

The Condition the Heart

Jesus is invited to a dinner party of a prominent Pharisee. Not unlike some dinner parties of our day; people want to be seen by other people of influence or connect with people of influence and hear what they have to say, and they even want to possibly influence people on issues. Often there is an agenda. Like most of the things the religious leaders invited Jesus to, they too, had an agenda. Most of the time their agenda was a vain attempt to catch Jesus in some heretical teachings, sayings or actions in an attempt to discredit this man who had a growing influence among people. Today's passage is no different.

What I would like for you to observe in this text today are three things. **First**, those who reveal the true condition of their hearts by their hypocrisy. **Second**, those who express the true condition of their hearts as they practice humility. **Third**, as hearts are revealed we understand who is invited to God's banquet.

As is right we begin with prayer to God our Father. Pray with me as Jesus taught so long ago. The first prayer that I was taught. **“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread, ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”** For yours is the kingdom and power and the glory forever. (Matthew 6:9-13) Amen.

We should say this prayer, not as just a memorized prayer without thought and understanding, but with a desire to truly bless the name of God and have an

anticipation of Jesus' return and God's kingdom to come. We recognize all we have is because of the grace of God, including the very food we enjoy. We are to have hearts ready to repent and seek forgiveness and to give forgiveness to others. Praise God he gives us his Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and transform our hearts so we sin less and he keeps us from evil.

With the help of God's Spirit, we now hear God's inspired word and let it teach us, strengthen us and transform us. Please stand, if you are able as **Ivan** reads the Word of God.

Heart of Hypocrisy

My first inclination when I read this passage was to say, "Jesus run. It is a set up. They want to trap you!" But, you see, I am a mere man, but Jesus is both man and God. He has no worry about the schemes of men. Jesus sees an opportunity to proclaim the gospel and he takes it. It is a trap but he uses this trap of men to glorify his Father and teach the gospel.

Reading at verse 1, "One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ² And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy." Here is how we know they were trying to trap him. First, this dinner just happened to be on the Sabbath with all its rules. They had seen Jesus in action before on the Sabbath and they knew he would do as he saw was right. Second, it just so happened that this dinner was at the house of a prominent Pharisee. One who, no doubt, had influence and a desire to catch Jesus breaking their laws and he had the authority to take Jesus before Israel's religious leaders. Third, it just so happened that they were all watching Him carefully. Why were they watching? It was not out of love or amazement they were watching Him,

they wanted to catch Him, going against their man-made rules. Fourth, there just happened to be a man there with dropsy.

The sickness in the ancient world known as dropsy was a condition in which a person's organs were beginning to shut down. They would retain fluid and be extremely swollen. Most often, this condition would result in death. Today, what was then referred to as dropsy is often related to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD or congestive heart failure that causes edema or the retention of fluid. So, we see a man with a very serious condition being used against Jesus by the religious leaders. As Jesus observes what the Pharisee and lawyers had orchestrated, he asked them questions for their self-examination.

Reading again at verse 3, “*And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?’*”⁴ *But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away.*”⁵ *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?’*”⁶ *And they could not reply to these things.”*

Jesus' desire is to cut to the chase. The Pharisee and lawyers were so steeped in man-made rules and regulations that they were unable to answer Jesus even with a simple yes or no. This reminds me of politicians today. You ask them a simple question and they can talk on-and-on about everything else and never answer the question. Why? Because many are hypocrites, they are not concerned with the betterment of people but in maintaining their position and power.

If the Pharisee or lawyers answered “*Yes, it is right to heal on a Sabbath*”, the religious leaders would accuse them of watering down their man-made traditions and rules in an attempt to be popular with the people. If he answered, “*No, it is not right*” the people would think and might even respond, “*What kind of*

heartless religion are you running here?” So, they did the only thing they could do and they remained quiet. If a politician actually answers a question; one way - he shuns one group and loses votes. If he answers it in another way - he rejects another group of voters. He chooses to simply speak many words and never say anything in order to not take a side and loose support from the other side. Hypocrites act in this way, whether they are the Pharisees of the Bible or politicians today or pastors who do not want to offend or Christians who want to be accepted by the world.

These Pharisee’s hearts were dead to God. There was a human being suffering greatly with dropsy and they used him as bait to catch Jesus. The only reason, I see, this man was invited was to be used by these religious leaders. They did not care at all about this man. I hope you are getting a picture of hypocrisy. Hypocrites are self-seeking liars and opportunists who fear man and not God. They live for worldly importance and have no heart for God. This was true at the time that Jesus walked this earth and it is true today. Jesus is saying the saving truth is simple; does one believe and live the gospel glorifying God or serve the prince of this world and men.

These religious leaders only invited the man with dropsy to use him and only invited Jesus to trap him. Literally, they were stalking Jesus, trying every way they could think of, to trap him, to discredit him and to shut him up because they were so steeped in hypocrisy, they were so blinded to God’s truth, they would soon go so far as to kill Jesus in an effort to avoid God and retain power.

I do not think we could over emphasize the fact that the Pharisees and the lawyers were the social elite, as verse 1 states, [“a ruler of the Pharisees.”](#) These were the upper-class citizens with wealth and influence. Jesus is getting ready to

insert a switch. Luke so often portrays for us this great reversal. These social elites, these men pleasers, these people of power and wealth will not even be included in the Kingdom of God unless they repent. They are lost. Often the meek and the powerful approach God differently. As God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, “The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel. ²⁰ For the ruthless shall come to nothing and the scoffer cease, and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off...” (Isaiah 29:19-20) We must be careful in this world because status and fame have a very big pull on our hearts. Keeping up with the Jones is a damning practice. We want people to like us and we want them to look up to us. Very often this quest for status causes us to choose the things of the world and not the things of God. Jesus explained this very problem.

Taking up Jesus’ response to the silence and their jockeying for positions to be noticed in verse 7, “Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸ ‘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, ⁹ 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.’” Jesus could tell the condition of their hearts by watching them at this party.

These religious leaders looked very religious on the outside but their actions pointed to self-centeredness. Rather than caring for others, they were just looking out for themselves. The whole party was nothing more than a rally to increase one’s social standing. The picture is this, the host is high up on the social ladder and when he throws open the door, everyone runs to get the best seat, either, the seat closest to the host or a seat in front so they will be noticed. The poor man with

dropsy was not even a blip on their radar screen - that is until they wanted to use him to trap Jesus. The point here is that these religious people race to get the best seat now, but the world which is so important to them and their quest for prestige is a house of cards that will end possibly in this life but definitely ends in the eternal life to come.

These words employed by our Lord shows a much deeper truth than these folks simply taking a lesser seat at a party out of shame. They will be denied entrance to the real party...the great banquet feast Jesus will host in heaven. The reason is that they would rather be seen here and now at this party than be present at the real dinner party thrown in heaven. For them the realities of the world trump the unseen future of heaven. They have belief to gain what they want – so, they are hypocrites.

Jesus is not saying the ambition of wanting to do all things with quality as witness for Christ is wrong. Pursuing a career that one finds fulfilling and allows one to have testimony of their relationship with Christ is not wrong. But even an effort to do what would be labeled a “good work” is not good without Christ as the motivation. The prophet Isaiah said of the people of Israel who had turned from God, “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” (Isaiah 64:6) Without Christ as our Lord and Savior and hearts of servants “good works” are questionable.

Heart of Humility

To contrast these hypocrites Jesus continues in verse 10, “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. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and

he who humbles himself will be exalted.”¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Jesus reverses the order, those seeking rank and position in the world are lowered and those who are lowly and who exhibit true humility do so from a changed heart. These are the ones who purposefully humble themselves here and now and are not pressing their advantage over others for worldly status. These folks may not enjoy a high social position here on earth, but are satisfied with who they are by their relationship with God. They understand that humility of oneself and exaltation of God leads to eternal exaltation in the Kingdom of God to come.

The humble look to the future through eyes of faith and realize there is a much better banquet will be thrown in heaven. They are the ones who realize that this great banquet feast will be the party to surpass all parties. Their concern is not to get the best seat now but to care for others and show them the best seat while they themselves seek a lesser seat. As Paul instructed, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

True humility is not always obvious. I read recently, that on a visit to the Beethoven museum in Bonn, Germany, a young American music student became fascinated by the piano on which Beethoven had composed some of his greatest works. She asked the museum guard if she could play his piano for just one song; she accompanied the request with a lavish tip and the guard agreed. The girl went

to the piano and played the Moonlight Sonata. As she was leaving, she said to the guard, "I suppose all the great pianist who come here want to play on that piano." The guard shook his head and said to the woman, the famed Polish pianist who became Prime Minister of his country, Padarewski (*pade'refski*) was here recently and he said "He wasn't worthy to touch it." Humility is the condition of the heart.

Jesus was a man who was truly humble, he knew who he was and humbled himself before God the Father and was a servant to the people the Father had sent him to save. As the writer of Hebrews stated, "Now in putting everything in subjection to *Jesus*, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." (Hebrews 2:8-9) The more we glorify Jesus and serve others the more the Holy Spirit humbles us. Jesus said in verse 11, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

To strive for acceptance by the world and to seek power will in due course lead to shame. Jesus very clearly tells us that everyone seeking to exalt himself will be made low. God is not impressed with social status. You could tell God that you were mayor or governor or president and He would say, "How did you use your position to serve my kingdom." You might say people looked up to you and God would respond as Jesus did to Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to *Jesus*, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." *Jesus* said to him, "Feed my lambs."¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" *Peter* said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." (John 21:15-16) God blesses us for the purpose of blessing others in His Name and sharing His gospel of life with them. We need to

recognize that people were so precious to God, he sacrificed his only son that we might be saved, but at the same time – you and I are not that important, what is important is the glory of God.

Hypocrisy’s Reward

Hypocritical behavior does have rewards. Reading verse 12, “**When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.**”

The point Jesus makes, is for the lost prideful hypocrite who has amassed for himself worldly status, he had better enjoy it now because that is as good as it gets for him or her. If you live for this world and its status, live it up now. Enjoy your life and everything you can acquire because when this life is over, so is your reward. Earthly reward for the unbeliever turns into eternal suffering.

When hypocrites throw parties their guest list is made up of people who can help them get what they want out of this life. Their invitations come with a catch. I will invite you as long as you are useful to me - case in point; Jesus and the man with dropsy and the room full of Pharisees and lawyers.

Humility’s Greater Reward

Jesus says there is a better way that brings lasting joy and peace, reading at verse 13, “**But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.**” Jesus wants his followers; all true Christians, you and me, to be different. We, us, you and me, must be the ones who invite the man with dropsy because he is created in God’s image and we care for him and his soul. He is invited not to be used but because we are to serve and care for him. He

is invited because we simply care and are not concerned whether or not we will get anything in return. The fact is we will not receive back as far as the world is concerned and it will probably even cost us something, but we invite him anyway. This is one reason why Canyon Bible moved to this location by the East Mountain Food Pantry.

Now we turn our attention to Jesus' closing parable.

Hearts Revealed

Follow along as I read beginning in verse 15, “When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”¹⁶ But he said to him, ‘A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.’¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, “Come, for everything is now ready.”¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, “I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.”¹⁹ And another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.”²⁰ And another said, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, “Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.” Let me stop here.

We must read this parable in light of the previous chapter. Jesus has been calling the Israelites to come into the Kingdom of God and over and over they have refused to enter. The gospel will now out go to the Gentiles, the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. In other words, the Gospel when out beyond the Jews and it has come to us. We are the poor, crippled, blind, and lame who God invites to the great

banquet feast. Just as Jesus commends to his disciples the practice of inviting the poor to their parties, He does so because that is the practice of God.

Application

I want to close with this point of application; since only those who exhibit humility from a changed heart are invited to the great banquet feast then how do we foster more and more humility in our lives? How do we become more and more the ones who invite the poor rather than the ones who will benefit us in this life, this world? How can we become humble people who glorify God and serve others out of love?

We must begin with some foundational truths. First, do you understand who you really are? You are poor, blind, and powerless. If you are invited to the feast it is not because God can get something from you. If you are invited it is because God loves you and desires to not receive anything except the glory you give Him.

Second, do you understand that you are a sinner? Do you really understand that there is no part of you that is not corrupted by sin? Do you fully grasp that you should not be invited to the feast because of your sin?

Third, do you understand what it took to add you to the guest list? Do you understand that the Guest of Honor, Jesus, died to pay the penalty for your sin? Do you understand that He wrote your name down and the ink He used was His own blood?

This kind of knowledge must be taken into one's heart and soul and this is where humility is born. This is what God requires. So, my beloved – love God with all your heart and live humbled by the price of your salvation. If we can live as Jesus instructed, the 2 great commands found in the New Testament, live these and

everything else will fall into place – believe - “ ‘The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:29-31)

Love God and live in humility! Amen and amen!