

November 2nd, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 22”

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Luke 14:7-11

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

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;**

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.**

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.**

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

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

The point of the last lesson was to prove the truth of the idea that no one has lived a life worthy of going to heaven, which is an idea with which many people cannot agree. People generally consider themselves to be “good” people, and, in their minds, good people, as opposed to bad people, go to heaven when they die. However, we think of ourselves as good people because of our self-centeredness.

I once read the account of a normally law abiding person who became so angry with someone that he killed them. He said that he always thought that good people did not commit such crimes as murder, but after he killed the person with whom he was angry, he realized that good people do commit murder when they are pushed far enough.

I hope that you can see, from the example of this man’s self-serving thinking processes, that our evaluation of ourselves is generally based upon the sliding scale that we use. We consider ourselves good, regardless of that which we do, and we find excuses and justifications for our faults. We do not, however, take the fact into account that God is using a different, a more objective, and a more unforgiving method of evaluation, and 100% sinlessness is the only score that passes God’s test. **James 2:10-11** tells us:

10 **For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.**

11 **For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do**

not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Well, suppose you neither commit adultery nor murder? Well, adultery and murder are just examples used by this passage of Scripture. There are many other sins besides adultery and murder, and the point of this passage of Scripture is that if we commit just one sin, we become ineligible to enter heaven, the place in which the holiness of God dwells, on our own merit. Let me explain further,

Suppose I invite you to breakfast and decide to make an omelet. Now, my recipe for the omelet calls for six eggs, and I look in the egg tray in my refrigerator door, and I only see five eggs. I look further and find another egg in the back of the refrigerator. Now, I have six and I can make the omelet.

So I start to break the eggs, and when I get to the last egg that I found and crack it, a nauseating aroma arises from the egg. The egg is rotten. But, I look at the egg, and say, "Well, it's an omelet, and only one of the eggs is rotten. The other five eggs are good, so maybe no one will notice just one rotten egg." So I mixed the rotten egg in with the others and make the omelet.

When the omelet comes out, it will probably look a little green, and it will probably smell a little funny, and when I serve you the omelet, you probably will not want it, because of the rotten egg in it.

Well, that's the way that our lives are before God. When we take our good deeds, and mix them up with the rotten sins that we have committed and serve our lives up to God, He doesn't find our lives acceptable, just as you would not find the omelet with the rotten egg acceptable. Some people believe in the 'balance' theory, that is, on one hand, I have my good deeds, and on the other hand, I have my rotten sins, and if the good outweighs the bad, then I get into heaven. But **Proverbs 16:25 tells us:**

25 There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

So, based upon our lack of merit, and based upon our rotten sins, we are ineligible to enter heaven. We are all sinners, and none of us can save ourselves.

But many in our current day do not agree with this logic. There is an interesting parallel to the thinking of our current day recorded in the nineteenth chapter of the book of Genesis. In this episode, Lot, the patriarch Abraham's nephew, has moved away from Abraham, because the Lord has allowed the size of both Lot's and Abraham's herds to increase. Their herdsmen are not able to find sufficient grazing land for all of the livestock, and so Lot and Abraham decide to move away from one another because of their increased need for territory.

Lot moved to the well watered plain surrounding Sodom, and was living in Sodom when the two angels came to destroy the place. The Bible says, in **Genesis 19:1-3 (NIV):**

1 The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

2 "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."

3 But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate.

Lot insisted that the angels, who looked like normal men, come under the protection of his roof in order to save them from the homosexual practices of the men of Sodom. The men of Sodom saw the two angels when they entered the city, found out where they were, and decided not to let Lot deter them from their plan, as **Genesis 19:4-5** records:

4 Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house.

5 They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

Lot had an extraordinary plan to protect the angels, as **Genesis 19:6-8** records:

6 Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him

7 and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing.

8 Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”

I’m not sure that I would have sacrificed my daughters for two strangers, but Lot chose to do so. Maybe Lot was just bluffing, hoping that the Sodomites would not call his bluff because they didn’t like girls. But the reply of the men of Sodom to Lot is a parallel to the thinking of our day that leads people to want to create their own standards and think of themselves as good people. In **Genesis 19:9**:

9 “Get out of our way,” they replied. And they said, “This fellow [Lot] came here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them.” They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

The Sodomites called Lot judgmental for attempting to protect the angels. And in our day we are generally accused of being judgmental when we confront sin in others. The Scripture tells us that we ought not judge. **Matthew 7:1** tells us:

1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.

Think about a criminal courtroom for a moment. The players in the courtroom are:

- the defendant, the one accused of the crime
- the defendant’s counsel, the one defending the defendant from the accusation
- the prosecutor, the one trying to prove the truth of the accusation
- the jury, who are the ones charged with listening to the testimony and determining the truth or falsehood of the accusation, and finally,
- the judge, who is the one charged with conducting the trial properly and passing sentence on a defendant that is found guilty of the crime.

Now, listen, once again, to that which Jesus says about judgment, in **Matthew 7:1-2**:

1 “Judge not, that you be not judged.

2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

Jesus tells us that should we decide to become a judge, that is, one that conducts the trial and passes out the sentence, that our own sins will be tried, judged and we will be sentenced

based upon the type of judgment that we use. I'm sure that that is what Jesus means, because he continues, in **Matthew 7:3-4**:

3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?

As I quote virtually every week, **Romans 3:23** still says:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

How can we condemn others for committing sin, and I mean any sin, without condemning ourselves, since we are all sinners? Based upon the passages of Scripture that I have read today, I have come to the conclusion that Jesus is telling us that the only one that can judge righteously is one who is sinless Himself, and the only one that fits that bill is God. Jesus says, when talking to the Pharisees, in **John 8:15-16**:

15 You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one.

16 And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me.

Jesus tells us that even He defers judgment to God, and does not take judgment upon Himself.

Now, it is important to point out that Lot was not actually judging the Sodomites, although they accused him of doing so. According to the definition, a judge is the one that conducts the trial and passes sentence on the guilty. Lot was doing neither. The reason that the Sodomites refer to Lot as the judge is that the Sodomites had already judged themselves, and they found themselves guilty. Lot was simply reminding them of their judgment of themselves, and they were reacting to their condemnation of themselves by being defensive and hostile towards Lot. Let me give you an example that may explain that which I mean.

Suppose, for a moment, that you are entering the first session of a computer class, and, as the instructor comes in, he tells the class that he is going to give them the final exam. "I don't expect you to do well", the instructor says, "but I'm giving the exam to find out how much the class knows about computers." Suppose that out of 50 questions, you get 5 correct, which is a score of 10%. Should this low test score make you think that the teacher is giving you a negative evaluation? Of course not. Would you feel any defensiveness? No. If you knew the material well enough to obtain a good score on the test, you would not need to take the class. You're taking the class because you don't know the material. However, if you get 10% correct on the final exam after taking the class, you would fail the class and that would more reasonably make you upset and defensive about the fact that the teacher is giving you a negative evaluation. The evaluation only counts as negative if you are supposed to know the answers.

Lot termed the planned homosexual rape of the two men by the Sodomites as wickedness. Had this been new information to the Sodomites, it would not have elicited a negative response. The Sodomites would have been analogous to a person taking the final exam at the beginning of the course; they would not feel judged based upon their score, but rather have new information to evaluate. The negative response came because the Lot was not telling the Sodomites anything that they did not already know.

The Sodomites did not ask Lot why he considered homosexual rape to be wicked because they knew homosexual rape to be wicked; they raped strangers because they enjoyed it, wickedness notwithstanding.

Lot was not judging the Sodomites, that is, he was not conducting the trial or passing out the sentence on the sins of the Sodomites, but Lot was simply reminding the Sodomites that their plan to rape the men was wicked.

Were Lot in the courthouse, his actions would have been that of a member of the jury rather than the judge, and although the Scripture says that we ought not judge, there is no scriptural prohibition against being on the jury. God gave us His law so that we can evaluate behavior and determine whether it is good or evil, just as jurors do. Jurors don't pass judgment on the defendants that come before them; jurors objectively determine the defendant's guilt or innocence, based upon the evidence. The reason for having several jurors, sometimes as many as twelve, and requiring a unanimous vote to convict, is to insure objectivity. To convict, the incriminating evidence has to be objectively sufficient to convince all of the jurors of the guilt of the defendant. However, the judgment comes from the judge, within whose discretion it is to declare a mistrial if he sees flaws in either the evidence or the procedure used to present it, or to give the defendant leniency if he thinks that leniency is appropriate, or give the defendant a moderate sentence, or to punish the defendant to the fullest extent of the law. But, in the church, we are jurors, not judges.

So, how should we in the church react to antisocial behavior? Jesus gives us detailed instructions, starting in **Matthew 18:15**:

15 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

God intends that Christians respond to sin by restoring the sinner. We are commanded to go to the person who offends us privately to avoid embarrassing them, and to try to elicit a repentant response. It goes without saying that we ought to approach our brother with humility rather than arrogance or resentment, and with a view toward reconciliation rather than revenge. Our best efforts, however, may not be successful, so **Matthew 18:16** tells us:

16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’

Reconciliation is still the focus of step two, but in addition to using humility and avoiding embarrassment, step two calls for a small application of peer pressure. The ‘one or two more’ should be people for whom the parties have mutual respect. In case the second step does not bring reconciliation, **Matthew 18:17** says:

17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

The significance of heathens and the tax collectors in this passage of Scripture is that they are not part of the church. So, if the sinning person will not hear the church, the church does not judge them or punish them; the church withdraws from them. Withdrawal is neither judgment nor punishment. A judge passes sentence on the defendant to punish him provided that he is found guilty of the crime. Withdrawal is not passing sentence on or punishing the sinning person. The sinning person is still free to do that which he wishes to do.

Lot only tried to get the Sodomites to leave the two angels alone. He did not try to punish them or reform them. Withdrawal protects the people that withdraw from the negative influence of the sinning person, as Lot tried to protect the two angels, but the sinning person is free to continue sinning as long as he wishes to. Thus, withdrawal is neither judgment nor punishment.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, **Matthew 4:17** records:

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The purpose of the withdrawal of the church from the sinning brother is to influence the brother into state of repentance, hoping that the brother will turn from sin because of his recognition of his past wrongdoings, abandon sinful or unworthy purposes and values, and dedicate himself to the amendment of his life. Repentance is a prerequisite for salvation, and thus, for church fellowship. A mere intellectual assent to the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is not enough to save us. Paul delineates that which happened in the lives of the new Christians in Thessalonica when they decided to believe in Jesus Christ, in **1Thessalonians 1:6-10**:

6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

7 so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

8 For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.

9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

The Thessalonians became followers and examples of Christianity, having turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God. Following the Lord rather than worshipping idols is an act of repentance. Becoming followers of the Lord means that we change our behavior to that which He tells us to do. A brother that fails to acknowledge his sin is not repentant, and thus is not following the Lord in that circumstance. You may not accept my testimony that you are sinning, and you may not accept the witness of the one or two more that I bring to you, but when you become a member of the church, you agree to accept the verdict of the jury of the membership. If we cannot agree, we must withdraw from one another, as **Amos 3:3** asks:

3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

So here is that which we have learned from the Scripture that we have studied today. Judging means to preside over the trial of and pass sentence on the one found guilty, and none of us is righteous enough to pass sentence upon another, because of the universality of sin. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, so none is worthy to judge, except God.

Although we cannot judge, we are all on the jury, and it is our responsibility to point out sins to each other, and to be humble enough to receive the rebuke from our brothers and repent of our sins as they are pointed out to us.

Our text for today, **Luke 14:7-11**, tells us:

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

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;

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.

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.

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

Self-exaltation is a problem in Christendom today. We need to avoid becoming like the men of Sodom, who exalted their personal desires above the righteousness of God, although they knew that that which they were doing was wrong. When Jesus came, the scribes and Pharisees were sitting in a seat of leadership that was too high for them, they were servants pretending to be the king, and when the true king, Jesus Christ, arrived with His miracle ministry, they refused to recognize His rightful claim to the highest seat because to do so would have caused them to have to go down and take the lowest place. Jesus did miracles that the scribes and Pharisees rejected, but listen to Simon Peter’s response to Jesus’ miracle, in **Luke 5:4-8**

4 When [Jesus] had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”

5 But Simon answered and said to Him, “Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.”

6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking.

7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”

Quite a different response from the scribes and the Pharisees, wouldn’t you say? Peter immediately took the lowest possible seat, calling himself a sinner, and telling the Lord that he, Peter, was not worthy to be in the Lord’s presence. In the “b” part of **Luke 5:10**

10 And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.”

Peter became the chief among the Apostles because he knew that he belonged in the lowest seat, and he took his low position gladly. Jesus then told Peter to come up higher, and made provisions for Peter to do so. Conversely, the scribes and Pharisees took the highest seat, decided that they were holy enough to judge the Lord Jesus Christ, and condemned Jesus to die. Jesus accepted their judgment, but He did not do so because He deserved death, as Jesus Christ lived a perfect and sinless life. Jesus Christ accepted their punishment and gave Himself, taking the lowest seat on Calvary’s cross, suffering, bleeding and dying as a criminal, in our place, in order to provide a sacrifice for our sins that God would accept. And God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf, as **Philippians 2:5-11** tells us:

5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,

11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In Luke 18:9-14:

9 Also [Jesus] spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 **“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.**

11 **The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.**

12 **I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’**

13 **And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’**

14 **I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

The Pharisee’s self declared righteousness voided out his prayers. The Scripture says that he was praying with himself. His prayers did not rise to the level of God’s attention because he had arrogantly taken the high seat although he was not worthy of it.

God hears the prayers of those that humbly acknowledge their dependence on Him and His righteousness, so rather than exalting his own goodness, the Pharisee should have credited God with any providing any goodness that he had and then repented of his sinfulness, as did the tax collector. And there are many that are going to be shocked on the Day of Judgment when they hear God’s judgment that their omelet is rotten and their good deeds do not outweigh their sins. The truth is that, as **Isaiah 64:6** tells us:

6 But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

God has set the bar too high for us jump over it, but the wonderful, marvelous, magnificent truth of the matter is that God is great in mercy, and has made a way for us to be saved from the consequences of our sin. **Romans 6:23** says:

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You and I can’t merit heaven, but we can receive the free gift of eternal life by our faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We need to have faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the historical truth of His resurrection from the dead to be saved.

Let us give up the arrogance of thinking that we are saved by our own righteousness.

Let us acknowledge our personal sinfulness. Let us accept the premise that our salvation is not because of the works of righteousness that we have done, and then, let us accept the free,

grace gift of God's unmerited favor, given by Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His life on the Cross of Calvary for our salvation. Heaven is a free gift; it is not earned or deserved by man.

Let us resolve to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and to acknowledge and rejoice in the fact that our righteousness does not come from ourselves or our good works, but is a function of the ministry of the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus Christ has sent to us to teach us right from wrong and to stir us up to love and good deeds during our lives. Let us not presume to judge one another, because none of us, on our own, is meritorious enough to judge someone else, but let us rather provide an example and an exposition and an exhibition of the Life of Jesus Christ for one another as did the Thessalonians, and let us be a further extension of the great work of building the Kingdom of God on earth, as Jesus commanded us, in **Matthew 28:18-20**:

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

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