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Jesus and the Pharisees: True Table Fellowship and Real Rest (Luke 5:27 – 6:11)

Introduction – Tables have something very magical about them; they create little universes of people. When you sit at a table with someone, there is an automatic sense of shared lives, of some level of intimacy, kinship, unity, even holiness. The Pharisees rejected Jesus' message (5:21-24), and now they object to His lifestyle - His table-fellowship and His Sabbath-keeping in particular. They taught a life of redemption from the world that required a certain kind of lifestyle. Jesus is offering a different kind of redemption, a different kind of fellowship, a different kind of rest – a different kind of lifestyle. His redemption is the Jubilee-redemption (remember 4:18-19).

The Questions of the Pharisees – This passage is framed around the first and last reaction of the Pharisees (5:26 and 6:11) in this Galilean section of Jesus' ministry. The outline could follow their questions (from 5:21, to 5:30, 5:33, 6:2, and implied in 6:7). As Jesus' popularity rises, the opposition from the religious elite grows stronger. But Jesus will not back down; He pushes ahead, answering them in kind. He has come to set men free.

Eating With Sinners (vv27-31) – Levi was a tax-collector, more like a customs-agent nowadays, and like we hear about in some countries today, it was a notorious living of extortion and bribery. For the Jew it was worse, for you were in fact working for the foreign tyrant as well. Like the untouchable leper, Jesus simply reaches in to this man's universe, summoning Levi to follow Him. In response, Levi throws a party, invites all his friends, and Jesus sits down and celebrates with them. Grumbling, the Pharisees and scribes (imagine clipboards in hand) question Jesus' association with sinners. Eating a meal is a holy thing; from their viewpoint, Jesus is sitting in defilement. Without disagreeing with their comments on his fellow-partiers, Jesus makes clear this is where He is supposed to be (and what He is supposed to be doing). He is the Physician come to heal the sick, and they are throwing a party because repentance is a glad-hearted, joyful, celebration-demanding thing.

Fasting or Feasting? (vv33-39) – The Pharisees prided themselves on fasting twice a week, something never mentioned in the Law. Jesus wasn't against fasting (He instructs His disciples in another passage on how to fast) but He hated the Pharisees purpose in fasting of boundary setting and claims of self-righteousness (Luke 18:11-12). More importantly, Jesus reminds them of how inappropriate it is for people to fast at a wedding party – because they were at one – or something even greater than that.

- And even now, Jesus not only eats with sinners, He feasts with them, regularly, at His Table. Not only does He offer us His table-fellowship, but we are given the very body and blood of our Lord in this fellowship. While there are appropriate times for fasting, we live in the age of the gospel, an age that should be characterized with feasting, celebration and joy.

Parables and a Warning – The problem with the Pharisees (and their kind of attitude) is that they do not understand the times. They are stuck in old ways, while God is doing something new, offering new wine.

Plucking on the Sabbath (vv6:1-5) – Nothing the disciples were doing was unlawful according to the Law's regulation of the Sabbath, but only according to the tradition of the Rabbis. Even more offensive is Jesus' response to them – for He sets Himself up like David and even declares, "*the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.*" We should stop and notice that Jesus doesn't always play nice-guy. He sticks their question back in their throats with an even greater sense of offending them in their hard-heartedness.

Life in the Sabbath (vv6-10) – This scenario is set up for us at a time when Jesus is the teacher in the synagogue. Jesus is interested in teaching what real Sabbath keeping is made of, and again treads upon the traditions of the upstanding religious ones of His day. In today's parlance, after healing this man in a glorious act of mercy and continued proof of His divinity, Jesus says, "*get a life*" to the Pharisees. Again, we should notice that Jesus was not declaring a cessation of Sabbath-keeping, but a cessation of Sabbath-squeezing. As He does so, Jesus is self-consciously offending the people of His day – and this is why the response in v11 is what it is.

Their Response/Jesus' Response/Our Response (v11) - Israel begins to plot her own destruction, disqualifying herself in the rejection of Jesus the true Physician, the true Bridegroom, the true Son of David, and the true High Priest. And this response is what set up the bringing in of the Gentiles (Rom 11:11b).

Jesus is not really as uptight as we sometimes make Him out to be. Really, it is the Pharisee-types that are uptight. We need to

learn this lesson, because reformed-types are known for being really uptight.

We really need to learn to dance and drink, to feast and celebrate, to labor and love, with all the beauty and grace and charm of our Redeemer, who knows how to bring in the lowest and weakest of society, and knows how to stick it in the eye to the hard-hearted.

True Table Fellowship and Real Rest – Table fellowship is holy and intimate and transforming. It is a wonderful practice for our homes, our parishes, our church, and it is a wonderful preparation for partaking of Christ at the Lord’s Table – and all of this is preparation and practice for the final and ultimate table and rest – the Great Wedding Feast at the Final Resurrection. Does your life look like you are practicing for that day? And when we do and say these things, there will be some, because Jesus promised there would, who will be filled with rage and will discuss with one another what they might do to us. At that point, Jesus didn’t back down. Come, follow Jesus. *drh – November 27, 2005*