The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: Healing A Man With Dropsy

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Christ’s miracle of healing a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6) is the last healing He performed on the Sabbath. This time, it is not in a synagogue but in the house of one of Judaism’s chief Pharisees. Why was He invited to eat with the lawyers and Pharisees? Luke records that “they watched Him closely.” Their suspicious attitude set the initial mood for the meal and their intentions toward Jesus: They wanted to discover a way to make an accusation against Him. The miracle occurred under the malicious scrutiny of enemies who especially criticized Him for His healing on the Sabbath. They sat and ate with the Son of God, yet they were so blind, they could not see who He was. As a consequence, they did not know Him.

Sabbath dinners, famous for their festive entertainment, were an integral part of Jewish social life. The Pharisees were well known for their own careless approach to the Sabbath, often feasting and drinking excessively, but at the same time, they nitpicked how others kept it. They had no reservations about throwing a party on God’s day, but to heal the sick on the Sabbath was, to them, unforgiveable (Mark 3:1-6). Jesus accepted invitations to feasts (Luke 15:1-2), and was known to enjoy eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. He knew the Jewish leaders would use occasions like these to condemn Him.

1. What did Jesus prove by His merciful act on the Sabbath?

Comment: This is the only case of dropsy found in the Gospels. The term the physician Luke uses to describe the man’s condition is a strictly technical one. Dropsy was considered to be a symptom of an organic disease, usually one of the heart or kidneys. What we call “dropsy” manifests itself in edema or swelling of various parts of the body.

Whether the unnamed man is an invited guest or had come only to be healed, we do not know. Jesus takes the man, “heal[s] him, and let[s] him go” (verse 4). The healing is performed by actual contact. At His touch, the disease flees, and he is allowed to leave the feast before Jesus resumes His conversation with His antagonists. Though the man does not ask to be healed, Christ gives him the blessing of healing.

Jesus’ teaching is clear and pointed. He brings to the Pharisees’ attention that, if their acts of love toward their animals in danger on the Sabbath are acceptable, why would acts of love for human beings on the Sabbath be any less acceptable? He had taught a similar lesson earlier in the synagogue (Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-9). He compares the man with dropsy to an animal stuck in a cistern or pit (Luke 14:5) and the woman with a crooked spine to a bound animal (Luke 13:10-16). By healing the man with dropsy, Jesus proves that it is merciful to heal on the Sabbath day, and by His illustration of the ox, He exposes their lack of love and consistency.

2. What happens when Christ is rejected?

Comment: It is interesting to notice that, in reality, Christ is always in control. Here Jesus takes the initiative to direct the argument to provide Him the opportunity to teach
the truth and glorify God. He asks the question first, not the Pharisees. As had happened before, His questions are so clearly and cleverly stated that His adversaries find themselves unable to answer. They cannot answer Him truthfully, or even at all, for fear that they will condemn themselves for what they are—unloving, self-seeking hypocrites (Luke 14:6). Being publicly silenced and humiliated only irritates them more; and so, they anxiously wait for another opportunity (Matthew 12:14).

The wisdom from above that Jesus exhibits is obvious (James 3:17), and His approach, straightforward. He opens the subject for discussion Himself, anticipates any and all objections from His antagonists, and with a simple direct question, appeals to their conscience, love, and professed beliefs (Luke 14:3). Overmatched, “they [can] not answer Him regarding these things” (verse 6).

Whenever people reject Christ, as these Pharisees and lawyers do, they have trouble knowing and recognizing the obvious in important areas of life, especially the spiritual area. Today, many people like this demonstrate an inability to answer simple but important questions like, for instance, “Where do we find true fulfillment in life?” This shows the great need in our society for people to accept Jesus Christ, not more legislation or other government programs.

3. How are we to apply this teaching in our lives today?

Comment: This is the last of seven miracles that Christ performs on Sabbath days. We see here what happens to the unconverted mind because of unbelief—a lack of love is the inevitable product of rejecting God. By these Sabbath healings, He emphasizes the humane element in the original institution of the Sabbath as a day of rest, recovery, and joy, rescuing it from Pharisaic distortion. In addition, by observing the seventh day as the day of public worship, He gives it sanction as God’s weekly holy day for the church.

By these deeds of healing, He honors it specifically as a day of showing mercy. As Lord of the Sabbath, He consecrates it by His Spirit for the worship of God, as well as for the service of man (Mark 2:27-28). His constant compassion for human suffering is a mirror of His compassionate heart for sinners. He lived to relieve the afflicted and oppressed, and He died to emancipate men and women from a worse disease than that of any physical nature. By His shed blood, He can take the sinner by the hand, heal him, and “let him go” to walk in newness of life.