

Series Gospel of Luke

This Message #24 Table talk

Scripture Luke 14:15-24

We are studying the portion of the Gospel of Luke which describes the last six months of Jesus' life on earth. At the end of chapter 9 Luke wrote these words: "As the time approached for Him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." Jesus actually travelled to many of the villages and towns of Judea and the region to the east of the Jordan River (Perea) for a period of time, but He always kept His goal of Jerusalem in mind.

The word "resolutely" has to do with determination and fixed purpose. There are two reasons why the word "resolute" is an appropriate word to describe the travels of Jesus. First, He knew exactly what was going to happen to Him in Jerusalem. He had announced on several occasions that he would suffer many things and be killed. Remarkably, in spite of the horrible things which he knew would happen there, He did not allow anything to distract Him from fulfilling His mission, which was death on the cross.

Secondly, Jesus had to have a resolute and determined attitude because He was constantly confronted by people who were sometimes apathetic to His teaching and activities, and often openly antagonistic. He taught about the Kingdom of God and demonstrated the powers of the kingdom in many of the cities and villages of Judea, as he had previously in Galilee. I think Jesus was disappointed about the lack of responsiveness on the part of His listeners, but He was not frustrated because He was always doing exactly what the Father wanted Him to do and saying exactly what the Father wanted Him to say. He took advantage of every possible opportunity to teach the truth of God's ways.

In our previous message, we thought about the first part of chapter 14. Jesus had been invited to a Sabbath day meal in the house of a prominent Pharisee. You will remember that chapter 14 began with a situation which had been set-up to incriminate Jesus — to catch Him in violation of Sabbath laws. When Jesus encountered the man who had the disease referred to as "dropsy," He did not hesitate to heal the man, and then He proceeded to point out the inconsistent and hypocritical behaviors of the religious leaders in regard to the Sabbath laws which they, not God, had established.

During the course of the meal Jesus rebuked and instructed the religious leaders and the host about some of their other behaviors and attitudes. The words of Jesus must have turned the afternoon mealtime into an uncomfortable experience for the Pharisees. The reading today is a continuation of this occasion in the house of the Pharisee. This is why I gave this message the title "Table Talk." We will reread verses 12-14 to give us the context. Then in verses 15-24 Jesus refuted the presumptions of the Pharisees concerning salvation.

Read Luke 14:12-24

The launching point for this teaching was some words spoken by Jesus at the end of verse 14. The words, "the resurrection of the righteous," caused one of the men at the table to exclaim, "Blessed is he that will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." In their teachings, the Pharisees put a lot of emphasis on the resurrection. They looked forward to a great feast which would occur on earth after the resurrection. It would be the great day when eternal fellowship with God would begin.

The concept of this future celebration was Biblical. There are allusions to this event in the Old Testament and explicit statements about it in the New Testament. For example, in Isaiah 25:6-8 we read: "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples; the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth."

New Testament scholars refer to this event as the "marriage supper of the Lamb." It will be the time when the Church will be like a bride, eternally united to the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, at the end of the age (*see Revelation 19:9*).

The Pharisees took for granted that they would be part of that celebration. After all, they were the religious leaders and teachers of the Law. Jesus, however, warned them about their presuppositions. He used a parable to explain that they might be excluded from the kingdom banquet, and, if they were excluded, they would have only themselves to blame. In effect, Jesus said, "Do not count your blessings too early. There will be some surprises at God's banquet table. You might be incorrect in your assumptions."

Jesus had warned the Pharisees about their incorrect presuppositions on previous occasions. For example, in chapter 13, Jesus had explained that there would indeed be many people in the kingdom, but that the Jews would be locked out because they made no attempt to enter the kingdom through the proper door. The parable in the passage today has a similar message. Let me give some background information.

The typical procedure in the Middle East was for invitations to a special event to be delivered orally in a face to face meeting. After all, there was no postal system or email! The host would send a servant to the homes of individuals who were to be invited, announcing the approximate date and location. The invitees would give an oral acceptance to the invitation, the equivalent of an RSVP. Only men were typically invited, but women frequently joined in the festivities in a separate area.

A second characteristic to know is that great celebrations were usually not limited to a few specific hours on a specific day. The time of feasting could extend for two or three days, or even longer for very special occasions, such as a wedding.

Preparations for a great banquet would take many days. After all the preparations were completed, the host would send his servants around to all the guests a second time to announce that he was ready to welcome them to the banquet. Failure to come to the banquet after accepting the invitation was a gross insult.

Arriving male guests were greeted by the host, and their feet were washed. Sometimes the hair and beard were anointed, and sometimes each guest was furnished with a magnificent richly embroidered garment which was worn during the banquet.

At some point, after all the guests had arrived, the banquet host would shut the door, a signal that no others were to be admitted.

Jesus taught this parable in response to the statement of the Pharisee, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." The statement provides for us the context of the parable. It is not difficult to identify the "host" and understand the interpretation. Jesus was describing the post-resurrection celebration in the kingdom of God. The host of this banquet would be God Himself. God expected His chosen people to come to the banquet.

The chosen people in this parable were the Jewish people. God had raised up these descendents of Abraham to be His special representatives on earth. At Mount Sinai, God had promised to the Jews that they would be His people and that He would be their God if they obeyed Him and kept His commandments.

The invitations in the parables refer to the covenant promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. Through the prophets God told the Jewish people to get ready because there would be a banquet some day. In human terms, it required many centuries before all the preparations could be completed. We understand that the preparations included the incarnation of God and Jesus' victory over the devil, sin, and death. The death and resurrection of Jesus brought all the preparations for the celebration to completion.

At various points in the history of the Old Testament, God's chosen people made it evident that they did not want to follow the ways of God. The Pharisees of Jesus' day, who were included among those who had been invited to the banquet, made it evident that they did not want to attend. Although they had previously accepted the invitation and agreed to come, it became obvious that participation in the feast in God's kingdom was not a high priority in their lives.

The invited guests in the parable made excuses for their lack of willingness to attend, and what weak and unconvincing excuses they offered. For example, a person does not first buy a piece of land and only afterwards go to see it, nor does a person first buy five pairs of oxen and only afterwards go to find out about their ability to work. Another person had recently gotten married, but this should not have prevented him from attendance at the celebration in God's kingdom.

Jesus used these three excuses to indicate how God's gracious invitation to His chosen people was rebuffed. The people making the excuses were more concerned about materialistic earthly matters, rather than spiritual eternal matters. One man refused to come because of his possessions. Another refused because of his responsibilities. The last man refused to come because of his relationships. Possessions and the activities of this physical life were more important than a relationship with God and a celebration in the presence of God. Earthly concerns dominated heavenly concerns.

What was God's reaction? He became angry at those who had been invited because they treated Him with so much indifference and contempt. He ordered His servant to go into the streets and alleys of the town to bring in the unfortunates and outcasts of society, and, because there was still room at the table, people from outside the town were urged to attend. It was God's intention that every available place at the feast be filled.

Jesus did not interpret the parable for His listeners. He didn't need to. The Pharisees had already had enough encounters with Jesus to understand that He was rebuking them for their rejection of God's ways and their lack of faith in Himself as the Messiah. In verse 24 Jesus warned His listeners that refusal to accept God's invitation would result in their rejection from the kingdom celebration. The door would be closed to them and they would not get in, and it would be their own fault, the result of their own choices. Although the people of Israel had been promised divine blessings, they failed to step forward when there was opportunity.

God's celebration party was not cancelled or postponed. Other people besides those originally invited were welcomed at the table. Those who were first eligible missed out on the blessings, and those who didn't expect to have such an opportunity to celebrate were graciously welcomed.

There is a lesson here for us. We must not be like the Pharisees. We must not presume that we are qualified to sit in God's presence in the coming kingdom. The Pharisees had a high opinion of themselves, and too many people today also assume that they have nothing to worry about, spiritually speaking. The Pharisees assumed that they were qualified because of their zealous self-efforts in keeping the Law. In their own eyes they were righteous, but they were actually displeasing to God.

It was self-interest and pride which caused the Pharisees to reject Jesus as Messiah, to want Jesus out of the way lest He overthrow their system. It is this same kind of self-interest and pride which keeps people today from coming to Christ for salvation. Many expect to enter into the kingdom, but if they are unwilling to genuinely submit themselves to God and His kingdom lifestyle, they will be excluded. By means of this parable, Jesus warned His listeners to the dangers of ignoring the invitation of God.

It is crucial to understand here that the unwillingness of any individual to respond to God's invitation will not change the circumstances from God's standpoint. His party will go on. It will not be postponed. Other individuals will be invited to take the place of the original invitees. The most unlikely outcasts of humanity will be welcomed to the banquet. Opportunity will be lost by some who think they are qualified, but grace will be extended to others. There will be a grand celebration. The question is on which side of the divide we are on. God's grace continues, but we can miss out on His blessings if we do not respond to Jesus as we should.

In the Gospel portions of Scripture, God extends to us His invitation to "come to dinner at His house" — to become a member of His kingdom, to sit at His table forever, to be forgiven of our sins, to become righteous in His sight through the work of Christ, to enjoy intimate fellowship with Him. The "good news" of the gospel is that God has made it possible for us to be in intimate relationship with Himself. Acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior gives us the privilege to be in God's family. Rejection of Jesus condemns us to eternal separation from Him and His kingdom.

end

Interesting info:

One of the valuable lessons in this passage concerns the interplay between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Our text attributes the failure of Israelites to enter into the blessings of the kingdom of God to their rejection of the invitation given to them. The Jews were not kept from the kingdom by God's choice (election), but by their own choice. On the other hand, the salvation of the Gentiles is not attributed to their choice, but to divine grace (compulsion). The sovereignty of God is thus emphasized with respect to salvation; the responsibility of man with respect to condemnation. Both doctrines are true, though they must be held in tension. Let us keep the perspective and the emphasis which we find in Luke's account. Luke does not trade off God's sovereignty for man's free will, nor vice-versa. Indeed, he holds both in tension (cf. Acts 2:23).