

The Gospel According to
Luke

“Find Your Manners!”

Chapter 14:1-14

Introduction

I have a timely tip for high school and college grads as you are interviewing for work: *Mind your table manners!*

The human resource director of a major corporation, who is responsible for hiring new college grads as the company's future executives, has a unique way of separating applicants. After narrowing down the field through the usual interview process, he takes the remaining candidates out to dinner to observe their behavior.

"Watch a person as he eats," the man says. "That will tell you all you need to know about their character." "Manners," he explains, "are what you do, not for yourself, but out of regard for others."

Jesus had awful table manners that offended a lot of people. If you study the various dinners He attended, you see several social etiquette mistakes He made. Let me give two examples:

1. He ignored the ritual hand washing the religious Jews practiced before each meal (Mark 7).
2. He accepted invitations to eat without regard for a person's social standing, often eating with sinners.

He also ignored the *spiritual* manners of His day, by healing on the Sabbath, at the dinner table. Jesus was a social and spiritual embarrassment – at least as far as the Jews were concerned.

But not as far as His heavenly Father was concerned! Jesus was the poster boy for heaven's rules of social and spiritual manners.

In our story, the Pharisees were shocked that Jesus did not **mind their manners**. Jesus turned the table on them, exhorting them to **find His manners**.

We want to find our spiritual manners. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Find Your Spiritual Manners When You Remember You Are A Servant, and #2 You Find Your Spiritual Manners When You Forget Yourself.

#1 You Find Your Spiritual Manners
When You Remember You Are A Servant
(v1-6)

A common complaint is that kids are disrespectful of people and of property. Part of the problem is that they are no longer being taught proper manners. Manners are out – at least in our popular culture.

I admit I was in line at Carl's Jr. at the wrong time. It was just as the students from Hanford West were arriving for lunch. I thought I was OK; I was third in line. At least, I thought I was third in line! Then I was fourth... then seventh... then ninth... As more-and-more students simply joined their friends in front of me.

But I'm an adult, capable of a kind of foresight that these students do not yet fully possess. As a second cashier came forward and announced, "*I can help the next person in line,*" I stepped forward and said, "*That's me!*" It was a coup-de-tat of bad manners, and I was the champion.

In our story, the Pharisees were watching Jesus, to accuse Him of violating God's Laws. Jesus never once violated anything in God's Law; in fact, He fulfilled everything in it, keeping it perfectly. What Jesus violated, what He ignored completely, were their man-made additions that had become traditions.

Jesus always acted in perfect harmony with heaven. As you see Him at this dinner, He is teaching you the proper spiritual manners you need for life on earth. His first lesson is to remember you are here to serve others, not to be served.

Luke 14:1 Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely.

Luke 14:2 And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy.

Jesus was invited to an important person's house, for a formal meal. It was a coveted invitation – the kind that told others you were a somebody. I don't have to tell you that it didn't impress the Lord!

There was a man with **dropsy**. Today we call it *edema* (i-de'm?). Whether because of a heart problem, or a kidney problem, or something else, he was retaining fluids. His condition was terminal, given the limited medical expertise of the first century, but it was not an emergency. He was not going to die before the Sabbath was ended.

The Pharisees had so twisted Sabbath-keeping that they taught you could not treat anyone on the Sabbath except in life-threatening emergencies, and then only to barely save their life. In their warped-world, the man with **dropsy** should have been ignored until sundown Saturday.

The Pharisees were **watching** Jesus **closely**. They may have purposely planted this guy at dinner, in order to test Jesus. If so, what a sad commentary on their religion! Not only would they not help this guy, they used his suffering to their advantage.

There's a great use of contrast in this whole episode. The Pharisees thought that they were watching Jesus; *but He was watching them!* Not only was Jesus watching them; He knew perfectly well what they were thinking.

Luke 14:3 And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, **"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"**

Luke 14:4 But they kept silent...

They ought to have answered and said, *"No!"*, because that is what they believed. They couldn't, however, for at least two reasons:

1. For one thing, to say *"No!"* would be to admit that their rules lacked mercy. It was one thing to sit around and interpret God's Law during a theological discussion or debate; it was something else

entirely to apply those conclusions when they would have a detrimental affect on one of God's dearly loved children. I recommend that you always consider where your conclusions about God will lead you. If they lead you away from grace, mercy, love, acceptance, and the like... **Your conclusions are wrong!**

2. For another thing, this question was a rebuke to them. Whether they answered "No!" or "Yes!", everyone knew that **they** couldn't heal anyone on any day! Jesus was the One doing all the miraculous healings – not them. It tended to expose the failure of their religious system. It reminds me of folks who put a higher premium on theological education and training, rather than recognizing God's gifting.

They kept silent. You might call this *The Silence of the Wolves!* Jesus was the Lamb of God, among wolves seeking to tear Him up. But they were helpless against Him.

A sub-plot in this story, for your encouragement, is to realize that Christians do not need the power or positions or possessions of this world in order to accomplish God's purposes. You are ambassadors for heaven, invested with all the credentials and power you need to represent Jesus on the earth.

Luke 14:4 But they kept silent. And He took *him* and healed him, and let him go.

No fanfare; nothing fancy. Jesus completely and totally healed him on the spot.

Let him go sounds to us as if the man was being held, almost as a captive. It may be a reference to the former disease; but I think it indicates something else, too. In a sense, this poor man had been held captive by a false religious system that not only ignored his needs; it was willing to use him in a terrible manner to meet their own needs.

God's people are never to be used as a means to an end! Even if the "end" is something positive or good.

Luke 14:5 Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?"

Luke 14:6 And they could not answer Him regarding these things.

Their Sabbath rules allowed them to help their livestock out of trouble. How much more should they have wanted to help a human being, made in the image of God? Again, I emphasize, that if your conclusions about God and the Bible don't promote grace and mercy – **abandon them!**

I cannot over-emphasize our human tendency to know-it-all. God will always be greater than any system of thinking we can devise. We never want to reduce Him to our way of thinking. We want Him to elevate us to His way of thinking.

These guys again remained silent. It is symbolic: Religion, with its rules and rites and regulations and rituals, is mute. It cannot even answer life's simplest questions.

Don't get me wrong: Religion has a lot to say! Most of them are heavy with things you need to know or do in order to make God notice and accept you. But ultimately, religion cannot save you; it is all just a lot of noise. When it comes to what really matters, it is mute.

In the Pharisee book of manners, you did not heal on the Sabbath. Jesus ignored the spiritual manners of His day. One key point is to see that He was acting as a **servant**, rather than one being served.

Reclining on couches around the low table, getting ready to eat, the Pharisees are a picture of folks thinking they should be served. Jesus – as God's servant – got up and did what needed to be done. It reduced Him in their thinking; it lowered Him on their social scale. But, in heaven and on earth among believers, it revealed the heart of God.

Just because you are serving, it doesn't mean you are a servant. Serving as a servant involves the proper attitude:

1. It involves ignoring wrongs, and not demanding rights.
2. It requires that you quit thinking in terms of what is fair and simply walk by faith.

Whenever we serve without the heart of a servant, **we become just like these Pharisees.**

You find your spiritual manners when you remember you are a servant; and,

#2 You Find Your Spiritual Manners
When You Forget Yourself
(v7-14)

I mentioned that Jesus was watching them. He had seen how the invited guests arrived, and were greeted. They scrambled for the best seats – the seats closest to the host, considered the seats of honor. And He noticed that only certain people had been invited; only the upper crust of society.

Jesus knew that they were appalled at His seemingly bad social manners. He gave them a lesson in spiritual manners. He started by addressing the invited guests first, then the host.

Luke 14:7 So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them:

Luke 14:8 “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;

Luke 14:9 and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.

Luke 14:10 But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.

Luke 14:11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Obviously, it would be embarrassing to be asked to move to a seat further from the host. I’m sure it happened from time-to-time. But the parable is meant to illustrate a spiritual truth: If you seek to exalt yourself, you will be humiliated; but if you humble yourself, you will be exalted.

Humility is not simply thinking lowly of yourself; it is not thinking of yourself at all! It is preferring others to yourself; it is putting others first.

When I was a brand-new, baby believer, we used to sing, *“Let’s forget about ourselves, and magnify the Lord, and worship Him.”*

Jesus forgot about Himself. He left heaven, setting aside His glory. He took upon Himself a body of flesh. He was fully God, but fully man, and always subordinated Himself to the will of His Father. He was equal to the Holy Spirit, but was filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit. If anyone was wronged, and could claim rights, it was the Lord. But instead He led a life of servanthood – eventually leading Him to suffer and die shamefully on the Cross at Calvary. He humbled Himself, and He was highly exalted.

So, *“Let’s forget about ourselves, and magnify the Lord, and worship Him.”* If you need help with humility, consider how much you have been forgiven; contemplate your own weakness and inability to live the Christian life without constant dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Jesus also had a word for the spiritual manners of hosts:

Luke 14:12 Then He also said to him who invited Him, *“When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid.*

Luke 14:13 *But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.*

Luke 14:14 *And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*

First, let me say this: Jesus was not teaching that you should never invite friends and family over without also inviting a homeless person! He was getting at your motives. The idea here is to not be the kind of person who is seeking something in return.

Forget yourself, and think about whose needs **you** can meet. Don’t go around searching for something you think you need. Reach out to others. **Your needs are met by meeting the needs of others.**

I often hear Christians commenting that their particular needs are not being met. Whenever you hear yourself saying something along those lines, you ought to start singing, *“Let’s forget about **myself**, and magnify the Lord, and worship Him.”*

Can you imagine Jesus saying to His disciples, “*I don’t feel that you guys are meeting My needs.*” He came to serve, not be served. We should come to serve, not be served. Whether you come home, or to Church, or to work – **you are there to serve, not be served.** The Christian life is not about you. It’s about others.

What about your needs?

1. First of all, many of your needs are what we could call ‘felt needs.’ You feel you need something that is not being provided, either at home or at Church or at work or at school. If you have Jesus, then His grace is sufficient for you. It may be that your felt need is God’s design to teach you contentment with Him.
2. Second of all, if each of us is thinking about others, then all of our real, spiritual needs will be met! Others **will** be ministering to me; maybe not in all the ‘felt’ ways I think are necessary, but certainly in the ways that God has deemed advantageous for me.
3. Not only that: While I am being ministered to, I will have the inner, spiritual joy of pouring-out my life for others. If I want to find my life, I need only to lose it for Jesus by serving others in the power and by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Serving as a servant is what we would call a *Win-Win* situation.

Applying the Word

Jesus accepted an invitation, then acted as a servant in the context of the activity. He invested even the most common episode of His daily life with spiritual purpose and power.

Your daily life, and all the little things that occur in it, can take on spiritual purpose and power. There are spiritual manners to *find*, then *mind*, so that the people you come into contact with see Jesus as you drive with them, eat with them, work with them, study with them, worship with them; as you interact with them in a thousand different ways every day.

One very simple key to serving as a servant is to **watch**. Jesus watched the man with dropsy; He watched the Pharisees. In other words, *He paid attention*.

Every year, our leadership goes on an overnight retreat to pray and seek the Lord. This year we were exhorted by the Lord along these lines. We should see the need, then meet the need. It's what a servant does.

When you go out to dinner, and are being served by a waiter or waitress, you'd rather they pay attention to your needs than have to get their attention. See the need; meet the need.

If you are not a believer; if you're not a Christian; then put yourself at this dinner. You are one of two people in the story: the man with dropsy, or a Pharisee.

The man with dropsy was suffering with a terminal disease. If you are an unbeliever, you are terminal: You were born spiritually dead in your sins, and you are going to physically die and spend eternity separated from God, in Hell. You have a kind of spiritual-dropsy: **You retain your sins and cannot eliminate them!** Only Jesus can heal you, because what you require is forgiveness from God for your sins.

If you're not careful, you could become a Pharisee. You could get religious – find a group, or even a way of thinking, by which you suppose you can improve yourself and earn your way into heaven. But look at the Pharisees in this story:

1. First, They could not help the man with dropsy; they kept silent. All the world's religions, with all their rules and regulations and rituals and requirements, are mute.
2. Second, These guys were all about outward appearances. There was no inward change. They did not know joy, or peace, or love. They were more lost having religion than the man with dropsy.

Ask yourself: *"Who am I most like at this dinner?"* Then act honestly.