

I've included a short synopsis of the message. Afterwards, there are also some discussion questions for you to consider.

Text: Luke 14:7-14

Title: How to be religious without becoming a Pharisee

Sermon Brief

1. I want to talk with you about how to be religious.
2. This is kind of basic.
3. But we are going to do a lot of religious activity in the years ahead. After all, we are a church. And yet there's a lot of religious activity that's empty. Worse, there's a lot of religious activity that is dangerous.
4. Take the Pharisees. There's a lot about them that we would appreciate. They studied the Bible. They prayed. They fasted. They gave to church. They were zealous. And yet, they ended up crucifying Jesus.
5. How can we be religious without becoming Pharisees?
6. In this passage, we find two basic steps.
7. **First, we must pursue humility.** If we are going to do church right, we have to wake up each morning and proactively, deliberately humble ourselves, which I know sounds kind of obvious except for the fact that a whole lot of times, it isn't. There are a whole lot of times where we are motivated instead by a desire to exalt ourselves, and sometimes we are even using religious activity to do it. This spiritual pride and spiritual pride is dangerous! Jesus notices that the Pharisees were motivated by a desire to be honored by others, and so he tells a parable to reveal to them why that kind of lifestyle is so foolish. We might look at people trying to find the most important seats for themselves, and think, ok, that's not good, but what's the problem really, the problem is that Jesus knows, these seemingly small ways of living are tied, to a deep down way of thinking, that is opposite, of the how the gospel works. The absolute only people who God's going to honor at the final judgment are the people who have humbled themselves, who know they are unworthy sinners, and who've put their total trust in the mercy of Jesus Christ, on the basis of his death on the cross. This is a

promise. If you stop talking and acting like you deserve something from God, but recognize you do not deserve anything good at all apart from Christ, and come like a beggar to Him, trusting in His mercy, through Christ, alone, God will raise you up, to eternal life. And because that's how the gospel works, if we're already Christians, we look back, and, if that's how we entered the kingdom, by humbling ourselves before God, if we don't want to become Pharisees, that's how we need to LIVE, now that we are in.

8. **Second, we need to live for eternity.** There's no Christianity without the resurrection of the dead, and yet there is a whole lot of religious activity. You can be religious and, actually very religious without ever once thinking about eternity because sometimes religious activity has certain benefits right now. As Jesus looked at the Pharisees he noticed that they were making decisions on the basis of how those decisions could benefit them right then. In other words, as Jesus is looking at the Pharisees he is noticing that they were motivated by the same thing that was motivating most unbelievers. Now! Now! Now! Which for unbelievers, makes sense, because they are unbelievers. They DON'T believe in the resurrection, but, for someone who says they are a believer, is actually the path towards spiritual death. If you look at your life and you are making most of your decisions based on how you can benefit yourself now, you are on the path toward becoming a Pharisee. We all say we want to have this vibrant Christian life, but it's important you understand that a deep relationship with Christ requires faith in Christ. You can't have a deep relationship with Christ without trusting in the promises of Christ. Unfortunately, very often the reality is that while we say we want to have this deep relationship with Christ, we only want to get it by doing religious activity, WITHOUT ACTUALLY BEING WILLING TO TRUST CHRIST. We want to be able to come to church and do our thing and have this close, growing relationship with God, and then go out, and live the way everyone else is living, which is for ourselves, and, what we can get right now and it doesn't work like that. If we want to do religion right, we are going to have to deliberately make choices that are first and foremost based on faith in what God's said about eternal life instead. That needs to be on the top of our day to day decision making process. How will this decision IMPACT me a billion years from now?

9. It's great to get together with other people and read the Scriptures and pray and worship and sing. It's a privilege. But it's also dangerous because, it's possible to do all of that without FAITH in CHRIST and without FAITH in CHRIST all this stuff we are doing, is empty, and ultimately SOUL-DESTROYING. And yet sometimes

it is hard to see that we are not exercising our FAITH because we are so busy,
so active which is why I think it is so important we evaluate our lives and ask, is the pattern of my life one of self-exaltation, of getting people to notice me, to think I am important, and is the pattern of my life, one of living for now, because those are two of the clearest signs of unbelief in the gospels.

10. If we are going to be a God-glorifying church, we are going to be doing a lot of religious activity in the years ahead. But, as we do, we must make sure that our religious activity is really motivated by faith. What are some steps we can take on a daily basis to exercise our faith and make sure we are moving in the right direction? Pursue humility and make every day decisions that are based on eternity.

Discussion Questions:

1. We need to engage in religious activity like praying and reading our Bibles and public worship, obviously. It's a privilege. But it also can be dangerous. What are some warnings people need to hear about religious activity? (If you need help look at James 1:22-25; Isaiah 1:12-15; Matthew 23)
2. In Luke 11-14, Jesus has been warning the disciples about the Pharisees. What specific exhortation does he give the disciples in Luke 12:2? So clearly there is a big problem with the Pharisees. But what are some things the Pharisees actually had going for them? In other words, if we looked at the Pharisees apart from what Jesus has told us, what might impress us about them? What can we learn from that?
3. We don't want to be Pharisees! We don't want to be people who are religious and whose religious activity actually does the opposite of what it is supposed to. So let's listen to Jesus as he speaks to Pharisees in verses 7-14 of Luke 14 in order to discover how we can be religious without becoming Pharisees. What are the two steps we said on Sunday that these verses reveal we must take?
4. Ok now, let's dive a little more deeply into this text. Read verse 7. Who does Jesus tell this parable to? What were these Pharisees concerned about as they were coming to this meal with Jesus? What do the following verses say about the

motivation behind the Pharisees' religious activity: Matthew 6:1; Matthew 23:5,6; John 5:44? How might this kind of thing show up in our lives?

5. Why is using religious activity to get others to honor you such a big deal? In what way is it anti-gospel?
6. Can you explain the point of the story Jesus is telling in verses 8-10? Is this just about good manners or prudent advice for when you go to a wedding? How is remembering this a parable helpful? In parables Jesus is using a situation from everyday life that people were familiar with to teach people a truth about the gospel that they weren't. What truth about the gospel is this parable teaching?
7. What very important principle is being taught in verse 11. What is the warning? What is the promise? What is the significance for us? How should knowing this is how God works change the way we act in our everyday lives?
8. In what way is humility connected to faith?
9. What are some ways a lack of humility might show up in the way you are living your life and even in the way you are pursuing religious activity?
10. Can a person perform religious activity without believing in eternity? Why would they do that? And what happens when they do?
11. What strange counsel does Jesus give about who to invite to dinner in Luke 14:12? Feel that. How does this run counter cultural? What reason does he give for not inviting certain people? Why does he say to invite others?
12. Is Jesus saying it's wrong to have dinner with your friends? If not, then what is he saying?
13. What happens to you if you are making your decisions based primarily on how you can be benefited now? What does the following statement mean: "You can't expect to have a deep relationship with Christ without trusting in the promises of Christ." What are some evidences that might show up in the life of a Christian in Orange County that he actually believes in the resurrection of the dead?
14. We often make decision on the basis of how something will impact us in a few

years. What difference would it make to make decisions on the basis of how something will impact you in a billion years? (Hint: Look at some of the things Jesus specifically said.)

15. How would your life look different if you took what Jesus was saying in verses 12-14 seriously?
16. As we look ahead to the next few years, we are going to be engaged in a lot of religious activity. How should what is taught in this passage change us so that religious activity pleases God and doesn't harm us?

