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Luke 14 – What’s in it for me?

One of my favorite moments on any mission trip to Mexico is being invited into the homes of the local people. I have many fond memories of sitting in the house of families in Mexico eating homemade food and enjoying their company and hospitality. The feeling of welcome is a lasting feeling. This is the type of heart that God has called us to.

Let’s look at the opposite. Picture yourself throwing a dinner party. I want you to think about two people. The first should be someone who has been a hero to you. The second should be the most outcast person that you know.

Where would you seat each of these people?

Would the hero sit close to you or far away?

Would the outcast sit at the far end of the table?

When you offer the food, to whom would you start with between those two people?

Between the two who would be best fitted for the table prayer or a toast?

Our natural inclination is to offer the best to the one we know. However if you were to invite Jesus to that same dinner table you would find his reaction to be quite different.

Today we are going to look at the parable of the great banquet which is found in Luke 14. We are going to see the account of powerful men choosing to eat with themselves instead of excelling in service to which they should have been doing.

Today we are going to look in the mirror and we are not going to like what we see. We (and I mean you and I) are going to see how selfish we are. Then we are going to see how wide and selfless the love of God is.

Let’s stop and pray.

Today we are going to study chapter 14 of Luke. We are going to look at the first 24 verses. I know that's a big chunk of the chapter. Inside this passage we are going to divide the passage up into three sections.

1. 1. We are going to see Jesus power to heal amidst the religious leaders
2. 2. We are going to see His teachings
3. 3. Then we are going to see how it all ties in with the parable of the great banquet.

Here is the first section – Jesus healing amidst the leaders

Let's read Luke 14:1-11

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.

Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" And they had nothing to say.

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

First in verse 7 Jesus addresses the guests of the house for their choosing of seats at the table. They took seats of honor assuming they were the ones due the honor. This is contrary to the picture that Jesus paints. He describes a life of humility because God exalts the humble. Jesus does not say don't invite your friends and family but he does say don't forget these who are looked at as lesser. In verse 12 Jesus shifts gears and addresses specifically the host. It is this address we will dive into shortly.

Jesus teaches as He heals about rescuing the needy on the Sabbath as he heals the man with Dropsy. Dropsy was a swelling of parts of the body due to a collection of fluids. The healing created some angry dinner guests and Jesus knew that so He addresses them on the matter and gives them a case study but they say nothing to His challenges to their ways as we see in verses 4 and 6. Now in the heart of what we are going to study today we see the selflessness of Jesus as the ideal just as we do in the beginning of this chapter.

I find it interesting for us to see that these men had nothing to say as Jesus acted so selflessly. We too often have nothing to say. We too often ignore the problem that we could address and just sit back with nothing to say. Perhaps that is the Pharisee in us.

These are the words of Jesus in the house of a Pharisee full of powerful leaders.

Let's try to figure out some of the things that are going on behind the scene in all of this.

1. First of all the leaders Jesus is with should have known what Jesus was talking about.

It was not a new idea. They had studied it for sometime and were to live this way of life.

Proverbs 25:6-7 says

⁶ Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence,
and do not claim a place among great men;

⁷ it is better for him to say to you, "Come up here,"
than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman."

This idea is repeated in many ancient Jewish texts

2. Sometimes lower class people would be invited to social events by the host so that others could see them honor the host.

It was a way for the host to buy respect. Jesus knows this yet tells these men that they should have the poor, lame, and blind there but not because of that cultural norm.

3. Jesus challenges the class system that seems to have been valued by these men.

Look at the way Jesus talks to them...When referring to inviting people they already they knew he uses the word "your" showing some sort of kinship and relationship but when he speaks to them about inviting others who can offer "nothing" in return he speaks to them by suggesting that their thoughts of these men are "the" poor, lame, and crippled

So Jesus comes as a guest, and reminds these men of the writings that are to guide their lives while He tries to shake up their culture. The whole event of Jesus at the Pharisee's house comes in the first 24 verses of the chapter. While verses 8-11 are the words of Jesus to the guests, verses 12-14 are given to the host how he should act. As Jesus tells the host these words a third person listens in and responds.

Let's look at verses 12-14.

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

In verses 12-14 we see the type of calling Jesus wants his followers to have

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1. A deep love for people other than their own. Family and friends are good but he wants those at the table to see the poor, the blind, the crippled.

Picture a corporate board room. Picture business people debating over marketing strategies. Picture them sitting at a nice long and wide wood table with comfortable chairs. Please picture servers waiting on them with pitchers of nice cold beverages.

As they sit there and laugh they talk about how they can get the most money out of their customers regardless if the customer can truly afford or need what they sell. That's the type of image I have in my head of these men. They have neglected to see the needs around them and have only seen their own wants. God desires for us to love people where they are...not for whom they are.

Here is a living example of that. ---- Former televangelist Jim Bakker speaks of events that occurred immediately after his release from prison:

"When I was transferred to my last prison, Franklin Graham said he wanted to help me out when I got out-with a job, a house to live in, and a car. It was my fifth Christmas in prison.

I thought it over and said, "Franklin, you can't do this. It will hurt you. The Grahams don't need my baggage."

He looked at me and he said, "Jim, you were my friend in the past and you are my friend now. If anyone doesn't like it, I'm looking for a fight."

So when I got out of prison the Grahams sponsored me and paid for a house for me to live in and gave me a car to drive. The first Sunday out, Ruth Graham called the halfway house I was living in at the Salvation Army and asked permission for me to go to the Montreat Presbyterian Church with her that Sunday morning.

When I got there, the pastor welcomed me and sat me with the Graham family. There were like two whole rows of them-I think every Graham aunt and uncle and cousin was there.

The organ began playing and the place was full except for a seat next to me. Then the doors opened and in walked Ruth Graham. She walked down that aisle and sat next to inmate 07407-058. I had only been out of prison 48 hours, but she told the world that morning that Jim Bakker was her friend.

That's the type of Love Jesus teaches us to have...a love not concerned about its own reputation.

2. Here is another thing Jesus teaches these men. Jesus wants them to see throwing a banquet as not an opportunity to smooze and connect with people so that when those people throw a party that they will invite you back

One of the first images that popped into my head was a scene from the movie "Field of Dreams." Towards the end of the movie James Earl Jones and Kevin Costner are standing on the baseball field built in the middle of a corn field in Iowa. And as they stand there they are visited by one player from long ago who invites James Earl Jones's character into the corn field to see the world that they came from. Jones obliges and Costner stands there saying, "What do I get out of this?"

That sounds to be like the problem of our culture. We have schools teaching that you should succeed at all costs. Everyone is looking for advancement while we neglect to look back at those who we run over and leave in our wake. This type of selfishness even pervades church life. We can look around us and say "what's in this for me?"

3. Jesus wants them to see others better than themselves

Let's pretend you are going on 2 dates. 1 with the person of your dreams and 1 with someone you would rather not go out with but for some reason you are. I suppose our natural inclination would be to favor the one more than the other. To offer the one the best and not the other. Jesus calls us to see all the same.

What happens in verses 16-24 is in part a result of the conversation that happened in verse 15. It creates the hinge. All of what Jesus said enraged some or most of the men there but at least one of these men has a different reaction.

He is the one who was listening in. He is not mad but is at the very least intrigued and impressed by Jesus comments. As we read verse 15 keep that in mind---

When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

This man expresses some understanding to what Jesus is talking about. He expresses a hungering for heaven. Jesus then teaches using the parable of the great banquet. This parable is about the kingdom of God. What stood out to me are the excuses the men come up with for not attending the banquet.

People come up with all sorts of excuses to try to get out of situations. I thought I would share with you some excuses people have given for why they got into car accidents.

The other car collided with mine without giving warning of its intentions.

I collided with a stationary truck coming the other way.

A pedestrian hit me and went under my car.

In my attempt to kill a fly, I drove into a telephone pole...I actually knew a guy in High School who had a similar story like that.

An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my vehicle, and vanished.

The telephone pole was approaching fast. I was attempting to swerve out of its path when it struck my front.

Let's look at verses 16-24 – the parable of the great banquet - and focus on the excuses of the account.

Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

"'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

Here are the excuses

14:18 - *"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'*

One would think that this man would have examined the land beforehand, even if he had bought it through an agent. This late notice would be heard as a weak excuse that would serve as a huge insult to the dignity of the host, who had prepared the feast at much expense.

14:19 - *"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'*

Having even a total of five yoke of oxen would mean that this man had much land to plow; he must be a wealthy landowner in his own right. It would be inconceivable that he had no one working for him.

14:20 - *"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'*

This man's excuse is a valid one for not going to war during the first year of marriage but it is not valid for skipping a feast one had promised to attend. Wedding feasts were planned far in advance, and the man should have known not to schedule two events at the same time.

That is the life full of excuses for pursuing God's call.

These men all came up with excuses, which is just as bad as having nothing to say. All of the reasons spoken and unspoken show a spirit of "it's my way not yours, God." These answers all speak volumes to their priorities and to their selfish desires.

In the parable Jesus uses he talks about those who rejected the invitation in their lack of room at the banquet which is heaven. As much as we can see here the man does not reject Jesus words. There is hope for this man that this man finds redemption.

At the end of the parable that Jesus shares we see the heart of God. A heart that says, go bring people to God so that they may taste the goodness of God. What a powerful lesson these men heard that was quite contrary to the way they were living.

Eight chapters late in Luke we see Jesus on the cross and never does he put the focus on Himself.

-- He selflessly in 23:28 says “do not weep for me”.

-- In verse 34 Jesus talks to the Father about forgiving the men who hurt him.

-- In verse 43 Jesus offers peace to the criminals.

-- And in verse 46 Jesus gives up His life.

His actions were 100% consistent with His message of selflessness in Chapter 14. The perspective of Jesus is to look outside of Himself and to see those in need. That is the life He calls us to pursue.

My prayer today is that through God’s word you are reminded of the selflessness of Jesus for a bunch of selfish people, us.

If the words of Christ to these men remind you of your need for transformation and repentance let me offer these words of hope.

Jesus spoke to these men so that they would be changed. He did not count them as lost selfish scum but as men in need of hope. As we look at our own imperfections be reminded of Christ’s selfless act on the cross and the power that act has to overcome our imperfections.

Before we close today let’s take a look at this passage one last time and see how we can learn to live more selflessly.

1. Be reminded of verse 9 and how it spoke of a life lived in humility as what God desires.
2. Be reminded of verse 12 which teaches us to look outside our comfortable space without motivation for repayment
3. Be reminded of the parable of the banquet and how Jesus spoke of inviting everyone without any exclusion.

These things will have an impact on us as we live life following the only one who can truly be called selfless. This selfless one, Jesus, desires to draw us in, to redeem us, and to conform us to His likeness.

Will you go here today saying, “What’s in it for me” or will you go here today “saying, “God, less of me...more of you.”

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