

DINNER WITH JESUS // Luke 14:1-6

Message from the series, The Gospel of Luke

This story of Jesus dining with Pharisees on the Sabbath is the last in a series of Sabbath incidents (previous encounters are found in Luke 4:16-37, 6: 1-11, and 13:10-17). It is also a third and final example of Jesus eating a meal with Pharisees (see also Luke 7:36-50 and 11: 37-54). In these encounters, a familiar pattern develops: there is someone there in need of healing and conflict emerges with the Pharisees. In this passage, which parallels in many ways the incident described in Luke 6, the Pharisees have arranged a Sabbath set-up—they are looking for something with which to accuse Jesus.

This passage could be applied to the holiday season. Jesus' example provides a model for gracefully navigating uncomfortable social territory. In imitation of him, we should:

1. Take advantage of an invitation, especially from someone in need of the gospel.
2. Remember we are always being watched, and we should strive to be found above reproach.
3. Know who is hurting in the room and why.
4. Ask gospel-provoking questions on spiritual matters.
5. Make every moment count for ministry.
6. Put a bow on every visit by letting our last words leave a sweet taste.

But, the main point of this passage is that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He owns the room, he knows why he is there, and he's there on purpose.

1. The Meal Arranged (v. 1-3)

Jesus is one of the invited guests at this Sabbath dinner party. It is a pre-prepared meal (because no work, including food preparation, could be done on the Sabbath) with a pre-meditated plot. The Pharisees have planted a man suffering from dropsy in the group, hoping that Jesus will violate their teaching by healing him on the Sabbath. Jesus, however, knows their thoughts (Luke 6:8) and responds to them, even though there is no indication in the text that anything has been spoken on the matter. His question—"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—puts them on the spot. If they say it is lawful, they contradict their own teaching. If they say it is not, they reveal their own hard heartedness. Their silence is a sign of their consternation.

2. The Man Redeemed (v. 4)

Jesus will heal the man with dropsy (edema, a swelling that would be symptomatic of many serious diseases, including heart failure). His treatment of the man is a picture of salvation: he "took him"—Jesus initiates the intervention; he "healed him"—salvation heals the sickness of sin; and "sent him"—Jesus doesn't leave us where we are when he saves us. By sending the man out, Jesus also foils the Pharisees' plot, revealing that the man was not an invited guest but a tool being exploited by the Pharisees.

3. The Message Conveyed (v. 5-6)

Jesus makes clear: human welfare takes priority over Sabbath rules. He exposes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees by asking "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?" The Pharisees cannot respond. They had used the man as a ploy, not even valuing his life as they would an ox in a well.

The incident is an illustration of many of us who have fallen in a well and cannot get out on our own. Jesus offers mercy and grace. He helps those in need and does ministry that no one else can do. When we are in potentially uncomfortable contexts, are we looking for those with spiritual dropsy? Jesus knows them. Are we looking for him to do something that only he can do?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are there upcoming events on your calendar when you need to be alert for those in need of the healing only Jesus can provide? How can you be praying for spiritual encounters and gospel-centered conversations?
2. Can you remember when Jesus “took, healed, and sent” you? How can you share that story with someone soon?
3. Are there times when we are prone to value rules above people? How can we prayerfully ask God to reform our priorities to match his?