

Sermon
9/26/2021

Sermon on Luke 14:1–11
Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity
September 26, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In our Gospel text today in Luke 14 we have recorded for us the account of Jesus attending a dinner at the home of an important Pharisee and ruler of the Jews.

Luke records right at the get-go that this dinner happened on a Sabbath day. This immediately presents us with the setting of a great clash, for the Pharisees often tussled with Jesus over Sabbath observance.

Several sins of the Pharisees happened at the party that gave Jesus occasion to preach and teach. And like a good pastor, he was always ready to preach and teach.

The first and greatest sin was the Pharisees' unbelief in the Christ and their hypocritical holiness in inviting Him to dinner when all they wanted to do was accuse him.

Second was their false holiness concerning the Sabbath day. According to their silly little rules they were prevented from doing good and helping needy people on the day of rest. Jesus rebuked them for this.

Third was their sin of pride shown by their scrambling and maneuvering to get the most important and special place at the dinner table. This gave Jesus the opportunity to preach against lust for attention and how we ought to be humble.

Pay attention then as we go through our Gospel text and learn from the Pharisees how not to live the holy life. To the common Jew, the Pharisees looked very pious and holy on the outside, but they were a holy people.

Let me read the first part of our text again, *“One Sabbath, when Jesus went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away And he said to them, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” And they could not reply to these things.”*

Now our text indicates that the great and underlying sin of the Pharisees and their lawyers was their *unbelief* of Jesus. They invited him to dinner not to hear from Him, not to be instructed by the man who had already proved himself to be the Son of God through his miracles.

No. These Pharisees were hypocrites.

They feigned interest in Jesus and so had invited him to dinner but they were *“watching him carefully”* our text says. That is, they were watching him like hawks to try and catch him in a misstep and so have reason to discredit him, and bring charges against him as a law-breaker.

Jesus was aware of their hypocrisy. And friends, God sees through the hypocrisy of all us.

We might be able to hoodwink everybody in the pews, and the pastor himself, into thinking that we are pious Christians, concerned about God’s word and the needs of our neighbor.

But our Lord Jesus Christ can see through it all. He knows whether there is faith in your heart which is what makes for true holiness. So be honest with yourself and honest with God and seek his approval through true repentance.

He indeed wants us to be holy on the outside. He wants us to be busy going about doing good works: praying, attending worship, tithing, looking out for the needs of our neighbor.

But even more, much more, God wants inner holiness and worship from the heart. He wants us, above all things, to fear, love, and trust in Him.

In short God wants us to believe in our hearts that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who suffered for us and that for his sake our sins are forgiven.

And so God knows whether you are truly holy or not. Pastors are not like that. Indeed, no pastor can see into the hearts of his parishioners to verify 100% that they believe.

But pastors can verify that you are here in the pews receiving what is necessary for true holiness: God's Word and his forgiveness.

And so it is that Jesus did not nail the Pharisees that day for their unbelief. Because on the outside they were at least gathered—on false pretenses mind you—to hear from Jesus.

No, on that day Jesus chose to focus his preaching on proper Sabbath observance and how the Christian ought to be humble.

And that brings us to the second part of the sermon. What is proper Sabbath observance? Why were the Jews mixed up about it?

Make no mistake, the Jews were pretty good at making the Sabbath day different from the rest of the week. Likewise, the Christian Sabbath, Sunday, ought to be different too!

The Jews worked Sunday to Friday, but come Friday evening, which is when their Sabbath day officially began, then they ceased from work through to Saturday night.

And this is because God had commanded Moses that the Israelites should not work on the Sabbath. It was to be a day of rest, which is what the word sabbath means!

In Jesus' day shops were closed on Saturday. There was no making hay, no tilling the earth, no buying and selling and so on. And good for them.

We Americans are like animals who can't tell one day apart from the next. We work during the week and when we get time off we are so busy getting stuff done around the house or getting out of town that every day just seems to be the same buzz of anxious toil.

Friends, do not think that the third commandment to remember the Sabbath day is just some quaint ancient rule.

God is going to hold us accountable for Sabbath keeping. So let's learn what it means to properly remember the Sabbath, because the Pharisees got some things right and a lot wrong.

What did the Pharisees get right about Sabbath keeping? They made the day different from the rest of the week. The Sabbath wasn't a free day to just run around and get things done.

The problem for them, however, was that the day meant for them idleness. They weren't allowed to do anything! You could not even pick up your mat on the Sabbath!

And they made all sorts of hypocritical rules about it. You could pick up a fallen apple in your house, that wasn't work. But you couldn't pick up a fallen apple in the orchard, that was work! Ridiculous!

Jesus saw the benefit of resting on the sabbath. You wouldn't have caught him sawing timber and making chairs on the Sabbath during his carpenter days.

But Jesus was all about doing good on the Sabbath. And that meant showing love for others and helping them in their need on the Sabbath. In the case of our text it meant healing a poor man and healing him of his dropsy.

Likewise, Jesus even caused the Pharisees to admit that they wouldn't hesitate helping out a man or animal who was in dire need having fell into a well on a Sabbath day.

So make Sunday a day where you make yourself aware of the needs of others, especially your brothers and sisters in Christ here at Our Savior's. And seek to help them, either on Sunday or some other day.

So Sabbath was never meant to be something onerous where you could hardly do anything except twiddle your thumbs waiting for the day to be done, which is what the Pharisees had made it into.

No. Sabbath keeping, which Jesus proves in our text, means a day for doing good things for others

But here is the other element of Sabbath keeping that is especially important for us today. In fact, it is the most important thing concerning Sabbath-keeping.

The Sabbath was meant to be a day set aside to hear God's word preached and taught.

Indeed, synagogues were busy places on Sabbath days, because Jews would gather there and hear the Scriptures and the sermon. Jesus spent many Sabbath's preaching in the synagogue!

And here is how God will especially hold us accountable concerning the Sabbath.

Have we been careful to hold God's word sacred and gladly hear it preached?

A million sins will be forgiven us, if only we are careful to attend to preaching and God's word; carefully hearing it and seeking to live according to it.

In the end friends, the Jewish Sabbath is gone.

When Jesus came and fulfilled his calling as the Savior, Saturday Sabbath observance was finished, so was Temple worship and all the sacrifices. Jesus is our Sabbath rest, he is the new Temple, and his sacrifice on the cross is the one great final sacrifice.

So the Jewish sabbath and Jewish worship is no more.

So it is that the apostle Paul could tell the Christians in Colossae, *"Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath"*

Nevertheless, God has always wanted his holy people to gather around the preached word. And he has always wanted his word meditated on and thought about.

And since Christ the Word made flesh has come and died and rose again, it means gathering to hear about Christ and receive his gifts.

The Christian church has traditionally chosen Sunday to do this. And for good reason, it is a helpful reminder that it was on a Sunday that Jesus rose from the dead.

So Christians are humble people, who realize that their salvation is a pure gift of God's grace to us in Christ. He alone has accomplished for us the forgiveness of sins and established for us peace with God.

Why wouldn't we want to gather together to hear this good news and be instructed in this new and wonderful way of life? The Christian life?

We come now then to the third part of the sermon where Jesus instructed the Pharisees about humility. Here is the pertinent text.

"Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'"

Jesus gave here practical advice about dinner seating. When you go to a feast, sit in the low place, then you just might be honored. But if you sit in the important place to start with you just might get horribly embarrassed by being asked to sit in the low place.

Jesus is giving practical advice here, but understand that He was not outlawing the practice of showing distinctions and varying degrees of importance among people.

Jesus was not a communist who wanted to make everyone equal in society!

So it is that you ought to treat everyone with respect, but you ought to be especially be respectful to your boss at work, your government representative, your pastor, your father and mother. This all fits in the commandment to honor your father and mother.

Without such distinctions everybody thinks they are entitled to be governor, judge, pastor, parent, policeman and there is only chaos, which is what we are seeing today.

The sad truth is that everyone by nature is discontent with their place in life and scrambles and maneuvers and tries to be more important and special than others.

So what Jesus is forbidding in our text today is discontentedness with our place in life.

If we fail to be content with our place in life and seek to be more popular and important to others, like the Pharisees in our text, we only invite God's wrath.

The wonderful promise is that those who are humble and content with their place in life, however low it might be, will be elevated and brought honor and respect eventually. This is what Jesus meant when he said, *"Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"*

And friends, who is more humble than the true Christian who realizes his miserable sinfulness and clings to Christ alone for help? Indeed, that person will be exalted!

Alright. Let's learn from the sins of the Pharisees in our text.

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Let's take true Sabbath-keeping to heart by attending Divine Service and carefully hearing God's Word. And also looking out for what good works we can do on our day of rest.

Also let us learn, unlike the Pharisees, to be content with our lot in life, and look to Christ alone to elevate us and bring us glory. Amen.