

## Serving Up Humble Pie

Luke 14:1-14

If you were of nobility during medieval days, you would have been accustomed to eating the very best the land had to offer. That included the very best cuts of meat, especially meat from deer. What was left was served to the peasants and very poor of the land. It was common for them to take the heart, liver, lungs, and intestines, mince them and bake it in a pie. The innards of the deer were known as the umbles. A nobleman never ate umble pie and if it was served to him, it was a humiliating experience and so we get the expression “eating humble pie.”

Maybe you have had a slice or two in your life time, not the actual slice of pie, but a good slice of something that has humbled you. We find that in our text today. Once again we see the religious leaders setting a trap for Jesus, who turns the tables and reminds them of what is truly important. Wanting to use someone with a medical condition to entice Jesus to violate the Sabbath, Jesus in turn shows us that true humility is seen in how we treat others. But this passage is more than just about humility. It is also the road by which we travel to Christ for salvation. Let me be clear that humility does not bring salvation, but it is something we must exhibit if we are to be saved. It’s what the tax collector displayed when he prayed for God to be merciful to him because he was a sinner.

With that let’s turn to Luke 14:1-14.

A scheme is laid for Jesus

A study is made by Jesus

A simple truth is offered by Jesus

## I. A SCHEME IS LAID FOR JESUS – v. 1-6

The only detail Luke provides for us is the day, it’s the Sabbath. We don’t know when it took place and we don’t what town. But we do know the why as we’ll see in a moment. Scholars believe that Jesus is still in the region of Perea in a village and they

believe that it is sometime nearing His crucifixion. The other detail Luke gives us is that this event is at the home of a prominent Pharisee, perhaps the ruler of the synagogue. The Pharisee was a high ranking official within the sect. He may even have been a leader among the Sanhedrin which was made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees.

Following the Sabbath service at the synagogue Jesus was invited to this Pharisee’s home to eat. Notice in these first two verses a plot that is foul.

## A. A Plot That Is Foul – v. 1-2

We read that Jesus was being “carefully watched.” The KJV just says that He was being watched. In the Greek it’s a combination of two words – para meaning near and tereo meaning to keep. Combined, it means to keep near. In the gospels the word is used in a sinister tone. Mark 3:2 “Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if He would heal Him on the Sabbath.”

Luke 20:20 “Keeping a close watch on Him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something He said so that they might hand Him over to the power and authority of the governor.”

It’s used in Acts 9:24 where spies watched the city gates closely so when Paul left they could kill him.

They weren’t watching His table manners. The word means to observe carefully, to spy on, to be on the lookout for an opportunity with malicious intent. Think of it as a robber casing a neighborhood looking for an opportunity to break in and steal.

The Pharisees who were there with Jesus for dinner were looking to see what Jesus would do. What were they looking for? Let’s read on – verse 2. What day is this? It’s the Sabbath.

What were they hoping Jesus would do?

They were hoping Jesus would heal the man.

Why would that matter?

It mattered because they believed that such an act was a violation of the Sabbath law that no work should be done on that day.

Understand that the man was not a dinner guest. In reality, the religious leaders shunned anyone with illnesses and handicaps. They believed that such a person was being judged by God for something and so in order not to become defiled themselves, they avoided such people (Leviticus 15). Dropsy is a medical condition also known as edema. In the Greek the word means swelling. It's a condition caused by the retention of excess fluid in tissue. It could be caused by liver or kidney problems or even congestive heart failure. The swelling can cause severe pain. This man was suffering and the Pharisees were using him for their own heartless purpose.

He was being used solely for the purpose of being bait. They had intentionally positioned the man so that he was directly in view of Jesus. They were using this man for their own foul, evil purposes. They didn't care about him. They only cared about having another reason to reject Jesus as the Messiah. The very miracles that should have convinced them of the truth of Jesus being the Messiah were the miracles they used to reject Him.

Why would they need any more proof about what Jesus would do on the Sabbath? This isn't the first Sabbath test religious leaders put Him through. There are seven (7) other incidents in the Gospels that are recorded in which Jesus did something that, according to them, violated the Sabbath Law of doing no work on that day. He healed some. He cast out a demon. He allowed His disciples to pluck grain and eat it. What was it that Jesus said on one occasion? Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for man.

What the Pharisees were doing was sinister. It was a plot that was foul. How would Jesus respond?

B. It Was A Plot That Is Foiled – v. 3-6

Jesus responds by asking two questions.

1. A question about healing – v. 3-4

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”

That's a fair question isn't it? After all, isn't that what they were hoping Jesus would do? It was a question however that disarmed them. They are now on the defensive. They couldn't answer it so they kept silent. It's like the time the Pharisees brought the woman who was caught in the very act of adultery. The law said she should be stoned and they wanted to know if Jesus would agree with the law. Jesus responded that the person who was without sin could cast the first stone of judgment. Jesus asked a question, but they kept silent.

If the Pharisees said it was okay to heal on the Sabbath then they would be authorizing and approving His actions and therefore could not accuse Him.

If the Pharisees said it was not okay to heal on the Sabbath then they would be considered as heartless and uncaring for those in need.

They believed that a person could only be helped if his life was in danger.

They were trapped in their own trap and so remained silent.

With that Jesus did three things:

He took hold of the man.

He healed the man.

He sent the man away.

It demonstrated Jesus' compassion.

It demonstrated to the man that he was not the social outcast that others thought him to be or that he was not unclean.

It demonstrated that Jesus is the true healer.

Folks, the devil wants us to think that we are worthless, that we have no redeeming value. He wants to use us for his own personal, twisted end, but Jesus has come and taken hold of us and has shown us His compassion when He died for our sins. He wants us to understand that by His sacrifice we are of great value to Him, that He cares about us and that we are worth being spiritually healed. Is it ok to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus thought so.

Jesus then asks a second question.

## 2. A question about helping – v. 5-6

It's a rhetorical question, one they all knew the answer to. It's a question that once again, left them speechless. In the Old Testament it was lawful to help a son or an animal in dire need. Who among them wouldn't have their paternal nature kick in if their son needed help? They would even help an animal. No matter what animal it was, that animal was money to them. Depending on the animal it plowed their field or provided milk or products to make cheese or butter. It could for them bring a profit, so of course they would help it get free.

By asking these two questions Jesus revealed their true heart. Their silence implicated them in holding animals of more value than this man whose health was poor. They were more concerned with ceremonial tradition. The man with dropsy was of less value than piece of property and through it Jesus exposed their false piety.

A scheme is laid for Jesus that He uses to His advantage. And while they were watching Him, He was in turn watching them. Jesus makes a study of those around Him.

## II. A STUDY IS MADE BY JESUS – v. 7-10, 12-14a

### A. He Shares A Parable – v. 7-10

Jesus did His own careful observation of his host and the other guests. We read that He noticed that guests picked the places of honor at the table when they sat down to eat. It was probably a bit more sophisticated than playing a game of musical chairs, but I imagine that as they entered and were told they could have a seat, they all scrambled to get the seats closest to the host. The closer you were the more honor you had.

At meals they reclined on cushions and faced toward a low table or blanket on which the food was placed. There were usually three people to a cushion. The host would sit in the middle with the guest of honor to his right and so on down the line usually in some kind of rank. From what Jesus observed it sounds like it was a free for all in terms of who sat where. They all wanted the place of honor next to the host. The closer to the host, the higher up the social ladder they felt they were.

For these Pharisees, it was a way of feeling important, of being noticed. People look for that kind of significance in their life and if they can tell folks the next day that they were guests at the house of so and so and that they were seated next to him why that elevates him in the eyes of others.

We have that occurring in the Old Testament when Haman was invited by Queen Esther to a banquet. He went home and told all his friends that he was the special guest of the Queen and the only other guest was the king. He puffed himself up. Look at how important I am in the kingdom in the eyes of the royal family.  
Esther 5:10b-12

Some people like to drop names to make them feel important. It was the same thought that got James and John in trouble with the other disciples when they asked Jesus if they could have a seat of honor right next to Jesus' throne when He set up His kingdom.

So Jesus tells a story to put them in their place. He tells it like this: Let's say someone invites you to a wedding feast. Jesus says that the person should be careful which seat he takes. He may think he deserves a place of honor only to find out someone more important than he is has arrived. The man is then asked to move in deference to the person with greater esteem. The self-exalted person will be humiliated in front of the other guests when he has to move to a lower position. Instead, He encourages that when invited to a feast, take the lowest place so that when the host comes in he may see you and move you up to a place of greater honor.

Now there is such a thing as false humility. There are those who give an impression of humility and piety as a way of being recognized. You may purposely appear to be humble with the motivation of being shown honor. That is just as wrong as thinking yourself to be something and then being reduced to nothing in the eyes of others.

To illustrate how they were behaving, Jesus shares a story. Why does He share it? He does so because He sees a problem.

#### B. He Sees A Problem – v. 12

The problem was something they were all guilty of. It's the idea of reciprocity. I did something good for you. I expect something good in return from you. I invite you over for dinner. I expect that you to invite me in return.

Here's what Jesus had to say about them in Matthew 23:5-7 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them Rabbi."

It's what John MacArthur calls an "exercise in self-promotion."

It was a revolving debt. The social circuit was nothing more than I do for you, you do in return for me, and I'll return the favor.

Jesus saw it as a problem. Notice that He suggests a paradigm shift.

#### C. He Suggests A Paradigm Shift – v. 13-14a

A paradigm is a concept or pattern or example that is accepted by others. Their pattern was to invite each other over. Jesus was asking them instead to shift what they thought and how they acted by inviting instead those who didn't ever get invited to banquets. Invite those who have been outcasts and marginalized – the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. Invite those who can't pay you back in any way. That would bring a true blessing.

Here's the point I think Jesus is trying to make with them. He wasn't just explaining proper etiquette or who to have on the invite list. I believe Jesus is describing those who vied for the chief places in the kingdom. The Pharisees thought that because of their religious position God should in some way honor them by giving them places of honor in the kingdom. They were entitled.

They believed that because of their religious position they were important.

They thought that because they were God's chosen people they were important.

They thought because God had given Israel the law and they were its keepers they were important.

They thought because they had the Temple they were important.

They thought because they were descendants of Abraham they were important.

Clearly that ought to amount to something in God's books when it came time to inherit the kingdom.

They should be given places of honor.

Through His illustration Jesus says they aren't as important as they think they are. Their self-righteousness will result in being sent back to the

lowest place.

If they wanted to have a place of honor in the kingdom Jesus is telling them they need to humble themselves.

What's Jesus' point in all this?

### III. A SIMPLE TRUTH IS OFFERED BY JESUS – v. 11, 14b

There are three principles that Jesus gives us that are important. They are divinely given. We see in these verses the following:

Divine abasement for the haughty

Divine approval for the humble

Divine appointment for the humble

#### A. Divine Abasement For the Haughty – v. 11a

This is a principle that is evident throughout Scripture.

Let's be clear. God hates pride. He hates self-exaltation.

Pride is that personality of having too high an opinion of yourself, an exaggerated self-esteem, being conceited and haughty.

When we talk of pride we are not speaking of the pride we have in our children or grandchildren.

I'm not talking about pride in an accomplishment at work or in school.

I'm not even talking about the pride we have in our nation.

We often hear sung the anthem of Lee Greenwood that I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free. And I won't forget the men who died who gave that right to me. And I'll gladly stand up, next to you and defend her still today. 'Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land. God bless the USA.

The pride I'm talking about is being a braggart, making yourself appear more important than you

really are, putting yourself up on a pedestal wanting all the attention.

You may have seen in the news a video clip of an ESPN reporter who had to get her car that had been impounded and she ranted on about how important she was because she was on TV and had an education and then belittled the attendant who worked in a trailer and probably didn't have a degree and needed to lose weight and on and on.

God hates pride. Pride that He is opposed to is a belief that we are better than anyone else. It's looking at others with contempt.

There is a story that one day Mohamad Ali, who claimed to be the greatest, boarded a plane and was asked by the flight attendant to buckle his seat belt before takeoff. Ali responded that superman didn't need a seat belt to which the flight attendant said superman don't need a plane either, so buckle up.

Jesus told His audience that those who exalt themselves will be abased, they will be humbled, they will be brought low.

Peter reminds us that God is opposed to the proud. Solomon in his wisdom writes that among the seven things God hates, pride is among them.

Proverbs 16:5 "The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished."

Isaiah 2:11 "The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled, and the pride of men brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day."

Daniel 4:37 "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything He does is right and all His ways are just. And those who walk in pride He is able to humble."

Filled with pride because he was created the most beautiful angel that reflected the glory of God, Lucifer sought to usurp God's throne and he was cast out of heaven and will receive his final judgment in the eternal lake of fire.

Filled with pride because he elevated himself to be god, Pharaoh and Egypt were destroyed by a series of 10 plagues.

Filled with pride Haman flaunted his status but was brought low when Esther revealed that the plot he had contrived would destroy her and her people. He was hanged.

Filled with pride at the great kingdom he thought he had built on his own, Nebuchadnezzar was made to act like an animal for 7 years.

Filled with pride because he failed to give God credit for his great oratory skill when everyone praised him, God took the life of King Herod.

"But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall." (II Chronicles 26:16)

Scripture reminds us that he who thinks he stands, should take heed lest he fall. (I Corinthians 10:12)

Proverbs 16:18 – pride goes before destruction.

Psalm 10:4 – pride does not seek God, they have no room for God.

Proverbs 11:2 – pride brings disgrace.

Proverbs 13:10 – pride breeds quarrels.

Jeremiah 49:16 – pride deceives.

Proverbs 29:23 – pride brings low.

Isaiah 2:17 – pride will humble.

Pride shifts confidence from God to self. In Scripture it is associated with being stubborn, arrogant, willful, and disobedient. And that was the attitude of the Pharisees. Jesus tells them that if they didn't change their prideful ways, they would be brought low. God will humble those who exalt

themselves. He will bring them low. There is divine abasement. He will bring judgment.

## B. Divine Approval For the Humble– v. 11b

I Peter 5:5-6 "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."

What is interesting in that passage as it continues is the result of humility. Not only does God give grace to the humble and will exalt them in due time, time, but if you read on to verse 7 we can then cast our care on Him knowing He cares for us. A humble spirit is required.

Both Testaments speak of humility as an essential quality of true piety or of the person who is right with God. The word used for humility in the New Testament was not found in classical Greek. They took it to mean someone who was unworthy or pitiable, a person in a lower class. A humble person was despised in Greek culture.

But Scripture views it as a character trait to possess. Christ is our example to emulate. He humbled Himself taking on the nature of a servant demonstrated when He took up the towel and basin and served others. Mark 10:45 states that He came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many demonstrating the true depth of servanthood.

Humility is the habitual frame of mind of the one who acknowledges that he owes everything to God who bestows on us redeeming love that we don't deserve. It has been described as the root of all graces and virtues and the virtue that is necessary if we are to truly love as God loves. We read in I Corinthians 13:4 that true love does not puff itself

up, it does not boast. Therefore to truly love both God and others we must be humble. It is a virtue that continually reminds us that we belong to Christ and that everything we have comes from Him and because of Him.

Micah 6:8 describes humility as a sign of a genuine relationship with God. “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Arrogance and godliness cannot walk together. But bear in mind that true humility is not something that we can develop on our own. Lewis Sperry Chafer describes it as a character trait that is inwrought by the Spirit of God. And he goes on to say that the moment we become conscious of our humility we have lost it.

Luke 9:23 reminds us that humility is to deny self, that is the only way we can seek God.

Humility depends solely on God’s righteousness for salvation. That’s what we see in verse 14. In order for the proud person to be saved, he must become humble. The humble person God will exalt. There is divine abasement for the haughty. There is divine approval for the humble.

#### C. Divine Appointment for the Humble – v. 14b

In this verse Jesus is not advocating that inviting the poor who cannot reciprocate a meal will grant you automatic entrance into heaven. Jesus is saying that an evidence of salvation would be how you treat others, especially those who are outcasts by society. Inviting the outcasts would not make them righteous, but it would testify that they were in a right standing with God. God would then reward them in time.

It is clear that salvation comes to the humble, not because they are humble but because they recognize

that they have nothing in themselves apart from what Christ offers. The humble person sees himself as God sees him and agrees. That’s why when the two men came to the temple to pray, the tax collector was justified because he fell at the mercy of God and the Pharisee was not because he relied on his own self-righteousness. Pastor John Piper says that true humility is glad in the grace of God.

There is a story about the colt that was chosen to bare Jesus into Jerusalem on the day of His triumphal entry. As they approached the city, the shouts of Hosanna rang in the ears of the little donkey who basked in the jubilation and accolades that were cast at Jesus. Soon the day was over and he returned to his pen filled with pride that he had been chosen. He basked in the experience as pride welled in his soul. Throughout the week he longed to hear the praise he had heard earlier in the week. So he strode back into town looking for all the praise that he had experienced, but instead received quite a different reception. Most people ignored him. Others cast insults at him or threw stones. Dejected he returned home and described to his mother the very different reception he received from the week earlier. In wisdom, his mother said “foolish child, don’t you know that without Jesus you are nothing.”

In their pride the Pharisees believed they would get to heaven based on their own religious merits. They would be rejected. They sought to trap Jesus. Instead He turned the tables on them and told them that they needed to become humble because only then would they be exalted and repaid at the resurrection of the righteous otherwise they would eat humble pie.