

“Friend, move up higher”

A Sabbath dinner party at the house of a Pharisee – you just know this is going to be good – it’s ripe with possibilities. The Pharisees are watching Jesus closely – just waiting for Him to make a mistake.

Enter a man with dropsy – not the kind of person they wanted at their little dinner party. Jesus sees Him and says: “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”

Well, if you are one of the lawyers or Pharisees – you’d have to get out your Talmud and Mishnah and check and see what the rabbis have to say about this – how they interpret this situation.

It’s a Sabbath Day, so the question is whether this is work or not? With the rabbis – it all depends. In this instance, the lawyers and Pharisees determine it’s just better to keep silent. Of course, silence doesn’t do the poor man with dropsy any good. The Law can never heal.

Well, what about a son or an ox that’s fallen into a well – would you get them out? Would you even have to ask if it were lawful to do such a thing on the Sabbath? Would you wait until the next day to pull them out?

Of course not! “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” the Lord says. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” “But Jesus,” the Law says do no work on the Sabbath Day.

So here we are – with a man who needs to be healed. Ignore him and you break the Fifth Commandment. Help him and you break the Third Commandment. They’re caught between a rock and a hard place.

That’s how it is with the Law – always demanding you to do something – or NOT do something. There is always more Law. It is never satisfied.

Only one who is free from the Law is free to show mercy to the neighbor with no strings attached. When one is free from the Law, the question isn’t – “Is lawful?” – rather, the question is, “Does the Lord say that this is merciful, loving, good and gracious?”

Jesus is utterly free. He is the Lord of the Sabbath – and what He does for this man with dropsy – He does for all, by His dying and rising. He has come to bear our infirmities, our sicknesses, all the ravages of sin – in His body. He takes our sin from us to Himself – so that, “By His wounds we are healed.”

Jesus heals the man and sends him on his way – and the lawyers and Pharisees are struck silent. How can this Jesus, this “Sabbath breaker” – at the same time, have the power of God to heal?

It doesn't make any sense to their law-oriented minds. Surely God doesn't act in this way. And if they are being consistent with their teachings – they no doubt believe that this man has done something to deserve this dropsy. That's how the Law works – you get what you deserve. And if we are honest, that is how we think it works, at times.

With all the eyes and ears on Jesus – this is a perfect time for a little parable. When you go to a wedding feast, don't take the honored seats. That way, you won't be embarrassed when someone more distinguished than you bumps you from your seat – and you'll be honored when the host says, “Friend, move up higher.” “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

This parable isn't about where to sit – it's about how it works in the marriage feast of the Lamb – in the Kingdom of God.

He has not given His Law to exalt you. Try to use the Law to exalt yourself and admire how spiritual, religious, and wonderful you are – and you're going to be humbled. Boast in your goodness, and the Law will put you in your place. Justify yourself with all the good you've done, and the Law will reveal the sinner that you are.

Do the comparison job to exalt yourself and put others in their lowly places – and it will backfire on you – because there's always someone better than you (comparatively speaking).

But when the Law humbles you, seats you at the lowest place because you are the chief of sinners – the Bridegroom Himself, Jesus, will exalt you – coming to you and saying, “Friend, move up higher.”

That's what happens as the Lord invites you into His house this very day. Jesus comes to those who have exalted themselves – chosen the best seats – those who believe they are worthy of honor --- and He removes them from their seats – so that they “begin with shame to take the lowest place.” They have no need of Jesus and His Sabbath healing – so they have no place at His feast.

Those who have been humbled by the Law – who bow down as poor, miserable sinners – confessing they have sinned in thought, word and deed – sinned against God and their fellow man – by nature, sinful and unclean --- Christ comes to them and says, “Friend, move up higher.”

All who exalt themselves, who believe they are not sinners – will be humbled. The lowly sinner, however – will be exalted. That is what the Kingdom of God is all about – for Christ is the Savior of sinners. Unless you are seated with the sinners – you cannot be saved.

Where are you seated on this Sabbath? Are you in need of healing – in need of His rest? Jesus invites the lowly, the crippled, the lame and the blind. He invites YOU to His Table. He comes to you and says, “Friend, move up higher.”

This is not an invitation to a choice seat at a dinner party – it is an exaltation from the prison house of sin to freedom – from death to life – from hell to heaven. For Christ Himself is here to forgive sinners – to forgive YOU.

Dearly beloved, in Christ you are healed – and His forgiveness sets you free, gives you REST. In this forgiveness and rest you live – until the resurrection of the just – when you shall sit at Table with Jesus (even as you do today) – and see Him face to face.

So friend, in the name of Jesus, “move up higher.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.