



This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



Called to Humility and Hospitality

Study Scripture: Luke 14:7-14

Lesson 1, March 2, 2019

Key Verse

For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Luke 14:11

INTRODUCTION

We again look at the matter of 'right' behavior. Let us remember at the outset that our Lord Jesus of Nazareth is a man whose behavior is the model for us.

We must also note from this Study how Jesus acted at a time when He was not very popular with the ruling classes and He had powerful enemies that were seeking to trap Him and to destroy Him.

So we also should learn that there is a proper way to behave even when we are surrounded by enemies who watch us closely and seek to provide some occasion to accuse and damage our ministry. The right way therefore is always the way of humility even when we are invited and placed in a situation which is dangerous for us.

We are told that in the matter of 'wrong' behavior, self-interest is the root evil. This leads people to; jockey for position, getting ahead, self-assertion, status seeking and hypocrisy, which involves having one rule for me and another not quite equal rule for others and a callousness in dealing with the plights of those around us.

Jesus encourages His children to reflect His character, living lives of humility in His presence, rather than spending most of our time trying to exalt ourselves to places of honour that we do not deserve.

So let us never forget that we too should do good and in doing so we are to reflect the character and the nature of Christ who lives in us.

Obviously doing good and behaving in a right way is not a normal thing for those who have the sin nature and for those that have not yet been totally transformed, an event which would only happen at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice the serenity and calmness with which Jesus met the events of life even though He was under constant and critical scrutiny. He did not like many of us lose His temper when faced with difficult situations, lose His nerve and become irritable. We behave that way many times but we should not be that way if we live with Him and the Holy Spirit is transforming us into His image.

Notice too Jesus did not refuse even His enemies' invitation of hospitality for He did not abandon the goal of giving men the hope of eternal life. He always wanted to appeal to them, to try to change them, to make them learn, and to talk with them.

Jesus well knew that as one writer put it

“The most amazing thing about the scribes and Pharisees is their staggering lack of a sense of proportion. They would go to endless trouble to formulate and to obey their petty rules and regulations; and yet they counted it a sin to ease a sufferer's pain on the Sabbath day.

If a man had only one prayer to pray he might well ask to be given a sense of proportion. The things which disturb the peace of congregations are often trifles. The things which divide men from men and which destroy friendships are often little things to which no sensible man, in his saner moments, would allow any importance. The little things can bulk so large that they can fill the whole horizon. Only if we can put first things first we all things take their proper place-and love comes first”.

In our lesson, we are faced with an important teaching on pride and humility, with a warning that we should not seek the highest place on our own initiative, trying to advance ourselves by self-promotion and politicking, instead of being humble and letting God do the work.

Actually, humility has always been one of the characteristics of great men. So if you want to obtain and keep humility you do it by looking always at the facts, which are that we are very small in the total scheme of things, we have not achieved that much, and will achieve very little in the end for in the end when death removes us life will continue for those we leave behind and it is very possible our contemporaries will forget us.

And we are also reminded that we should keep on comparing ourselves with the perfect, so that we can properly assess our life and our contribution to life and the world.

Jesus also addresses the danger of pride, for this leads us to associate with people on a 'what is in it for me' basis. This kind of self-centred living will cost us dearly at the Resurrection of the Just.

The lessons here are directly addressed to the people of Israel who are warned that the things that preoccupied them and dominated their lives were not legitimate. Gentiles are also shown as not being any better and we are hereby warned of the traps that Satan, the world, and the flesh, have prepared for us.

The context of today's lesson is very important. Jesus is still ministering and teaching in the east of the Jordan, and the Pharisees are increasingly hostile to His ministry.

It is now the Sabbath day and though we are not told that Jesus attended the synagogue, Jesus is invited by an "apparently" hospitable Pharisee, to a Sabbath luncheon. It is to be noted that table fellowship was a most important time in Jewish cultural life, but in line with the hostility of the Jewish leadership, it is significant that our text us tells that; " they watched him closely.". This word "watching" we are told is used for interested and sinister espionage, and so Jesus was under scrutiny.

Several unpleasant things happen and Jesus uses this to tell his host and the guests of the spiritual realities of true hospitality and the critical importance of righteousness.

The guest list is made up of prominent Pharisees, with the exception of one-man, obviously suffering from dropsy and placed so that Jesus could not overlook him. He is definitely not one of the prominent, high status guests, who have been jockeying for position at the supper, trying to assert their social status and importance.

These Christ rejecting, self interested, status seeking, calloused hearted Pharisees silently and sullenly watched to see what Jesus would do. If He healed the man on the Sabbath day that would be against their teachings and traditions, but not however against the law of Moses, as we read it in Scripture. So much for their concern for people and their desperate situation. The shepherds of Israel were hard of heart and had no intention of graciously inviting Jesus to heal this man, who would eventually die from this abnormal accumulation of fluid in the tissues of his body.

It appears that this was the seventh deliberate attempt to seek a confrontation over the legality of healing a man on the Sabbath and now we can clearly infer that this man with an obvious physical sickness, suffering without much hope, was placed before Jesus so that he could exercise his predictable compassion.

Jesus, knowing that though the Law of Moses did not forbid healings on the Sabbath, their traditions and teachings did forbid such healings and so he asked the lawyers and Pharisees directly, whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day.

They would not answer the question, for they knew that their position was one of folly. Jesus then immediately healed the man and let him leave. The lawyers and Pharisees did not keep the man at the supper to eat of the meal, for as far as they were concerned he had served his functions.

Jesus was now free to ask a second question of the Pharisees dealing not with the matter of principle as in the first question, but in the matter of practice. Even if they disagreed on the principle of healing on the Sabbath and demanded that others not be healed, would they practice what they preached! Jesus now set about to expose their inconsistency and hence their hypocrisy with the question in verse five.

These Pharisees placed many burdens on others, but they made exceptions when it came to them, their children and family. They were wilful hypocrites, rebellious against the teachings of God and were not even willing to discuss the matter or face up to their true nature and seek repentance and healing.

Jesus now turned to teach another spiritual lesson, by dealing directly with their position seeking, self exaltation, constant initiatives for recognition and the desire for the place of honor that motivated these people. He tried to get their minds working by telling them a parable.

THE TEXT

Verse 7. It seems that something unusual was going on at this feast, which led Jesus to rebuke their social pride. One writer describes the seating arrangements that were common at the time of Jesus:

“When a family hosted a great banquet or a wedding feast, they would have the servants set up round tables for the meal. Cushions were set up in a U-shape around three sides of small round tables so that three people could recline at each table. The place of honor was in the center of each U- shape, the next highest to the left, and the last to the right. So in any given feast the host might have as many places of honor as tables set up. Everyone knew what seat was the place of honor among the three seats. Normally all the guests would stand around until the host came in and pointed out who was to sit in the places of honor....

We don't know how many people were in the Pharisee' home that Sabbath afternoon, but we do know that they did not wait for the word from the host, but almost rushed to the tables to take the places of honor.”

Jesus noticed how every Pharisee, as soon as he came in, rushed to get as close as possible as he could to the best seat.

Verse 8. Jesus then warned them that they should not take the highest place on their own initiative, for if they did take the most honored seat, they might face the embarrassing situation where someone more important than they turned up, whom rightfully belonged in the place of honor in which they sat.

Now it is not that the Pharisees did not see this truth in Scripture for Proverbs 25:6-7 teaches:

“ 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.”

This is really a perfect picture of a religious man who is not humble, and who instead of letting God do the work of promoting and elevating him, tries to advance himself by self-promotion and playing politics. That man is rebelling against the instruction of Scripture as taught in the Old Testament and by Jesus and the Apostles.

Verse 9. Jesus taught that, that self-centered person would face the situation where the host would have to ask him to give place to the more honorable and go down to a lesser place of honor. The host certainly would not see the more honorable guest stay out of the place to which he was justly entitled and a usurper claim that position to which he had no right.

This move downwards, this demotion, brings with it shame and embarrassment. It would be a disgrace for everyone to see that he was claiming to be more deserving than he really was. Pride clearly will lead to shame and finally to a fall. We note that shame is not a pleasant emotion.

Verse 10. Jesus advised the Pharisees that if they did not want somebody else to humble them, then they should humble themselves. They should not play the self-promotion game, for humility and self-denial are virtues. When one starts low, the host will see that you deserve a place of respect and honor and will invite you to go up higher. This promotion and elevation will bring with it honor and joy as one moves up before the admiring crowd.

It is clearly wrong to think that you are so special and deserve to sit in the best place. The right way to live is to understand that you're not special and do not have the right to sit in the place of honor. The privilege of allocating positions belongs to the host and humility and self-denial leads to honor, while pride and ambition are regarded by men as disgraceful behaviour.

Note that we are not being told to take the lower place and to sit there with a hang dog attitude, so that people will notice how miserable we are and realize that we really don't belong down there.

We are being taught that we should not have such high-up views of ourselves that we can never be in the lowest place, but should stop living a self-centered life, be humble and joyfully enjoy whatever position we are in.

Paul tells us in Philippians 2:3

“ Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

Then Paul goes on to instruct that we are not to just look out for our own personal interest, but for the interest of others. We are to have the same attitude as Jesus Christ, the attitude that made Him not regard His essential equality with God as something to be grasped or held onto irrespective of the needs of dying humanity, but humbled Himself and died on the cross to save His brethren.

The spiritual leaders of Israel, instead of seeking their own power, self-fulfillment and personal honor, should instead humble themselves and look after the sick and suffering sheep among them that they are shepherding.

Verse 11. The principle is now clearly stated. If you want to go “up”, you must be down and work there so that God can raise you up. If you try to work your way “up”, you risk being “put down”.

Actually, Psalm 75:4-7 states unequivocally:

“ I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn”

Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck.

For promotion comes neither from the East, nor from the West, nor from the south.

But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.”

God is really telling His children to reflect His own character, being humble before Him not spending a lot of time trying to exalt ourselves and fighting for undeserved places of honor.

When we are humble we will be able to deal with people without intimidating them and without having them see what we really are like, for people are not stupid, and can see that we are just self seeking.

The Pharisees were people filled with self-interest and that made them do sinful and arrogant things. They used the poor man with dropsy as a tool of convenience to achieve trapping Jesus in some technical breaking of their traditions. They were angry with Jesus because He spent time with the poor, the sinners and the unsuitable, for they were interested in elevating themselves and considering themselves to be better than others.

Note that there was no indication that they had put Jesus, the Lord of the Universe in the place of greatest honor. They might even have put Him in at any of the lower seats, by rushing to place themselves in the places of honor.

So brethren, self interest and seeking to elevate ourselves is a sin. It is not the mind of Christ. It will get us nowhere. We should work hard and do our work to the glory of the Lord and let God raise us up. This is the lifestyle that Jesus preached, one of lowliness of mind.

If we seek to take on honor, we will find ourselves distorting even the Sabbath, doing things that we should not be doing because we want to achieve our own self-interest. We will reject loving our neighbor. God therefore will not exalt us.

If we are humble, and show the mind of Christ in everything that we do, we will be exalted throughout all eternity.

Verse 12. It was not only the guests that were misbehaving. The host himself apparently had a heart of selfishness and self-promotion. He had set up his dinner guest list in such a way that he would be rewarded in this life.

He had fallen victim to the temptation for what is called reciprocal relationship. The motto here is, I invite you and promote you if you will invite me and promote me. If you cannot help me, you are a burden and will never come to my house. I need my rewards immediately and if you're not in position to advance me, then I will leave you out of my festivities.

This is sheer self-interest, self-centered living, life on a "what is in it for me?" basis. This is mixed up values.

Note now that Jesus wants us to have a love for strangers, especially for those who are needy and who we can help. We are to reflect His character, doing what He did.

Jesus explained why and how we should dispense hospitality to others. Some will be able to recompense us for our hospitality, but some will not. If we invite only those who can repay us, our motives are wrong and that is really practicing unrighteousness.

Here Jesus is not teaching or telling us that we should not continue to fellowship with our brethren at certain times but He is saying that, that particular type of socialization has its time and its place. When invitations are given to our brethren because they are in a favorable position, that this, they possess the means/money to have a similar dinner and to invite us, pride is really creeping into the heart of the guest as well as the host. Our guest place is a means through which we show our pride in ourselves.

When on a continual basis we ask our friends and family to come to our dinners and we possess the means to entertain in a lavish manner and serve sumptuous food, while are at the same time disregarding others in our community whom might appreciate such an evening, but who might not be able to recompense us for our invitation. Jesus says that is not right.

It is when we display charity and love to all our brethren, doing it in our hearts for true fellowship, that Jesus will highly regard us.

Jesus stressed in this verse that though it is OK to socialize with our friends, we should seek to socialize with those who are not quite our friends or brethren. We should do that socialization frequently, so that we send a proper message about God to others.

It is important to God that we attempt to reach out to others and keep company with others, seeking to turn them to God. Jesus Himself socialized with many individuals for His intention was to do the work of His Father at all times. One must always consider that they

are doing the work of the Father, or else one will begin to tire of constantly trying to do those actions, which might not be reciprocated.

If we seek to be invited to the parties that others have and therefore invite them to our parties, we will be only satisfying the kind of fleshly desires, that move us away from the will of God and cloud our journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

SO REVIEW YOUR GUEST LIST.

Verse 13-14. Here Jesus indicates the direction of the charity and love that we should always strive to exercise. He lists individuals who might be fellow servants with us in Christ, but who clearly do not have the means to repay us for our acts of kindness in inviting them to our feasts.

These individuals might enjoy the feast and might be grateful, but they, as well as us, know that they cannot repay us.

God will be watching everything that transpires and He is interested in whether what we do is designed to please Him and to obey Him. The actions of Jesus help us to get a better understanding of what the love of God is. Simply by doing what Jesus did, we see what God wants from us.

Actually, many times it doesn't seem rewarding to reach out to many of the people in this world of ours, for it is not very pleasant to mix with the maimed, the poor, lame, and blind; those that are physically and emotionally challenged. It actually costs us a lot. We know that when we spend our time they will be able to do very little for us, except to pray for us perhaps.

But we are reminded that we are not losers when we continue in these activities; for since the weak, the poor and the helpless cannot recompense us, their God in heaven will recompense us.

There is a day called the 'Resurrection of the Just' and it is at that time that all works of charity will be rewarded. The rewards then are sure and great for what is done to help the poor are in fact works of righteousness done to Jesus Himself. He will personally bless us for ministering to Him and His Father with bless us for ministering to His Beloved Son.

The Jewish people believed that when Messiah came, He would hold the Messianic Banquet, which we know as the 'Marriage Supper of the Lamb'. Revelation 19:9. Isaiah 25:6, Matthew 8:11 and other passages refer to this longed for event.

The problem was that the Pharisees thought that they would make it into the kingdom and participate in this Messianic Banquet, but that the poor, the Publicans, sinners and all other outcasts of society would be excluded from this event.

Their social gatherings such as this one was a microcosm of what the messianic event would be like and so Jesus' coming description of what the truth was would shock them out

of their sandals. They certainly would not like it. Just remember though that these people were hypocrites and their behavior violated every single teaching of Jesus. May we prove to be different from them.

CONCLUSION

Jesus has warned of the need for humility and hospitality. He has told us that it is good to do well on the Sabbath, whether People like it or not.

He has insisted that they behave as He did, not taking the highest place to promote themselves but to work hard in the place where they find themselves and let God move them up. See Philippians 2:5-11.

Jesus later warned that God will not tolerate excuses from those who do not want to accept His invitation to come to His banquet. Those who make excuses are really condemning themselves. Their excuses really mean that they do not want to participate in his feast.

Do not kid yourself. God will have a full house. If you do not want to come He will find others who want to come.

So as we look at the need for humility and hospitality we must tell everyone that there is an invitation from God for them to come to Him and that they should not be preoccupied with their own lives and their own lust for positions in the world. They should accept the invitation for if they reject this, they might not get a second chance.

Jesus is the key to my salvation, your salvation, and the salvation of all men and if Gentiles refuse to accept him they too are responsible for their condemnation.

Note that self-interest is a devilishly destructive thing. It will cause us to reject Jesus, turn our backs on the truth, avoid the unsuitable people, motivate us to seek for the places of honor, support, help and invite the affluent to our feasts and ignore the poor and entrap us into the foolishness of our culture. It is really sin.

In Philippians 3:21 we read of people who seek after their own interests and not those of Christ. One writer pleads with us:

“Let us recognize how much self- interest paralyzes and perverts our ministry, our worship, and our Christian walk. Let us learn from our text that our reward in heaven will be great, and that it comes to those who “give up their life” to gain it, while those who seek to save their lives lose them.

May the Spirit of God work through the Word of God to replace self- seeking with self- sacrifice, to the glory of God and for our own good as well.”