

**Jesus at a Pharisee's House - Speaking Truth to Power**

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**Julian Doorey - Sermon - Cavy Bap - 12-8-18**(Luke 14:1-14) - *read in the sections being discussed*

2

**[Luke 14:1-14: Jesus at a Pharisee's House](#)****[Sabbath unrest \(v1-6\)](#)**

1 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. 5 Then he asked them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?" 6 And they had nothing to say. (TNIV)

**[Honour reversal \(v7-11, 12-14\)](#)** - read later...

**Prayer****Introduction**

Do you ever find yourself in social settings where you're the odd one out in your beliefs, values or behaviour? Some years ago I went with my elderly Mother and her friend to another elderly couples place for lunch (I didn't know them)... sometimes parents force you! At that time I was studying at Bible College for 3 years. Mum wasn't hostile to it, but perhaps saw it as a waste of time and money. The lunchtime conversation was polite, but became somewhat antagonistic when the hosts found out I was studying at Bible College. I felt was under scrutiny, as I attempted to positively answer some tricky questions. The climax occurred when the male host asked 'what happens to people after they die who have chosen not to follow Jesus?' At this point the room is silent and all eyes and ears are on me, as I attempt to give a reasonable answer loyal to scripture and respectful to the host. The moment passes... and we resume weather talk. Referring to Luke 14...

**Dinner with Pharisees**

3

In Luke 14, Jesus has dinner with a top leader of the Pharisees. The Pharisees generally get a bad rap in scripture, with stories of conflict with Jesus. Who were the Pharisees? They provided a combination of leadership, governance, Biblical (OT) scholarship and teaching. I think of a 'scholarly eldership' responsible to guide, preserve and set boundaries for the religious beliefs, views and behaviour of Judaism - centred in Jerusalem, but spread around the Middle East. It was very difficult - living under an oppressive Roman occupation, with its multicultural mix of religious beliefs, including various Roman Gods, and expected loyalty to the Roman Emperor, seen as a God / person. The Pharisees had a tough job and were not all bad. For example the Pharisee Nicodemus sought to learn from Jesus... Reading in John 3...

**[John 3: Jesus Teaches Nicodemus](#)**

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." (TNIV)

Getting back to the other Pharisees (unlike Nicodemus), they were concerned when they started hearing about Jesus. Who was Jesus? He was an unknown, uncredentialed, inexperienced, rough-neck from rural Galilee, who was a potential threat to orthodox Jewish belief, values and behaviour. He was pushing the boundaries with some of his teachings (I am the way the truth and the life etc) and mixed with the wrong crowd (prostitutes, fishermen and rich tax agents). He was attracting the

masses (at least at the start) and people said he performed miracles. And so the tension built... until Jesus is at dinner with one of the top Pharisees, and presumably others.

### **Sabbath unrest (v1-6)**

The Pharisees are carefully watching (and listening to) Jesus, it seems to try and find fault with his beliefs, teaching and lifestyle. This would verify their opinions that he was unorthodox, a phoney, a false prophet and a real danger to Judaism. They had every right to ensure that Jesus was not leading people astray, but they had their own major wrongs. Biblical interpretation can be tricky. According to Luke, the Pharisees say nothing, while Jesus only says 36 words (TNIV). A group of people together for several hours can potentially say several thousand words. (Phone call story)

4

The issue raised by Jesus is about the proper use of the Sabbath day. The Sabbath was established in OT law as a day of rest and worship, enabling people to recover from 6 days of work and re-create... good for the mind, body and spirit. The Sabbath was an important observable marker or point of difference which set the Jewish community apart (less painful than male circumcision). The Pharisee's job was to preserve the Sabbath, as a marker or point of difference, good for people and their faith. They didn't want to see it encroached upon as we have seen Sunday eroded way. They had rules / guidelines about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. Jesus challenged their caution, conservatism and control, by asking in v3 whether someone could be healed on the Sabbath day, rather than waiting until the next day. The Pharisees couldn't respond, so he healed a man who was there. He drives the point home, by asking in v5 who would not immediately pull out a child or animal who has fallen down a well on the Sabbath day. Again they are stumped... a gotcha moment. Jesus demolished their legalism which had put tight boundaries around the Sabbath day. He restored the spirit of the Sabbath as a life giving blessing for people.

### **Chick-fil-A**

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My niece's husband manages a Chick-fil-A restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Chick-fil-A is a big fast-food chain (2200 locations, \$4.8 mill each year) begun by Truett Cathy, a Southern Baptist in Atlanta. The South is home of the Bible-Belt in the USA. Chick-fil-A don't open on Sundays as a 'way of honouring God and directing attention to things that matter more than business'. This is one of their markers or points of difference. Imagine McDonalds closed on Sundays... millions of lost revenue. In 2011, they were boycotted for financing anti-same-sex marriage charities. In 2012, they released a statement, 'We are a restaurant company focused on food, service, and hospitality; our intent is to leave the policy debate over same-sex marriage to the government and political arenas'. I have a thought about their Sabbath closure and the public boycott. Perhaps they could open on Sundays (with willing workers) and donate all profits to a social cause, helping poor people to work their way out of poverty, in the USA and overseas. This could be a life-giving use of the Sabbath, similar to Jesus healing. Imagine the positive public witness...

### **Speaking Truth to Power**

What Jesus did here was... 'Speak Truth to Power' (to Pharisees). My heroes are people who have spoken truth to power to bring about justice, equality and freedom for others. In no particular order:

6

• Mahatma Gandhi - challenged British colonial rule in India, leading to independence (1947).

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• Rev Martin Luther King Jr - civil rights leader for USA blacks and whites - *Dream* (1963).

8

• Muhammad Ali - refused to fight in Vietnam... 'They never called me nigger' (1967).

9

• Martin Luther - challenged Catholic church errors resulting in the reformation (1517).

- 10 • Kate Sheppard - fought for NZ women to get the vote - 1st in world (1893).
- 11 • William Carey - established the Baptist Missionary Society, father of modern mission (1793).
- 12 • Te Rongomai - Maori Christian pacifist of Parihaka village destroyed by soldiers (1881).
- 13 • Nelson Mandela - fought for South African racial equality between blacks and whites (1994).

You'll have your own list. I'm not talking about people complaining about petty issues. All these people spoke truth to power for the benefit of others, at great personal cost. Sometimes the benefit was spiritual, sometimes social, sometimes human rights... sometimes a mix. The cost to the speaker is always 'social' (rejection, marginalised, loss of friends), often 'economic' (loss of career opportunities, imprisonment), and sometimes premature 'death' (Gandhi, Rev Martin Luther King Junior). Jesus spoke truth to power, seeking righteousness and justice, offering life and forgiveness... and suffered a premature and cruel death.

**Honour reversal (v7-11, 12-14)**

- 14 Jesus goes onto address another issue, the Pharisees culture of relational honour and patronage.

Honour reversal (v7-11)

7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all the other guests. 11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (TNIV)

In v7-11, Jesus warns them not to show their importance by competing with others for seats / places of honour, or as the Message puts it Jesus noticed 'how each had tried to elbow into the place of honour'. Have you ever experienced an elbow in the ribs while queuing at a counter for service? (Nepal story). It's hard for Kiwis to grasp what's happening here, unless you've lived overseas in a an honour and patronage based culture. Kiwi culture was founded on egalitarianism, although this is changing. Non-Western cultures don't work this way, often working through a complex system of relational honour and patronage. Let me try and explain...

- 15 Patronage defined... A patron (individual or organisation) gives advantage to a client (family, friends, ethnicity, political party or religion), while excluding others. The advantage could be encouragement, privilege, money, a job or some other opportunity benefitting the receiver who is loyal to the giver. Western parlance includes: 'it's not what you know, it's who you know', 'being part of the old boy's network', 'the inner circle' and 'shoulder tapping'.

I observed and experienced this for years in South Asia. The Bangladeshi cultural characteristic of patronage, governs every relationship from top to bottom throughout society... resulting in favouritism, cronyism and nepotism, as patrons give advantage (patronage) to their clients (preferred group), while excluding others. Some stories...

- Front page newspaper article heading: 'Christian NGO Director employs 11 close relatives'.
- Church denomination aid and development NGOs set up in the 1990s - issues of favouritism, nepotism and relational advantage... employing relatives without skills.

- Baptist Aid policy: Village based development husband and wife couples employed from outside the working area, to avoid relational pressure from relatives and friends.
- NZ Baptist Bangladeshi staff unwilling to express their true concerns to the organisation.

Jesus does not outright condemn honour and patronage as a relational cultural approach. It has many good characteristics such as loyalty and responsibility for those connected to you in some way (family, friends etc). However, Jesus speaks sharply against the negatives aspects. He tells the Pharisees to take the lowest place around the meal table (v10), then delivering the final cultural blow in v11 says 'For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted', or as the Message puts it 'If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face. But if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself'.

In v12-14, Jesus again challenges relational based honour and patronage. The Message says...

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Honour reversal (v12-14)

Then he turned to the host. "The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbours, the kind of people who will return the favour. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You'll be - and experience - a blessing. They won't be able to return the favour, but the favour will be returned - oh, how it will be returned! - at the resurrection of God's people." (Msg)

Honour and patronage based relationships rely on reciprocity ie: relationships based on 2 way advantage rather than simple friendship. Mutually beneficial relationships are not wrong (such as in business), but Jesus challenges the Pharisees in v12 to not only invite 'friends and family and rich neighbours, the kind of people who will return the favour'. Rather in v13 they are to invite 'some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks... who won't be able to return the favour'. He wraps up with a peculiar statement in v14 'you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous'. Is this implying there will be a hierarchy of reward in heaven based on our good works? Or is it saying, that our graced based salvation in Jesus is the motivation to be involved in good works which seek to bless and feed others? I think the second.

**Conclusion**

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The key theme has been Jesus speaking truth to power, for the benefit of others, in 2 ways.

- Jesus challenged the Pharisee's restrictive understanding of the Sabbath or our Sunday. What do you do on Sunday? Are you using it to re-create within your own life? Are you using it to re-create the lives of others (not just family)?
- Jesus challenged the negative aspects of the Pharisee's relational honour and patronage based culture, resulting in favour to family, friends, ethnicity, political party or religion, while neglecting others. Do you reach out in friendship to people who cannot repay you? Who do you seek to bless and feed at your table?

Returning to my opening story about having lunch with my Mother, her friend and the lunch hosts who were asking me tricky and antagonistic questions about Christianity... And especially the male host's question about 'what happens to people after they die who have chosen not to follow Jesus?' I answered the best I could... God's love was expressed though the death of Jesus on the cross for the sin of all people. By responding to that through faith, people can begin a relationship with God now, which continues into eternity. Choosing to not accept God's gift of Jesus's death for our sin, will result in a Christless eternity. I don't know how the man responded. I heard that he died suddenly about 1 month later. In a way this was a small attempt to speak truth to power - being hosted for lunch in someone else's house by people I did not know, who were antagonistic.

What attempts are you making to speak truth to power for the benefit of others in need?