

Part 52: Hypocrisy and Humiliation

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We've been working through the book of Luke here at Sovereign Hope and since chapter eleven Jesus has been leaning into places of conflict with the Pharisees and other Jewish officials. Our passage today, takes Jesus into the belly of the beast itself.

As the tension increases with each step towards Jerusalem, we find Jesus this morning in the dining room of a ruler of the Pharisees. We will spend two weeks at the dinner table with Jesus and these religious elites.

While we will learn much about ourselves in Jesus' teaching, we also learn much of our savior. As Jesus sat at table with men who would falsify court proceedings in order to condemn him and murder him, we can think of King David's prayer in Psalm 23, "You prepare a table before in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows."

In the midst of a hostile and misunderstanding world, Jesus moved into difficult places because the gospel moves into difficult places. The gospel goes into difficult families with history of unbelief, the gospel goes into far away countries where it has never been preached, the gospel goes into difficult tribes where converts are hunted and killed on account of their faith. The gospel goes into difficult places. But do you want to know the most difficult place the gospel goes? Into your own heart.

The gospel confronts our hearts. Wherever Jesus went in the book of Luke there was a collision between the realities of the Kingdom of God and the expectations of the kingdom of man. How you view Jesus, either positively or negatively, always effects how you view and value everything in the world.

This is what we will see today: **Faith in Jesus confronts our hypocrisy and gives us humble hope.**

We will see first, **Hypocrisy Humiliated**, in verses 1-6 when Jesus heals another person on the Sabbath. Then, in verses 7-11 we will see Jesus talk about **Humility Exalted** in his parable of a wedding feast.

First, we will look at **Hypocrisy Humiliated**.

Luke tells us that on the Sabbath, the Jewish holy day of the week, Jesus went to eat in the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. This would have been the equivalent of a sitting senator hosting a meal for someone who is actively campaigning for an opposing political party.

Jesus was teaching the same Old Testament as the Pharisees and Lawyers were, but his application of the Old Testament was drastically different. It was a recovery of God's promise instead the law of man's effort. So why would the Pharisees invite him over for dinner?

In the three parables Jesus gives at this dinner, he uses the verb "invited" eight times. But that verb doesn't show up here in verse 1. Luke merely says, "he went to dine."

This is probably because Jesus wasn't invited out of hospitality, but he was invited out of duty. It was common duty for religious dignitaries to host any visiting rabbis (teachers). And even though Jesus was frustrating to the Pharisees, they were under some sort of cultural pressure to host Jesus nonetheless.

Luke gives us a glimpse into the true heart of their hospitality when he says, "they were watching him carefully and behold there was a man before him who had dropsy." (**Luke 14:1-2**).

Don't you get the feeling that this whole thing is starting to sound like a setup? Like a trap? He walks in, everyone is watching, and "behold" there's a sick man.

My wife did an experiment with our daughter once. She set up her phone recording at the table without her knowing and she said, "Ellie, I want you to sit here and I don't want you to do anything." And "Behold," my wife just happened to place a cupcake before her eyes.

We did it because we wanted watch her carefully to see how she would respond to this cupcake and the clear command to not touch it.

What we did for fun, the Pharisees did with hate in their hearts. They had heard Jesus healed on the Sabbath and now they wanted to see if that was indeed true so they could catch him.

They found a man who was suffering mightily. He had dropsy, what other translations call edema, or others (speaking to the non-medical dummy like me) say he was a man "suffering from abnormal swelling of the body." If you want to know what that might feel like, go and talk to Jonny and his family after church today. It might sound silly to us, but it was serious to them and it was to this man as well.

I've said it now, and I'll say it again, if we fail to grasp who Jesus is and the good news of grace we will always view others as tools or as threats. The Pharisees saw this man as nothing more than bait to vindicate themselves. But Jesus saw this man as burdened and in need of a savior.

The Pharisees probably expected Jesus to immediately heal and then they'd have their "gotcha" moment. But instead, Jesus confronts their hypocritical hospitality by asking them a simple question (**Luke 14:3**), "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"

What happened? "They remained silent." Jesus' words always confront our best laid plans.

Jesus trapped them. Because the truth was, the Old Testament law itself didn't prohibit healing on the Sabbath. There's not many laws on the books today that regulate you striking a Superman pose and flying, or from shooting lasers out of your eyes, and there weren't many laws directed at men to curb their healing powers in the Old Testament because it assumed most people can't heal. But Jesus was not most people. He was fully man, but he was also fully God.

So for them to say "Yes, you can heal on the Sabbath" would be to ruin their own trap (it would give to Jesus both authority and power). But for them to say, "No, it's not lawful to heal on the Sabbath" would be a terrible look for them. It would say to the man who was suffering, here's the guy who can heal you because he's healed many others, but we won't let him do it. That's a bad look for a group of people who live for the praise of others.

While the Pharisees are silently debating in their minds how they can weasel their way out of this theological trap, what does Jesus do? Look at **Verse 4**, "But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away."

While the self-righteous and hypocritical world debates the validity and legitimacy of Jesus, Jesus takes hold of those who need healing. In John 9, Jesus heals a man born blind and the Pharisees are dumbfounded by it. They start grilling his parents and the man to try and figure out how and why he was healed, and if he was even blind in the first place. They even tell the blind man that Jesus can't heal because he's a sinner. The healed, exacerbated, cried out: "Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

You might be one who has experienced from the world, or from some self-righteous Christians, a furrowed brow regarding your plight: What can fix you? Can you be fixed, can you be fixed now? But I'm here to tell you that there is a savior who isn't threatened by your circumstances or your past.

He's come to take hold of you. And he does that by giving you eyes to see what the Pharisees miss. He gives you eyes to see him for who he is, he gives you the eyes of faith.

And now, Jesus turns to the rest of us and he says this: **Luke 14:5-6**.

The Pharisees and legal experts created many, many laws around the Sabbath that restricted what could and couldn't be done on it. But Jesus challenges them with an obvious hypothetical: "If your son, or if your ox, falls into a well, who of you wouldn't immediately pull him out."

Jesus says in **Mark 2:27**, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." God's design for the Sabbath was not to restrict salvation to man's detriment, but to give them the rest of salvation for their delight.

Jesus' hypothetical situation highlights two important factors: the immediacy of the need and the ability to save. He says, if you see that immediate need, and you have the power to do something, wouldn't you do it? How much more, Jesus makes the point, should I immediately relieve suffering by divine mercy.

Jesus leans into our common sense in order to expose our inner conflict. The immediacy and the power of the gospel exposes our hypocrisy on a daily level. Just as the Pharisees diminished the weight of Jesus' work, so to do we. What if we put it this way, "Which of you if learning a trade, or saving for a house, doesn't first make a plan that enables slow and consistent growth?" Which of you then, knowing the same things, make a plan to grow in your understanding and application of the eternal gospel? Of reading and enjoying the power of God's word in scripture?

Or, "Which of you in purchasing that new shoe or car, find the first opportunity to share with your neighbor what it has done for you?" Which of you then, knowing the astounding need, immediate salvation and wonderful provision of Jesus Christ have shared that with your neighbor?

"Which of you if you saw your child ignoring their teacher or texting on their phones in class would not call them to respect and honor?" Which of you call your children to heed, honor and desire the reading and preaching of God's word as undivided as their age and ability allows?

Just like the Pharisees, we might not reply to these things because we know it reveals our hypocrisy. We claim to believe in the superiority of the gospel over all things—but we wrestle to live it out.

You see when we really believe the eternal realities and divine beauty of Jesus, the whole of our life becomes a hypocritical mess doesn't it. But praise God that Jesus wasn't a hypocrite. Praise God, that Jesus took control.

That's exactly what he did here. Jesus came in as a guest, but he's leaving this party as the host. He's taking the reins of this dinner and he's now going to start preaching. One commentator said at this point it's quite evident that, "Jesus will not be a passive guest."

To start dabbling around the doctrine of the gospel, to start hanging out with Jesus will quickly reveal that he's here to be the host not the helper. He's come to be the boss, not a butler. He's come to shake us out of our hypocrisy by showing us everything in light of him.

This reality will challenge your flesh, but it will also satisfy your soul. This is where Jesus goes next as he shares a parable with his guests. And it's here we see **Humility Exalted**.

I want to read for us once more this parable and then we will circle back and touch on a couple things.
Luke 14:7-11

So first of all we need to understand a little bit of cultural context here. First century dining rooms were very much like High School lunchrooms. There was a seating chart hierarchy. The host would sit at the head of the table, and then next to him would be the person who was the most distinguished guest. The seating chart, and the dignity of the individual, would descend from that spot all the way down to the bottom of the table.

I love the irony Jesus models here. Remember when Jesus came to this dinner party the Pharisees were "carefully watching" him. But here we see that it was Jesus who was carefully watching them. He noticed how calculated they were as they socialized around the room, maybe even jockeying for position in subtle ways as if the music were about to end in musical chairs.

Jesus highlights the depth of this problem because not only do they all want to sit in the seats of honor, but they want to sit there because they think they deserve it.

Have you ever accidentally sat in the wrong seat at a concert or on an airplane? There's nothing more humiliating than acknowledging to everyone in your immediate area that you forgot how to read a ticket. Matching is hard.

But how much more foolish would it be if it wasn't a simple mistake? What if you took that spot intentionally thinking that you were more deserving, that no one else was going to show up, and that you were the best of all people to have that seat. Only to realize it was reserved for someone else. You'd then have to stand up and see that all the other seats around you were taken and shamefully you'd walk to the nosebleeds.

That's the kind of inversion and humiliation Jesus is warning against here. And I think we can understand and apply this parable at two levels.

First we can see how will look at how it applied to the immediate context of that dinner party, and then we can apply it to our own lives today.

The immediate audience for this parable were “those who were invited” (vs. 7). Who is left at this point? Well the plant of the sick man is gone, Jesus sent him away. So all who are left are those Pharisees and lawyers. The people who are left are the experts in the law and the teachers of the law.

And what did they seek to do with Jesus? They sought to trap him with the law as they knew it. But what did Jesus just do to them, he trapped them with the very same law.

This parable wasn’t a disconnected teaching, it was an illustration of what just happened! In **Matthew 23:2** Jesus says of the Pharisees, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat."

Jesus was invited into a meal where these men sat on the seat of the law believing themselves to be worthy experts of it. They were the superior ones who were going to expose this charlatan. But by the end it was shown that there was a more distinguished expert in their midst.

They were shown not as guests of honor, but as humiliated and foolish compared to the one who came to rightly teach and perfectly fulfill the law. They wanted to lord the Sabbath over Jesus, but Jesus proved to them that he was Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8).

You see the Pharisees made the same mistake many opponents of Christianity do today as well. They set themselves as experts over God's word instead of under God's word and in so doing they dug their own trap. They tried to pit God's own Old Testament word against the very Word of God in the flesh.

You'll find many people who try to use scripture to disprove scripture, but it's a fool's errand. We think we can trip God up in his own words because we can trip up ourselves and others in our own words. Why can we do that? Because we are by nature conflicted and limited. We say things deceitfully we don't mean, and we don't have the ability to keep some of the things we sincerely.

But Numbers 23:19 says, that "God is not a man that he should lie." Trying to use God's word against himself is like trying to use a flashlight to create darkness.

The Law though unable to save, was never meant to conceal God's salvation but instead to expose it. The Pharisees were trying to use the Old Testament as a blanket to cover the very light of the Old Testament. The point of the law was to lead us to Christ, not away from it. Paul himself in **Galatians 3:24** says "So then the law was our guardian (or to put it another way, our tutor or babysitter) until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith."

In other words if the experts in the law were really experts in the law they should have seen that the Sabbath law pointed directly to Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath—that he was the distinguished guest the law was waiting for.

Christians, even though Jesus fulfilled the law, we have much to learn from the law when it comes to the ethics of our faith. It is meant to shape our lives even today but more than that it is meant to lead us to our need for Jesus.

We can often become so consumed with the outer works of holiness and righteousness and Christian behavior that we forget who allows all of that to happen. That's what Paul said earlier in **Galatians 3:3** when he said, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

In other words, the law and your growth in holiness are never pointing to your sufficiency or your own merit. Instead it points us to our dependence upon the more distinguished guest. The law humbles us now so that we might see what the Pharisees didn't: someone of greater honor is coming for our seat. The law exposes our need for Jesus, and here Luke is exposing the beauty of Jesus.

Despite Jesus' subtle rebuke of the Pharisees blatant hypocrisy notice the astounding sense of optimism Jesus leaves on the table: **(Luke 14:10)** "When you are invited, go to the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.'"

We are all hypocrites. None of us have deserved anything that Jesus did for us. But even the lowly are offered a seat at the table. Jesus says even of the Pharisees, "If you come and take the lowest seat, the master will say, 'Friend, move up higher.'" Brothers and sisters, if there's hope for them, there's hope for us.

What is that hope for the hypocritical, the conflicted and the sinner? Come humbly to Jesus.

There's an entrance fee to Christianity. It's not just faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is good, but the faith we have in Jesus at its core is also the faith we have about ourselves. It only makes sense to have faith in Jesus when we understand we are the man with dropsy, we are the son in the well, we are the sinner stuck in sin. We have nothing but an immediate need. But Jesus is the one who has the power to pull us out.

The entrance fee to Christianity is humility. Without humility there is no faith. Brothers and sisters, I was raised in a Christian home, I attended a Christian school, I went to seminary, I've been preaching weekly as a staff person for 16 years and I need to be reminded daily that it's my job to take the last chair. Because I come to the feast with nothing. No merit of my own. But only the golden ticket of Jesus.

J.C. Ryle says it this way: **"The root of humility is right knowledge. The man who knows himself and his own heart,--who knows God and his infinite majesty and holiness,--who knows Christ, and the price at which he was redeemed,--that man will never be a proud man."**

Look at the law, stare it in the eyes like the Pharisees did. And if you are not humbled by it in terms of how it matches up to yourself, then be humbled by how you match up to Jesus. He is more distinguished than you. He is sinless, always faithful, never doubting, perfect in obedience, tempted, tried, unstained.

The head seat is not ours to gain, but by grace it is Jesus' to give. R.C. Sproul says, **"The exaltation and the honor we experience is to be given to us, not grasped by us."**

If you are not a Christian, and you're trying to wrestle intellectually with the gospel. Wrestle well. The gospel is intellectual, but at the bottom of it you will find the humble need for faith. Humble faith. To come to Jesus acknowledges that you are not the expert, Jesus is. It realizes that truth exists apart from us.

To the Christian, do you have a pattern of helpful self-assessment and gospel application?

I often counsel people who wrestle with depression and there is both a beauty and a burden for those who wrestle in this way. The beauty is that those who wrestle with depression always take the last seat. They almost always see themselves as undeserving and unworthy of Jesus' grace.

But the burden is, they have seen themselves, they know themselves. Like the man with dropsy at the dinner table they often feel out of place and ignored.

I was talking to one sister who said, "I really struggle with communion Sundays because I always feel that I'm not worthy to take it."

I wish that all of us might share a glimpse of that profoundly true theology. We do not deserve to take Christ, but Christ has taken us first. It was Jesus who took hold of the man, and it's Jesus who takes hold of us by faith in the gospel.

Robert Murray Mc'Cheyne once said, "For every look you take at yourself, take ten looks at Christ."

Here is the practice of preaching the gospel to yourself and one you can preach to others. Yes we come to Jesus with nothing, we come unworthy, we come undistinguished, and undeserving. We come knowing there is always another who will deserve the honor seat.

But the host takes our hand, and he says to you, "Friend, move up higher." He says to you in your low estate. Friend, there's honor here for you because there's a generous brother in the honor seat. He shares with you his righteousness and his standing, he lords not over you his knowledge of his perfection but he shares it with all connecting the many guest to the side of the infinite host.

The gospel is a devastating blow of conflict to the whole of our heart because it goes against everything we naturally think best. The secular world might hear this and say this is a dangerous and toxic reality. And it would be drastically foolish, intellectually disingenuously and experientially egregious for us to put our business to self-humiliation if the gospel were not true.

But if the gospel is true—if one more distinguished has come to sit on the seat of Moses, then we suffer not for our humiliation. Why? Because this humility acknowledges our personhood with the relational offer of friendship, and it heals our wound with the promise of exaltation. The same hand of God which will humiliate those who exalt themselves in this life, is the same hand that exalts those who humble themselves in this life.

Peter who heard this very parable echoes this point in **1 Peter 5:6**, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."

Brothers and sisters, we who take that last seat will be exalted in the last day. Why? Because Jesus will do it.

For all who come to him, will be exalted by his merit, by his mercy and by his honor.