

Love Within Conflict Luke 14:1-6

A question as we begin our study of these precious words of scripture here in Luke chapter 14 . . . are you one of those people who tries to avoid conflict, to as often as possible, shy away from contentious encounters.

As we follow along each week with the Lord Jesus as He ministered to the people He encountered, we can clearly see that He was not of that personality, that He very intentionally did not avoid exchanges with the people whom He knew would oppose Him and bring Him difficulties, especially the religious leaders, the Scribes and the Pharisees. But He instead purposefully placed Himself within their presence where all sorts of contentious responses would take place.

In today's manner of speaking, we would call that "conflict resolution". And that was exactly what Jesus was doing. But His manner of resolution was not of the sort that we use today. We use "compromise" and "manipulation" and other secular type strategies. Jesus used "truth", "simple truth". And so should we!

Here as we examine this passage of scripture, we need always to remind ourselves of the deeply abiding reason why Jesus did all of the things He did, why He intentionally placed Himself within the center of what He knew would present conflict to Him. It was because He dearly loved those people. These scriptures clearly tell us that He was sent first to minister to and to redeem His own people. And though His people "received Him not", He still remained true to His mission with a love that is beyond our human comprehension.

And here, Jesus shows to us that He didn't just love the ones who were convenient to Him, His disciples and others who would love Him back. No, He loved all of those people, even the most unlovable and contentious ones, especially those religious leaders, the Scribes and the Pharisees, those men who were constantly intent on discrediting and dishonoring Him. And He loved each of them no matter what their response was to Him and to His teaching.

And please do note carefully that the Lord Jesus responded in a very wise manner to those contentious men when they attacked His character. He knew well the wisdom given by the writer of the Proverbs that warns us,

⁴ Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.
(Proverbs 24:6)

The wisdom within those words is especially appropriate considering the context that is given here within this passage that we'll study today. Here we are told that the Lord Jesus was saying His words "in answer to the thoughts" that were taking place within the minds of some of these Scribes and Pharisees.

Let's consider His words given to us here in Luke chapter 14, and let's learn more about our Lord, and about how He would have us to deal with the conflicts that confront us each day. Here, beginning in verse 1.

1 It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on *the* Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely.

2 And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy.

3 And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"

4 But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away.

5 And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"

6 And they could make no reply to this. (Luke 14:1-6)

A treasure that I often miss as I study through these gospels is the very special manner and persistence with which Jesus reached out to minister to the Scribes and to the Pharisees. Yes, again, most often His encounters with them were of a contentious nature. And they in most every way showed themselves to be His enemies. But still Jesus dearly loved those men and He sought to minister to them.

How do we know that Jesus loved them? May I say again the words that I have said so often. We know that Jesus loved them because it was for them, and for all of us other wretched sinners, that Jesus was sent into this world to give His life a ransom and to redeem us from our sins, even those of us who would be His enemies.

All though these scriptures, we're told of His deep abiding love for each of us, even those who so often oppose Him. Scriptures like those given in 1 John 4 where we are told,

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)

Note those words carefully. Love is the very nature of God. And then in verse 9 of that same passage,

⁹ In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

Again folks, I can't say this enough. It is the very nature of God to love, to be giving and forgiving and merciful towards all of us, even those who show themselves to be enemies toward Him.

And no, Jesus didn't love their ways, their misguided teaching and their prideful behavior, but He did love them personally. And He wanted each of them to come to a saving knowledge of Him, just as He did all the other people that He encountered.

And yes, many of His encounters with those men did result in some form of rebuke from Him. But we need always to remember that rebukes are intended to reclaim, not to condemn. Condemnation will come at another time, when Jesus will return and sit on His judgment seat as Judge of all the earth. But in the meantime, His purpose was to love those men and to persistently minister to them.

Thankfully, we are able to see that at least some of those religious leaders did eventually turn to Him and receive Him as Savior and Lord. Two that quickly come to mind are Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, when they openly showed their surrender by being the ones to take His body from the cross and to bury Him in the tomb.

Note here also in this passage that Jesus is no respecter of persons, in that He ate and He drank with anyone and everyone, from the lowest of tax collectors and women of questionable character, to the elite of the Scribes and the Pharisees.

And particularly with these Pharisees, He knew that most often their invitations were simply part of their schemes to find ways to trick Him and to search for blasphemous ways in Him so that they could publicly condemn Him.

The words in verse 1 give indication of that sort of motive. Listen!

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 14:1)

The implication of these words is that those religious leaders were “watching” Jesus as a predator watches its prey, looking for an opportunity to attack.

And Jesus was fully aware of their nature and of their schemes and of their desire to find ways to accuse Him of wrongdoing. But He also knew that He needed to take no concern of that, first because He knew that He would never say nor do anything wrong.

But then also, as we read in the previous few verses, Jesus knew that the plan of God for His life on the earth was absolute and unalterable, that He would, without interruption, continue on to Jerusalem and that it would only be there in Jerusalem that He would be betrayed and sent to His death.

For those reasons and many more, Jesus had no fears or anxieties as He dined with the Scribes and Pharisees.

And here again also in these words, as we mentioned a moment ago, we're reminded that Jesus was very aware of the inmost thoughts of everyone He encountered. We can clearly see His awareness of their thoughts as He began to interact with these Scribes and Pharisees, especially as it had to do with a man among them who suffered from a disease described as “Dropsy”, a kind of disease that manifests itself in an excessive, even grotesque swelling of a person's body.

And please don't let it escape your notice that this man with Dropsy was one of their own group, making what Jesus would do next an especially difficult conundrum for those men to deal with. Yes, they would want their good friend and associate to be freed from his disease, but they also had to deal with their misguided misunderstanding of the law. And not knowing how to respond, they just stayed silent.

Also, because we know that our Lord is “Sovereign” over all of the circumstances of life and that He is “Providential” in the matters that take place, may we assume that it was no accident that this man with Dropsy was in attendance that day, that it was providentially orchestrated by our sovereign Lord.

And so, as the Lord Jesus saw the man in his suffering, He immediately had compassion and healed him.

And please note also that just as with the woman in the synagogue a few days earlier, this man did not first approach Jesus and ask Him to heal his disease. It was Jesus who made the first move, without being asked.

Let me pause here for a moment and ask you and me, “How often does that sort of thing take place with us in our suffering, where Jesus reaches out to help us, even before we ask?”

Let me say without reservation that it probably takes place really, really often. Without our even asking, our loving Lord is constantly watching over us, giving relief to us, healing our diseases and meeting our needs.

Here with this man with dropsy, as with the woman in the synagogue who was bent over and crippled, while showing compassion to them in their suffering, Jesus was also seizing the opportunity as a teachable moment for those Pharisees.

Again, Jesus loved those men, those church leaders. And He knew that while many of them were severely corrupt, others of them were truly devout and truly interested in knowing the real truth about the laws of God.

Unfortunately, through many generations of misinterpretation and misguided teaching, laws such as those regarding the Sabbath had been reduced to a level of nothing more than a well-organized set of man-made traditions and customs, most often not even remotely close to God's intended meaning of them. And Jesus wanted to set those laws and those men back onto a right course of understanding and teaching.

Here, they had so misconstrued the law in such a way as to believe that it was unlawful to heal a person of a life-threatening illness if that healing were to take place on the Sabbath.

Please understand folks! This was no ordinary kind of sin. Yes, ordinary sin, such as lying, stealing and committing adultery were really wrong before God and were never permissible. But this kind of sin, the sin that was being demonstrated by these religious leaders was of an especially egregious nature.

Here were men entrusted with the very truths and oracles of God, and they were perverting those truths. And not only that, they were then teaching that perversion to others, both in their leadership and in their congregations.

In the Book of James, chapter 3, we are warned that,

¹ Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (James 3:1)

That was Jesus' greater concern for these Scribes and Pharisees. He knew that they would stand under a greater form of judgment for their sins.

And no, I really don't know how God judges one sin as being worse than another, and how the penalties might be different. But as He indicates in this warning about teaching, God does hold some sins as being "more sinful", sins that will deserve greater punishment than others.

And let me say again that even though these confused and misguided Scribes and Pharisees were constantly in opposition to Jesus, He still wanted them to know the real truth about His law and to be able to teach that truth to others. That is why, here again, we see Him giving these men warnings and rebukes, to give them opportunity to repent and to change and to become the church leaders they needed to be.

Folks, Jesus will strive with us for a long, long time, as we see Him doing with these Scribes and Pharisees. But the warning is ever before us that He will not strive with us forever.

But here Jesus continued one more time. And notice that He used the simplest of explanations. Here in verse 5,

5 . . . He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"
(Luke 14:5)

With these words, Jesus is still answering the unspoken thoughts and questions that these men had in their minds about who He was and about the obvious authority that resounded within His behavior and within His teachings.

Because some of these men, the Scribes, were lawyers, they knew well that Jesus was actually speaking to them in "legal terminology", much as they would do when they themselves would render a legal definition of the law to an enquirer.

And please remember that the Lord Jesus knew every thought and every motive taking place within the minds of each of those men. They did not need to speak out loud for Jesus to know their questions. He knew their thoughts even before the words came to their tongues.

And please, always know also that that is so for you and for me all of the time. Just because we don't say something out loud, don't think that our Lord does not know our thoughts or our motives. He knows! And He knows them very well!

And please know, that God does not condemn us for our questions, even when we are just thinking those questions. But with that being true, we really do need always to be careful to not question God in an accusatory way, as these Scribes and Pharisees seem often to do.

Thankfully, for those of us who have received the Lord Jesus as our Savior, God truly is our Father, our loving Father, a Father who wants us to think through the matters that take place in our daily lives so that we can learn from our mistakes and from our sinful responses. And as our Father, when necessary, He is faithful to discipline us to steer us back to the right path.

And while some, or most, of these Scribes and Pharisees present that day were probably not willing to believe in the Lord Jesus, He was still faithful to do His part and to instruct them wisely.

Folks, our loving Father is good all of the time. And everything that He does is always good.

With all of this being said . . . A question for each of us . . . what are we to do with the conflicts of our day? Do we just try our best to avoid those conflicts?

May I strongly encourage us to as often as possible take time to consider if an upcoming encounter will accomplish the purposes of God. And while we don't have the ability that Jesus had to know the thoughts and the motives of those we are in conflict with, still, most often we do know the people involved, our family member, our fellow church member, our coworker, our neighbor. And we can know at least some of the elements that are causing the conflict. And from that, we can reasonably know if our engagement in the conflict will be pleasing to the Lord.

And if we do determine that the encounter will have a needful and God-ordained purpose then yes, we probably should do exactly as our Lord Jesus did and we should step right on forward into the circumstance?

And again, those potential encounters can take place in all the many circumstances of your day. With a fellow church member, or perhaps within your workplace. But probably, if you are like most of us, the most difficult of your conflicts will take place within the privacy of your own home and family.

And one of the best parts about those encounters is that you already know those dear ones. They are not your enemy that you need to conquer. You love them and you want the best for them.

But what is your usual response within those conflicts? Have you found yourself spending most all of your energies trying to defend your point of view on a matter? Is your goal in those conflicts to simply demand that the other person come around to your way of thinking. Do you waste away the love that you have with senseless disputing?

These scriptures are filled with better ways of settling any disagreement that we might have. I love the heart of our Lord that's described for us in the Book of Exodus chapter 34, where we read,

“The Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. (Exodus 34:6-7)

And from those words, God strongly admonishes you and me in James chapter 1 saying,

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20)

And then also in Proverbs chapter 15, we're told that "a soft answer can turn away wrath".

Folks, please understand that in giving us these truths, our Lord is telling us that for whatever conflict we might encounter, whether it be in our church, in our workplace, or in our home and family, if we go into that conflict with a heart that is yielded to the Lord Jesus, then we, you and I really can have better responses.

But how do we change from our usual ungodly responses into the image and behavior that the Lord Jesus has? May I suggest that we begin first by asking our Lord to put within us the same kind of Love that He has for us.

Then next we need to begin spending more and more time within these scriptures, learning about the loving ways of our Lord.

And along with spending more time in God's word, we need to begin spending more and more time in prayer, earnest prayer, diligent prayer, allowing time within our prayer for the Holy Spirit to minister to our spirit, allowing time for the Holy Spirit to minister His fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control to our spirit.

And then, as often as we are able, as we encounter those people and those circumstances that we know might bring contention and conflict to us, quietly ask the Holy Spirit to give us the same love that was in the heart of the Lord Jesus so that we can have the same answers and the same behavior that He had as he ministered to those contentious people.

And folks, no, we still might not often get it right, but perhaps, on more and more occasions we will. And what a blessing that will be both for us and for those other people involved, and especially to our Lord.

And it all begins simply by our opening our hearts to our Lord and to His Holy Spirit. And then by opening this book, the bible and humbly asking God to speak to us through His words and through His Spirit. And He will. He will!

Listen, and I'll close with these precious words given in Psalm 119,

¹⁰³How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

¹⁰⁴Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. ¹⁰⁵Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. (Psalm 119:103-105)

Let's pray.