

Luke 14:1-14

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[0 : 00] Our scripture reading today is taken from the book of Luke, chapter 14, verses 1 through 14. One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.

And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they remained silent.

Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on the Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?

And they could not reply to these things. Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him.

And he who invited you both will come and say to you, Give your place to this person. And then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, Friend, move up higher.

[1 : 17] Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

He said also to the man who had invited him, When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. After this three-week trip, which we've so much enjoyed and which it's been a great delight to serve in.

And it's always good to come and pick up the threads of where the preaching is going in a local church as we work our way through different books of the Bible. So I'm delighted to have the task of taking you into Luke 14 this morning and these first verses.

[2 : 45] There's one question that lies at the heart of every religion in the world. And that is the question, how can I be right with God or the gods or whatever we believe in?

Of course, there's a great diversity of belief about one God or many gods. There are many people who would say this life is the only life that we have.

But there are many other people who firmly believe that there must be a life to come. But whatever your belief positions are or have been, every human being finds himself, herself asking questions about our destiny and our purpose.

Who am I? Why am I here? How can I live the good life? And above all, how can I be acceptable with the higher powers, with God himself?

And of course, from that there stems a whole variety of religious practices and convictions, sacrifices, penances, submission, self-denial, acts of mercy, all sorts of things by which we try to climb ladders to the ultimate, to the God that we believe in.

[4 : 03] Now this morning we come to a passage of the New Testament where Jesus is answering that question but answering it in a very tangential way.

He is taking us into things that we might not think at first read actually answer these deep questions of our lives. But I hope to show you as we look together at the passage that that is what he is doing.

He is at the home of a prominent Pharisee, a wealthy religious leader. He has accepted an invitation to a meal there. And we are in a section of the Gospel of Luke where Jesus is on his final teaching mission in the towns and villages as he makes his way towards Jerusalem.

And from now on in the Gospel because he is constantly telling his disciples what will happen to him at Jerusalem. Jerusalem becomes the sort of key note about what is ahead, the certain death that Jesus is going to die because that is why he has come into this world.

So he wants them to be in no doubt about the nature of his own claims to be the heavenly king who has invaded this world of time and space.

[5 : 15] And he wants them to be in no doubt about the sort of kingdom that he is inaugurating as he the king moves towards his enthronement on the cross outside the city walls of Jerusalem.

And on the third day in his glorious resurrection as he bursts out of the tomb alive forevermore. Now as we think about those things, Jesus is using some very down to earth human pictures here in chapter 14 to teach us the nature of this eternal kingdom.

How can I be right with God? In focus today are the religious leaders. They're called the Pharisees. And they had a well worked out set of answers to that inquiry.

All of those answers involved external behavior. The sort of things you would need to do in order to win favor with God to make yourself justified before him.

And their view was that if you did your part and they added many, many commandments to the ones that God had given them. If you followed all the commandments of the Pharisees and if your life was dictated by their laws, then you did your bit for God and God owes you.

[6 : 35] And so God is going to have to respond to you because you've got enough capital in the bank of heaven to make you a citizen. We still have that attitude.

People say to me, heaven helps those who help themselves. Now the Bible says heaven helps those who cannot help themselves. See, it's a completely topsy-turvy kingdom.

It's a completely upside-down idea, this gospel of Jesus Christ. And so as he sits at the Pharisees' table, Jesus wants to use this opportunity to show them and to show us, as we read it so many centuries later, that his values are utterly different from ours and that we need to be aware of great mistakes that we can make as we think we make ourselves acceptable to God, when actually there is only one way.

And we'll see what that is as the passage unfolds. So there are three paragraphs here. The first is the incident of the healing of the man with dropsy and the Sabbath controversy that that provoked in verses 1 to 6.

The second you'll see is a parable about how you behave at a wedding feast, verses 7 to 11. And the third is instructions about whom to entertain when you have a dinner party.

[7 : 56] How does all that fit together, you might ask yourself? It is the stuff of everyday life, isn't it? But through them, Jesus is exposing the false answers that the religious system is giving.

And he's beginning to show us, as he does all the way through these chapters, the wonderful way in which his kingdom turns this upside down. So let's look at the three great mistakes which we can easily fall into.

The first in verses 1 to 6 is the mistake of thinking that you can win your own way to God. Winning your own way to God. If you look across the page in chapter 13, where I believe you were last week and the week before, you will see in verses 25 and 26, that we're being told there, that there are some who will be excluded from God's kingdom, even though they claim great familiarity with Jesus.

When the door is shut, and the master of the house will not allow anyone else in, then Jesus says in verse 26, chapter 13, you will begin to say, we ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.

But he will say, I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me. So it's not a matter of being around Jesus, listening to Jesus, or even entertaining his followers to a lunch or a dinner, as this Pharisee did.

[9 : 24] That doesn't mean anything in itself. And we learn in verse 1 of our chapter, that this dinner party was one with an ulterior motive. One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.

So this is a setup. Jesus has been brought in, and a man is placed before him. Notice the language in verse 2. There was a man before him, put in a prominent position, who has a sickness which is very obvious, dropsy, that is, water retention.

And this man is there, put in the place by the Pharisee, as a test for Jesus. Subtlety is never a strong point with Pharisees, and Jesus brings this in now, and says to them, as the Pharisee brings the man in, and says to Jesus, so what are you going to do about it?

That's the challenge. Now in the last chapter, we saw Jesus healing a woman, who'd been crippled for 18 years, but he did it on the Sabbath day. And that's what annoyed the Pharisees, because they said, this contravenes all our rules, about no work on the Sabbath.

Here's another Sabbath controversy, another situation set up, after the synagogue service, on the Sabbath day, come back to lunch. Ah, but here's this man, strategically placed.

[10 : 48] What are you going to do with him, Jesus? Well, they didn't have long to wait. Jesus graciously heals this man, and he does it in two ways.

He does it both by his word, or his touch of healing, but he does it by two questions, which are either side, of the healing miracle. The first question in verse 3, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?

No response, so he heals him. And then the second question, in verse 5, 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?

See, what Jesus is doing, is teaching them something, through this amazing miracle of healing, let's not forget, that this is yet another example, of Jesus coming to help someone, who had no ability to help themselves.

But I think he chooses, this particular example, in verse 5, of a son, a child, or an ox, falling into a well, because dropsy, the excess fluid, was in a sense, drowning this man.

[11 : 59] It would fill the lungs, it would take him over, it would kill him. And as his body, is filling with water, which would prove fatal, Jesus, in a word, and with a touch, of his power, transforms the man's situation, and heals him.

But he says, look, if you had a child, who fell in a well, and was in danger of drowning, or even an animal, that fell, in a well on a Sabbath day, wouldn't you pull him out at once, before he could drown?

So why should this poor man wait? And they could not reply, to these things. Because their rules, you see, are shown to be more important, than this man's welfare.

And we all know, that that must be wrong. Now, obviously, more lies behind this, than at first appears. Because, the rules that the Pharisees, had added, to the law of God, about the Sabbath, said that medical attention, could only be given, if it was an emergency, life and death matter.

Now, why would they do that? Why have they added, all these laws? God, you see, simply said, honour the Sabbath day, make it a day, in which you thank the Lord, for everything that he's given you, a day of rest.

[13 : 13] That's all he said. But the Pharisees, put all sorts of rules, and restrictions around it. Because they wanted, not to honour God, by doing no work, on the Sabbath. But they wanted, to gain merit, as they saw it, because they went, far beyond what God commanded, and they were obeying, all the extra restrictions, which they had invented.

And the way, to be right with God, for them, was to store up, such merit, so that eventually, they'd be acceptable, to him. Now, I want to suggest to you, that that is the default position, of every human heart.

That's what we're all like, by nature. Works, religion, the religion, the religion of us, making our way to God, is always, our default position.

Because we want to be able, to justify ourselves. We want to be able, to earn something. We want to be people, who can say to God, I've done this for you, now you do this for me.

And making ourselves, good enough for God, to accept us, and then to bless us, that's the way, that we all, naturally think. But I want to say, very strongly this morning, that is the opposite, to true Christianity.

[14 : 29] See, what happens, is twofold. When you do that, the rules multiply, until the Sabbath, becomes a burden, that is hedged around, with endless, strict regulations, rather than a delightful, gift from God.

And burdened people, become grumpy people, become people, who are always, finding fault, especially with God. But they also become, proud and self-centered people, because, they kid themselves, that their ability, to keep these laws, and to live up, to these standards, really make them, rather special, in God's sight.

And once you get into, that sort of, legalistic rule keeping, I will make it to God, it always makes us, hard hearted, because it makes us, judgmental. We're always, setting ourselves, above others, and if we think, we're doing well, we become smug, and self-satisfied, and if we're not, doing very well, we become depressed, and discouraged.

And it is the exact, opposite, of real Christianity. Because you don't get, into God's kingdom, that way at all. You don't grow, in the Christian life, that way either.

Being in the kingdom, has nothing to do, with human merit. And it's so important, that we learn that. Keeping man-made rules, about what you can, and can't do on a Sunday, brings no merit, in God's eyes.

[16 : 00] He hasn't given, those rules. He doesn't approve them. Indeed, they are a slight, against the free, grace, and mercy, and compassion of God, which is salvation.

So you don't, persuade God, to bless you, by being good. God's blessings, come, because God is good.

Because God is gracious. Not because we deserve it. And if you're laboring, under some sort of, heavy burden, like that today, then learn from, the Lord Jesus, that he is the one, of compassion, and mercy, who stretches out, his hand, to everyone in need.

And to somehow, create a religious system, which overwhelms that, and dominates that, and will not allow that, free love and grace, to move in our lives.

It's a deadly thing to do. I, some of you will know, that when our first, little grandson was born, he was discovered, in the fifth month, of his life, with a liver cancer.

[17 : 05] And, I know folk here, prayed for him, and we thank God, for many friends, around the world, who prayed for him, at that time. And in the goodness of God, and through modern medicine, he has been healed, he's now eight years old, and he's a, a fine, healthy little boy, and we thank God, so much for that.

But you know, when it happened, two or three people, said this to me, well, I'm really surprised, that that would happen, in your family. After all, when you think of the years, that you've been serving God, in the ministry, very strange, that this should happen to you.

Now, that was a real shock to me, because, I have never thought of anything, that I do in the ministry, as a sort of insurance policy, against bad things, happening to me, and my family.

How could it possibly be? All our righteousnesses, are as filthy rags, in God's sight. We're all unprofitable servants, even at our best. And yet, you see, our heart says, oh, well, you know, he must have stored up, some bonus points somewhere, and he should have been let out.

They should have been given to him, on this occasion. How wrong you are, when you start to build, on winning your own way, to God. Now, the only way in, and the only way on, in the Christian life, is through the sheer grace, and mercy, of this Lord Jesus, who is going to Jerusalem, to die on a cross, for our sins.

[18 : 39] So, that's mistake number one. Thinking that you can win your way to God. That's what the Pharisee is doing, with his emphasis upon, Sabbath, and keeping laws, rather than upon compassion, and grace.

Second little paragraph, second mistake, pushing yourself forward. Pushing yourself forward. Now, this parable, comes out of a real life situation, it's the situation, Jesus is in, and verse seven says, he told a parable, to those who are invited, to this party, when he noticed, how they chose, the places of honor.

So, as they come in, there's something of a stampede, the closer a person, is to the host, the greater, is that person's, prestige, and honor.

So, they don't have a sort of, genteel, table name cards, arrangement, at this dinner party, which predetermines, where you sit. No, this is a free for all. So, what lies behind, this attitude?

I've got to get as near, to the host as possible, because, that will put me, in the best possible position, for other people, to respect me, and see how honored I am. So, Jesus uses the event, not to give a homily, about good manners, but to tell a parable, about acceptance, with God.

[20 : 04] See, the mistake in verse eight, is that the self-centered guest, thinks of himself, more highly, than he ought. In fact, so oblivious is he, to his true status, that he wants to impress people, with how very important he is.

The wedding feast, becomes an occasion, to show off his own, imagined superiority. And, here it's a, it's a dinner party, but Jesus tells the story, in terms of a wedding feast, and, of course, any sort of occasion, like this, would have the same, social mechanisms, happening.

So, it's awful really, isn't it, when you think of it, but, of course, it's a mechanism, that is so true, to the human condition. So, just as, we all want to justify ourselves, before God, so we all want to think, that we're just a little bit, higher up the pecking order.

We want to be, pushing ourselves forward, just that little bit, and our culture, encourages us, to do that. It's the syndrome, of the big fish, in the little pool. Well, in the parable, the man, misjudges the situation, and he gets, his comeuppance, in verse 9, the man, who is giving the feast, the father of the bride, I suppose, comes, and he says, oh, there's someone, far more important than you, that's got to sit here, you go and sit down there, at the end of the table.

How much better, the advice that Jesus gives, in verse 10, when you're invited, go and sit, in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, friend, come up higher, then you will be honoured, in the presence of all, who sit at table with you.

[21 : 44] But few of us, really believe that, do we? It's a test, of how much, we've really understood, and accepted, the gospel of Christ, when we say, well, if the Lord Jesus, wants to invite me, to do something for him, that's a wonderful privilege.

But the, trying to make myself, acceptable, by pushing myself forward, and ingratiating myself, with a host, if we're always looking, for things to do that, it's a miserable business, isn't it?

Because verse 11 says, everyone who exalts himself, will be humbled, and he who humbles himself, will be exalted. So friends, again you see, Christian wise, in our church life, in our fellowship life, if we're always desiring, to be recognised, it will elude us.

If you start to think, more about others, than about yourself, then there will be, no shortage of appreciation, whether or not, you are honoured, by human beings.

But the spiritual lesson, is that God, is not in the least, impressed, by our jockeying, for status, or position, before him. That is what, man-made religion, looks like.

[22 : 56] And the Pharisees, you see, are assuming that, well, they're entitled, to the most important, positions in God's kingdom, but they disqualify, themselves. They're going to be, humiliated.

And the reason is, because they are, far more concerned, with the praise of men, than they are, with the praise of God. If they wanted to sit, at the table of God, at all, then they've got to, learn to start, by humbling themselves, before him.

And that is, a message to us, isn't it? We start, right at the bottom. We have nothing, to commend ourselves, to God. We cannot build up, any sort of, capital, credibility, with God.

Because our hearts, are sinful, and because, when we look at, God's great commands, to love him, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor, as ourselves, we fall short of them, again, and again, and again.

And you don't have to, try to lift yourself up, to make yourself, acceptable. You don't have to, try and climb a ladder, to get up to God. He has come down, the ladder, to rescue us.

[24 : 05] That's what Jesus, is going to do, at Jerusalem. And I've got to recognize, how totally dependent, I am, on him, for his mercy, and his grace, to lift me, when I, don't even have any right, to be at the table, at all.

And yet, you see, as Christians, we can so easily, can't we, try to be, just that little bit edge, just that little edge, above other people. You know, our gifts, well I've got, these particular gifts, or our education, I've done this study course, or our pedigree, my family's been Christians, for umpteen generations.

All sorts of things, that we use, in our own thinking, just to sort of, give ourselves, a little edge, above others. Not the kingdom of heaven. Not like that, in God's kingdom.

So Jesus is, warning them, and us, and we need to remember this too, that, it isn't, impressing God, with what we have to offer him, because we have nothing.

But it's rather, recognizing, that we should not, think of ourselves, more highly, than we ought to think. And that everything that we have, is given to us by God anyway, it's his gift. But that we want to be, in his hands, relying upon his commendation, and trusting him, to put us in the position, where he wants us to be.

[25 : 25] Third mistake. Last paragraph, feathering your own nest. Or if you like, looking out for number one. Never have to ask, who number one is, do we?

So verses 12 to 14. When you give a dinner, or a banquet, don't invite your friends, or your brothers, or your relatives, or your neighbours, your rich neighbours, lest they, also invite you, in return, and you be repaid.

Now he's not saying, of course, don't give hospitality, to your family. He's thinking about, again, the Pharisees, who, in the whole business, of their lives, would never think, of having unworthy people, at their table.

For the Pharisees, this is a sort of, spiritual principle. You only have the pious, and the respectable, in your home. And those who are, of the same social standing, as you, or the same religious, standing as you, and of course, they will reciprocate, by asking you back, to their party, in due course.

It's a nice, cosy, religious, social convention. But again, do you see, how unlike God, that is.

[26 : 36] Look at verse 13. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they, cannot repay you.

Luke's interest, in his gospel, is all these outsiders, whom official religion, rejected, like the crippled, the poor, and the lame, and so on, the blind. All these people, being brought in, by Jesus, to his new, and eternal kingdom.

And that kingdom, is open, not you see, to those, who think, that they are good enough, for it, actually, of course, it will be unpopulated, because nobody's good enough, for God.

Now, this kingdom, is open, to the spiritual outcasts, to the underprivileged, who have nothing to bring, with which to repay, their benefactor. People who are willing, to receive, the free grace, and love, that Jesus offers.

And so he takes this, ordinary little, human story, and he says, that really, is a symbol, it's a, it's a picture, if you like, of what my kingdom, is like, and of how my kingdom, is stretching out, to bring in, all those, who otherwise, have been rejected.

[27 : 50] Inviting the outcasts, helping the poor, caring for the disabled. That doesn't make you, right with God, because then we're back, to works religion. But it is the fruit, of being right, with God.

That we have compassion, and love, for those around us. And the reward, Jesus says, comes, not in this life, but at the resurrection, of the righteous. So you see, it's an upside down kingdom, isn't it?

And this teaching, just cuts across, all the human presuppositions, which so often, stop us, from entering, Christ's kingdom, or for enjoying, its benefits. See, being a Christian, is very different, from being religious.

It's following a saviour, who didn't feather, his own nest. But who gave himself up, for us all. And it's in giving, that we find, fulfillment.

In receiving God's, gift of grace, in the saviour, that we at last, discover, that he makes us, right with God. And that the door, open into his kingdom, is a door, which leads us, to a revolutionary love.

[29 : 01] Which depends, not upon us at all, but utterly upon him. So those are the things, we've got to think about. What are you relying on? And in the context, of the Jerusalem, journey of Jesus, clearly the application, here is not, well we ought to take, notice of this, and not push ourselves, too much, and not be too self-centered, and try and be a bit, more compassionate.

So I'm going out this week, to really try, to be a better person. It's not what he's saying, at all. That will be, man-made religion. That will lead me, in the end, to hypocrisy, and to self-deception, because I'll, have to pretend, to be better than I am.

Now, the application, of this passage is, as Jesus is going, to Jerusalem, to die on that cross, it's to rescue people, who can't live this way.

Who are unable, to fulfill, the requirements, of his kingdom. People who know, that they're sinful. People who know, that that wretched, self-centeredness, keeps on reasserting itself.

People who are aware, of how easy it is, to put myself, above others, and look down on them. And yet, people who know, that that is not God's way. And that the answer lies, in a Jesus, who humbles himself, to death on a cross, who gives himself, up for us, who can offer, nothing to him, in return.

[30 : 30] But he pours out his love, and his grace, as he takes our place, and endures, the righteous wrath, and punishment, of a holy God, against our human sin.

The son of man, came to seek, and to save the lost. And it's the cross, that deals with our sin. And then it's the resurrection, which gives to us, the power to live differently, and to begin, to see changes like this, happening in our lives, on a progressive basis, as we seek, to live and work, for his praise and glory.

There's a famous, 18th century hymn writer, who rejoiced in the name, Augustus Montague Toplady. He also rejoiced, in the realities of the gospel.

And he wrote a wonderful hymn, which says these words, with which I'll close. Because these are words, that sum up, the upside down nature, of this kingdom, that's open to you, this morning.

For you to enter, as you turn to this Lord Jesus. What is it that he said? Nothing, let me just read to you, two verses of it.

[31 : 43] Not the labor of my hands, can fulfill God's laws demands. Could my zeal, no respite known. Could my tears, forever flow.

All for sin, could not atone. He must save, and he alone. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to your cross, I cling.

Naked, look to you for dress. Helpless, run to you for grace. Foul, I to the fountain fly. Wash me, savior.

Or I die. Now that is Christianity. In all my weakness, all my failure, nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to his cross, I cling.

And the more we do that, from day to day, the more he will shape us, by his risen power, through his spirit, to make us citizens of his kingdom, who bring glory, to our great and gracious king.

[32 : 47] Let's pray together. Let's just take a moment of quietness, as we reflect on God's word.

Maybe something that the Lord has impressed, on your mind or heart. Maybe some response, that you want to make. Turning away from our self-justifying, and from our religious confidence, to put our faith entirely, in Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

Just a moment or two of silent prayer. Amen. The Father sent the Son, to be the Saviour of the world.

So we worship you, our Heavenly Father, and we worship you, Lord Jesus, our Rescuer, and our King. We thank you for your kingdom, which is so contrary, to the kingdoms of this world, but which is so much, a reflection of your character, of love and compassion, and mercy, truth and righteousness, and grace.

And Lord, we want to thank you this morning, that you went all the way to Calvary for us, that you bore there, in your body, our sins, our self-centeredness, our pushiness, our pride, our desire to justify ourselves.

[34 : 15] Lord, thank you that all those things, which would obscure us, from your kingdom, would shut us out, from your sovereign rule, in our lives. Lord, we pray that you will, accept our thanks, for all that you accomplished, on that cross, for sinners like us.

And we pray that more and more, our lives may reflect, your kingly nature, as we live, day by day, in love for you, and love for neighbor, as we seek to serve you, in these days, in the light of the great coming day, when your kingdom, will be revealed, in all its power and glory, and when we shall be with you forever.

So thank you that we can, trust you, and know your presence, and help in our lives, that we don't have to justify ourselves. Please send us out, rejoicing in such a gospel, and help us to live it, and proclaim it, for your name's sake.

Amen.