

Luke's Gospel: Chapter 14

Feasts and Invitations...

Healing of a man on the Sabbath (Luke 14 v 1 to 6)

“They were watching him carefully” (v 1) – Jesus was under constant observation. People wanted to know what he would do in different situations, and they would form their opinions about God based on what they saw. In 2 Corinthians 3 v 2, 3 Paul explains that we are ‘letters from Jesus’, that all people can read; that the letters are not written with ink, but with the Holy Spirit, and not on paper, but on our own hearts. Other people watch us carefully – and we are the only ‘Bible’ many will ever read.

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” (v 3) – the issue does not revolve around the healing directly, but on healing on the Sabbath. When Jesus healed the man, did he do work on the Sabbath, and violate God’s command? Of course Jesus never broke God’s commandments, but he did often offend human traditions that surrounded the commandments of God.

“Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” (v 5) – Jesus’ logic is simple and cannot be disputed. If it is all right to help animals on the Sabbath, how much more is it right to heal people who are made in God’s image? The legalism of the Pharisees is really an expression of their pride: what can be more proud than setting man’s traditions above the law of God?

The parable of the wedding feast (Luke 14 v 7 to 11)

- How does Jesus’ teaching in these verses run counter to the ways of the world?

“When he noticed how they chose the places of honour” (v 7) – at the home of a Pharisee, Jesus noticed how people strategically placed themselves so as to be in the best places; that is, the places of most honour. In Jesus’ day, the seating arrangement at a dinner showed a genuine ‘pecking order’. “Do not sit down in a place of honour” (v 8) – if a person takes the most honoured seat for himself, he may be asked to move if the host would rather have someone else sit there. This is a perfect picture of a person trying to advance himself by self-promotion, instead of being humble and letting God do the work. See James 4 v 6, 10. “Go and sit in the lowest place” (v 10) – Jesus isn’t merely teaching good manners, but a lifestyle that in lowliness of mind esteems others better than self (Philippians 2 v 3). “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (v 11) – the promise of exaltation for the humble and humiliation for the proud is one ultimately fulfilled in eternity.

Jesus had the right to teach on this subject, because he fulfilled it perfectly. He is the ultimate example of someone who deserved the highest seat, but took the lowest seat, and was ‘moved up’ to the highest seat – see Philippians 2 v 5 to 11.

The parable of the great banquet (Luke 14 v 12 to 24)

“When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends” (v 12) – we can show pride not only as the guest, but also as a host – and we do so through our ‘guest list’. “Do not invite” is actually ‘do not habitually invite’: it is not wrong to ever invite your friends, your brothers, and so on, but it is wrong *only* to invite such people. Jesus is telling us not to associate with people on a ‘what’s in it for me?’ basis. That is self-centred living; we are called to follow Jesus, and he demonstrated ‘others-centred’ living.

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- How is this parable related to the guest's exclamation in verse 15?
- What is it that keeps people out of the kingdom, and who will in fact get there?

“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God” (v 15) – from Old Testament times, the Messianic Banquet was expected with eager anticipation. In the New Testament we know it as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19 v 9).

“Come, for everything is now ready” (v 17) – before clocks, the date of the banquet was announced long before, but the exact time was only announced on the day. “But they all alike began to make excuses” (v 18) – central to this parable are the excuses given, which are all essentially the same (‘they all alike’). The first two excuses concern material things, and both are pretty lame: after all, what kind of idiot first buys a field, and then goes to see it? If you have just bought ten oxen, what is the point of examining them after you have bought them? “I have married a wife” (v 20) – the third excuse has to do with a man who puts his family before Jesus. The best thing we can show our family is that they are *not* first in our lives, but that Jesus is.

“Go out quickly to the streets and lanes... and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame” (v 21) – if those first invited to the feast refuse to come, there will still be a feast: the master of the house will not give a feast in vain! Jesus responds to the man's exclamation in v 15 by saying, in effect, ‘You admire the Messianic Banquet, but are *you* ready to accept the Master's invitation? Will you make excuses, especially when you know what sort of people will be there: redeemed sinners, the crippled, the lame and the blind?’

The cost of discipleship (Luke 14 v 25 to 33)

- Note the reason for this stern teaching (see verse 25). According to verse 26 and 27, what does discipleship involve? Was this teaching for Jesus' time only, or does it apply still?
- According to verses 28 to 35, how can we safeguard against spiritual wreckage and ineffectiveness?

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate... he cannot be my disciple” (v 26) – Jesus boldly says that nothing can come between you and God. Even good things such as family and the instinct of self-preservation cannot become idols to the true disciple. ‘Hate’ is a strong word, but that is exactly how it can seem to family members and friends when we put Jesus before them. See also v 33 and Matthew 10 v 37 to 39.

“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me” (v 27) – a person carrying a cross essentially walked down ‘death row’ to his place of execution. There was no turning back, this was total commitment: Jesus gave himself for us totally, and he expects us to give ourselves to him totally.

In the parable of the tower (v 28 to 30), Jesus says ‘sit down and see if you can afford to follow me’, but in the parable of the king (v 31, 32), Jesus says ‘sit down and see if you can afford to refuse my demands.’

Salt without taste is worthless (Luke 14 v 34 to 35)

- In what ways is salt ‘good’? What are the properties of salt that make it good?

“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use...” (v 34) – salt that loses its ‘saltiness’ is of no use to Jesus.

Jesus looks for believers that he can use. Just as salt is only useful when it has the nature of salt, a Christian is only useful when that person has the nature of Christ.