

The Gospel of Luke

Lesson 19: Humility, the Great Banquet, and the Cost of Discipleship -- Luke 14:1-35

It is the Sabbath, and Jesus has been invited to dinner at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. But this is no relaxed evening among friends. Luke tells us that “they were watching him carefully” (v. 1), the way you might watch a man you have already decided to trip. And there, conveniently placed before him, is a man swollen with dropsy, suffering and silent. Jesus sees the trap and walks straight into it, asking the lawyers and Pharisees a question they refuse to answer, then healing the man and sending him away whole. The very religion that was supposed to lead people to God had become a net to catch the Son of God. Jesus will spend this whole chapter overturning the table of their assumptions, gently and relentlessly, about who is great, who is welcome, and what it actually costs to follow Him.

Watch how He does it. He notices the guests jockeying for the places of honor, the way people still angle for the seat near the head of the table, and He tells a parable that ends with a sentence that could be carved over the door of the kingdom: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (v. 11). Then He turns to His host and quietly dismantles the whole economy of social favors: do not invite the people who can pay you back, He says, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, the ones who cannot repay you (vv. 12-14). In one evening Jesus has unmasked the pride that hides inside good manners and the self-interest that hides inside generosity.

Then one of the guests, perhaps trying to steer the conversation back to safe and pious ground, sighs, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God” (v. 15). In response Jesus tells the parable of the great banquet, and it is one of the most searching stories He ever told. A man prepares a great feast and sends his invitation, and one by one the invited guests begin to make excuses. A field, some oxen, a new wife. None of the excuses is wicked on its face. That is precisely the point. The most ordinary, respectable, manageable things in life can keep us from the only feast that matters, until the master fills his house with the very people the world overlooks and declares, “none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet” (v. 24).

And then, as great crowds press in around Him, Jesus turns and speaks the hardest words in the chapter. If anyone comes to Him and does not, by comparison, hate his own father and mother, wife and children, even his own life, he cannot be His disciple (v. 26). Count the cost, He says, like a man building a tower or a king going to war. Whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be His disciple (v. 33). Salt is good, but salt that has lost its taste is fit for nothing (vv. 34-35). This is no salesman softening the terms to close a deal. This is the Lord telling the crowd the truth in love, that He is worth everything, and that following Him is not a hobby added to a busy life but the surrender of the whole life into the hands of the most trustworthy King in the universe. Read this chapter slowly, and let it ask you the question it asked them.

Group Discussion: Jesus warns His host not to invite only the people who can repay him, but to welcome “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” who cannot pay him back (vv. 13–14). So much of ordinary life runs on the quiet arithmetic of who owes whom. When you think about your own hospitality and generosity, how often is it aimed at people who can return the favor? What might it look like for our congregation to show kindness to people who can never repay us?

Personal Reflection: In the parable of the great banquet, the guests miss the feast not because of scandalous sins but because of a field, some oxen, and a marriage, ordinary good things that crowded out the invitation (vv. 18–20). Be honest with yourself this week: what good and legitimate things in your life have quietly become excuses that keep you from giving Jesus your wholehearted attention and obedience? What would it cost you to set them in their proper place?

Read Luke 14:1–35

Study Questions

1. After telling the guests not to seek the place of honor, Jesus concludes, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (v. 11). What does this principle, sometimes called the great reversal, teach us about how God measures greatness and about the kind of heart He honors? How does this connect to truths like “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6)?
2. Jesus watched the dinner guests “choose the places of honor” (v. 7) and exposed the quiet hunger for status that drives so much of what we do. Where do you find yourself angling for recognition, position, or the seat near the head of the table, whether at work, at church, or even in your own family? What would it look like to deliberately take the lower place this week?
3. When a guest says, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God” (v. 15), Jesus answers with the parable of the great banquet, where a man invites many, the invited guests make excuses, and the master fills his house with the poor and the strangers from the highways (vv. 16–24). What does this parable teach about God’s gracious invitation into His kingdom, about the tragedy of those who refuse, and about the surprising people He welcomes?
4. In the parable the guests offer excuses that are not wicked but ordinary: a field to inspect, oxen to examine, a wife to attend to (vv. 18–20). Which good and legitimate things in your own life most often function as excuses, the reasons you tell yourself you cannot give God your full obedience right now? What is one excuse you need to stop making?
5. The master tells his servant to bring in “the poor and crippled and blind and lame” and then to go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, “that my house may be filled” (vv. 21–23). What does this teach about the breadth and urgency of the gospel invitation, and about God’s heart for the people the world considers unlikely or unworthy?

6. Twice in this chapter Jesus presses the cost of following Him onto people who were enjoying His company, the dinner guests and then the crowds. When you consider your own walk with Christ, are there places where you have quietly assumed you can have the blessings of being near Jesus without the surrender He actually asks for? Where is He inviting you to move from admiring Him to following Him?
7. When the man with dropsy stood before Him on the Sabbath, Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" and they would not answer (vv. 3-6). What does this confrontation reveal about the difference between the heart of God's law and a religion of rule-keeping that has lost its compassion, and how does this point us toward the freedom we have under Christ rather than the old covenant?
8. Jesus says that when we host a meal we should invite those who "cannot repay you," and that we will be "repaid at the resurrection of the just" (vv. 12-14). How does living for a reward you cannot see, and that comes only at the resurrection, reshape the way you spend your time, money, and kindness now? Name one specific person you could love this week with no expectation of being repaid.
9. To the great crowds following Him, Jesus says that anyone who does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, cannot be His disciple, and that whoever does not bear his own cross and "renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (vv. 26-33). He even tells two short parables, a man building a tower and a king going to war, urging us to "count the cost" first (vv. 28-32). What is Jesus actually demanding here, what does He mean by "hate" when He also commands us to love, and what does this teach about the total, lifelong allegiance He calls every disciple to give?
10. Look back across the whole chapter, from the healing on the Sabbath, through the call to humility, to the great banquet, and finally to the cost of following Christ and the warning about salt that has lost its taste (vv. 34-35). Jesus has been forming us all along, teaching us to take the lower place, to answer His invitation, and to give Him everything. Name one specific way you sense Jesus reshaping your heart through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 14:1-35 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: James 4:6-10, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble; Philippians 2:5-11, Christ humbled Himself and was therefore exalted by God; Luke 9:23-26, taking up the cross daily and following Christ; Matthew 22:1-14, the parallel parable of the wedding feast and the king's invitation; Galatians 2:20, the crucified life in which Christ now lives in us.