

Luke 14:1-14

“Fix your eyes on Jesus,” writes the author of the Book of Hebrews. And this is precisely what the Pharisees are doing in our text. Their eyes are fixed on Jesus. They’re “*watching Him carefully*,” it says. But they are hardly obeying this Scriptural command, for they are watching Jesus with evil intent. They’re watching for the purpose of catching Him in a trap. And they have already pulled apart the trap’s jaws. These Pharisees have brought in a man who has dropsy.

What’s that? Dropsy is swelling in the body caused by the retention of water. It’s a symptom of a serious condition such as congestive heart failure. It’s the Sabbath day, and these Pharisees are hoping Jesus will heal the man so they can accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath law forbidding work on that day.

These Pharisees are like police officers who constantly follow an ambulance waiting for it to break a traffic law so they can pull it over and write a ticket. But when was the last time you saw an ambulance pulled over as it was on its way to the scene of a crash? Not going to happen. Officers don’t do that. Even though it’s going faster than the law allows, the saving of a human life requires it.

This is the point Jesus makes with these Pharisees. “*Which of you*,” He asks, “*having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?*” These Pharisees are not going to say to themselves, “Oh no, my child has fallen into a deep well! I need to go get a rope and pull him out. Oh wait, today is the Sabbath and I cannot do any work! I’ll have to wait till tomorrow to rescue my child.”

Jesus is simply brilliant here. But when isn’t He? The only time He was ever caught in a trap was in Gethsemane when He willingly walked into it. So do these Pharisees give Jesus a round of applause and say, “Well done, Jesus! You really showed us to be fools with Your brilliant response.” That would be the day. They say nothing. They know He’s right. They most certainly would work on the Sabbath to perform a rescue. But instead of learning from Jesus here, they hate Him all the more. As the Proverb says, “*Reprove a mocker and he will hate you.*”

But you are no mocker, are you? You are wise by the working of the Holy Spirit within you. And so you do not hate the one who reproves and corrects you. Rather, you love to be reproved. For the Proverb also says, “*Reprove a wise man and he will love you.*” And so when I point out that you are tempted to act like these Pharisees, and sometimes do, you won’t hate me, but rather love me for this reproof. And if I am wise, I will love you when you point out the same thing to me.

So how are we like the Pharisees? Hmmm, where do we begin? Jesus showed them that they completely misunderstood the Scriptures concerning the Sabbath day. But rather than admitting their error, they stubbornly held on to their false notions. We also are tempted to shape our religious ideas and practices according to our own opinions and desires. And we resist changing them. We are even tempted to condemn those who disagree with us. So we are Pharisees if we can sit through a church service, where God teaches us through the words we hear, but then leave the church service unchanged, unmoved, and unwilling to give up our own opinions on the matter.

Having said that, I now say this: We must be exactly like these Pharisees. Wait...what? Yep, you and I must let these Pharisees be our example. How? In this way: “*They were watching (Jesus) carefully.*”

“Fix your eyes on Jesus.” Though not with evil intent as did the Pharisees, yet as they did, watch Jesus carefully and closely, for He is the author and finisher of your salvation.

So let’s watch Him carefully. A man with dropsy is before Him. The Pharisees do not care about the man, but Jesus does. The Pharisees simply use the poor man against Jesus, wanting to trap Him with the law. But Jesus’ hands are not bound by the law, for there is no law that binds the mercy of God. For Jesus, showing mercy and love is of prime importance. He places the well-being of God’s children above everything. This is how He operates. It’s how He lives. It’s what He preaches and what He practices. He is full of mercy. And this mercy is extended always in true humility. He always puts others above Himself.

What about you and me? We may preach mercy, but do we practice it? We may take great pride in being humble, but do we then even grasp what humility really is? Mercy and humility belong together. These Pharisees did not practice either one. They lacked mercy on account of their pride. They did not count others as being more important than themselves. And thus, mercy was not part of their makeup.

If we carefully watch the Pharisees, we see them scramble for the best seats at the table in our text. Jesus draws their attention to this. He shames them for always grabbing the places of honor. This is pride at work. And He shames the host for inviting only the most noble guests to his dinner. Mercy invites the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. But this Pharisee was unwilling to do this. He does not act with mercy because of his pride.

And sadly that pride lives in our hearts. Pride is the fear that we will not be recognized for our supposed greatness. But true humility has no fear. It trusts that God will always provide. It believes that God will act in mercy and grant us whatever is necessary. A prideful heart does not watch Jesus carefully. It doesn’t need to, for it cannot learn anything from Him it doesn’t already know. But a humble heart does watch Jesus. To learn and to receive. For apart from what Jesus gives, it has nothing.

And so with humble hearts let’s watch Jesus to learn and receive. He practices what He preaches. “Take the lowest seat” He tells the Pharisees. And because He always acts in mercy, Jesus Himself takes the place of dishonor. He literally seats Himself in the lowest place...in hell. He accepts this seat by hanging from a cross. And friend, because He does this for you, God moves you up higher to a seat in heaven.

And watch Jesus carefully as He hosts His banquet supper. He does not invite those who can repay Him. Not those who are noble guests. Jesus invites to His Supper, here at His altar, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. In other words, He invites sinners, wretched sinners like you and me. He invites us because we are too much like Pharisees; because pride does live in our hearts. But friend, Jesus invites you because He places you and your well-being above everything. He acts in mercy toward you right here and now. He forgives you. And because He does, God seats you with your Savior in heaven. His mercy does this for you. Every one of you He completely forgives.

Now since He has declared everyone here forgiven, we can be humble toward each other. And we can show the same mercy toward each other that God shows to us, for remember there is no law against showing mercy and love. Amen.