this—that if a man gives to gain reward he will receive no reward; but if a man gives no thought of reward his reward is certain. The only real giving that which is the uncontrollable outflow of love."² He knows our motives. Every kindness

² William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible, the Gospel of Luke*, Published by Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh. Page 191.

with a correct motive will be greatly rewarded by our God. He does not forget anything, and it is laid up as treasure in heaven, waiting for our arrival. There will be some who are poor in heaven and others who have laid up much. What our treasure will look like I do not know, but the rewards are disproportionate to the service we rendered or the sacrifice we entered for the sake of the Gospel and the Salvation of the lost.

²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

There are great rewards to the child of God who invests his time talents and money to the service of getting the gospel to the world of men, ministering to the poor, broken and despised of this world. I believe that God is saying that our reward for acts of kindness in this life will be great and disproportionate to what we spent of ourselves. While we are living here on earth we cannot comprehend how God will repay his people.

⁹However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Living a life of humility in serving others will not always be easy. Sometimes God will ask us to do things that cause us to cringe. On such occasions, the Lord is greatly honored in our obedience to Him.

Prayer: Father, make me like Jesus, the greatest servant that this world has seen. Help me to be clothed in His character. Amen.

Keith Thomas

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com