

The Key to the Present is the Future

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[0 : 0 0] the future is the key to the present. The future is the key to the present. Many among us here love history. One website explains why we should study history. It says, the past creates the present. Our modern world exists because of events which happened long ago.

Only by understanding those events can we know how we got here and where we are to go next. Winston Churchill once said, those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. History is the key to the present. And when it comes to the story of the Bible, we must understand the history of God's dealings with the human race if we're to appreciate why Jesus died on the cross. History, especially biblical history, is important for the Christian. But there's another viewpoint we must understand if we're to appreciate why Jesus died and how as Christians we are to live. This viewpoint sees today not from the perspective of the past, but from the future. From this perspective we say, the future creates the present.

Our modern world exists because of events which shall yet take place. Only by understanding those future events can we know what to believe and how to live as Christians. Or to rephrase Winston Churchill, those who fail to learn from the future are doomed to make eternal mistakes.

Those who fail to learn from the future are doomed to make eternal mistakes. When it comes to the Bible, we must understand the future of God's dealings with the human race if we are to appreciate why Jesus died on the cross. The future, especially the Bible's view of the future, is important for the Christian. Now, in Luke 14 verses 7 to 24, Jesus is at a dinner held in the house of a senior Jewish Pharisee. And there are many other Pharisees present. Everyone in this room, including Jesus, believed in what was called the Messianic Banquet. The Messianic Banquet. Clearly taught in the Old Testament, especially by the prophet Isaiah, the Messianic Banquet will take place in heaven, when at some point in the future, the Messiah will be the host at a great feast at which all his chosen people will be present.

[2 : 5 6] The Messianic Banquet is a picture or an image of the joy and the plenty of heaven. Jesus clearly believed this would happen. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, which we'll engage in in a wee while, he gave his disciples the wine and said to them, from now on I will not drink of the fruit of this vine until the kingdom of God comes.

Now, whether there will be real banquets in the new heavens and the new earth, we do not know. This is, after all, only a picture of the joy and plenty of heaven. But what we do know is that Jesus Christ shall be our host and he'll fill us in heaven with laughter and joy and song forever.

So here, in Luke 14, we have Jesus at an earthly dinner with the Pharisees. And he uses this earthly banquet as an opportunity to speak of the heavenly Messianic Banquet, which lies in the future.

The setting may be an earthly feast, but the context of this passage is a heavenly feast. Jesus is painting a picture of the future and using that picture as a key to the present.

He's saying, in effect, only by looking forward to the future Messianic Banquet in heaven can we know what to believe and how to act today.

[4 : 30] So for Jesus, in this passage, the future is the key to the present. And the key issue in this passage is the question, who will be there?

Who will be present at that future Messianic Banquet? Who will the Messiah choose to be with him when he hosts that great future feast in heaven filled with joy and plenty?

Now you'll know that I like running. Some of the races I'd like to take part in have a qualifying time you must meet in order to enter that race.

So, for example, if you can't run a 5K in under 22 minutes, you can't run in that race. Is the kingdom of God like this?

Is heaven like this? Are there qualifications attached to being at the heavenly Messianic Banquet? Do we need to meet a certain standard of behavior that our good works outnumber our bad works, that we're deeply religious, that we've kept all the man-made regulations of our particular religion?

[5 : 36] That's what the Pharisees gathered around Jesus that day thought. But they had qualified for the heavenly Messianic Banquet by virtue of their Jewishness, their moral righteousness, their religious devotion, their works gained them access to the kingdom of heaven.

Who will be present at the future Messianic Banquet? In the minds of the Pharisees, only the deserving, only the great, only the religious.

But in these verses, Jesus paints a very different picture. Those who will be present at the heavenly Messianic Banquet will be the humble and the crippled and the lame, those who are not deserving.

Well, Jesus tells three parables, which, although they're set at earthly feasts, are really about the heavenly feast. He's warning those Pharisees present not to think that one can qualify for heaven by virtue of one's ethnicity, one's good works, one's religious devotion.

He's telling them to let the future be the key to the present. If it's only the humble and the undeserving and the uninvited who will be present at the heavenly Messianic Banquet in the future, what kind of person should I be today as a Christian?

[7 : 05] And who should we be reaching out to with the gospel as a church? Well, these parables can be understood after that lengthy introduction to set the scene.

These parables can be understood as saying, first, the humble will come first in verses 7 through 11. The humble will come first. Second, from verse 12 to 14, the undeserving will be rewarded.

And third, from verse 15 through 24, the outsider will feast. So, first of all, the present is the key, sorry, the future is the key to the present.

Verses 7 through 11, the humble will come first. The humble will come first. Well, table positions at a New Testament Jewish feast were similar to our arrangements today.

the host would sit at the head of the table and guests of honor would be seated close to him. Think of a wedding dinner. You've got the bride and the groom at the head of the top table and then their closest family are seated beside them.

[8 : 12] Those closest to the married couple, those most important and precious to them, are seated in places of honor. when Jesus sees how those Pharisees in the Pharisees' house that day are jockeying for the most important position at the table, he tells a story about a man who, having sat down at the top table, is told by the host to take the lowest place because someone more distinguished and important than he has arrived.

It's like a wedding dinner where a distant cousin you've never met decides he wants to sit in the best man's chair at the top table right beside you.

But when the best man arrives, you displace your distant cousin you've never met before and tell him to go and sit somewhere else. The top table is reserved for those who are closest to the bride and groom, those who are most precious to them.

He summarizes his story by saying, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, verse 11, and who humbles himself will be exalted. Now, he's at a feast of the Pharisees.

Men who thought by virtue of their ethnicity, their morality, and their religious diligence that they deserved a place at the top table in the kingdom of heaven.

[9 : 33] They thought that they were the most important people in the world to God, the most precious people to God, and they had earned a place with the Messiah right at his table in the end-time banquet in heaven.

By contrast, just before Jesus had told this story, he had healed a man with dropsy, and the Pharisees thought that anyone who was disabled was less precious to God, children of a lesser God, as it were.

In their minds, this disabled man wouldn't get anywhere near heaven. He's not going to be at the top table, but as far away from the host as it's possible to be. If there's a hell, this man deserves to be there.

The Pharisees, you see, were guilty of exalting themselves. Notice how Jesus says, he who exalts himself, God didn't exalt them.

They were doing that to themselves. They were saying, see how important I am to God. He must love me after all, look at how much I do for him and talk about him.

[10 : 42] By contrast, this man with dropsy, he knew his place. In his encounter with Jesus in the previous verses, he says nothing. He is rolled out as a patsy by the Pharisees.

He humbles himself. He refuses to justify himself. He refuses to pretend that he's important as important as the Pharisees. At this meal in the house of the Pharisee, the Pharisees took the place of honor at the top table and this suffering man had no place at all.

But Jesus is now speaking of the future and he's saying that in the heavenly messianic banquet, their positions will be reversed. The humble will be exalted and the proud will be disgraced.

the humble will take the positions of honor and the proud will take the positions of shame. Those who thought that by virtue of their morality and devotion to their religion, they'd be exalted in heaven, they'll be shamed.

By contrast, those who this world shames today will be exalted in heaven. You see how Jesus is saying the future is the key to the present?

[12 : 00] We must not judge greatness by today's standards. Just because someone's great in the kingdom of men doesn't mean to say they'll be great in the kingdom of heaven.

They might be the most respectable in this church but when it comes to the kingdom of heaven, their greatness means nothing. They may have played the religious card and it may impress us but it doesn't impress God.

He's never impressed by a holy mask because he sees a sinful heart under the surface. Likewise, just because someone is common in the eyes of the world doesn't mean they'll be common in the kingdom of heaven.

They may be a Christian who struggles with various kinds of physical and mental disabilities and challenges. They may be people of little or no reputation but when it comes to the kingdom of heaven they'll be exalted.

They never pretended to be something that they weren't. They depended entirely upon the grace of God for their daily bread and for the strength to keep going. They are the humble of this world, the unimpressive, the weak but to God they are precious and in the heavenly messianic banquet they'll be seated right there at the top table beside Jesus.

[13 : 17] If the future is the key to the present worldly greatness is turned upside down we must reassess what true greatness in the kingdom of God is.

Who is the greatest Christian in this church? Who is the greatest Christian in this church? If the future is the key to the present it is almost certainly not the answer you just come up with in your head.

It is probably not the most gifted or the most respected. It may be someone far more anonymous. Someone who struggles with physical or mental health challenges. Someone who'd be the last to push themselves forward.

well in practical terms if the future is the key to the present we must treat every single Christian with dignity and love considering them better than ourselves.

The humble shall be exalted in the kingdom of heaven. The standards of Jesus are polar opposites from the standards of this world because in his kingdom the humble not the great come first.

[14 : 33] The humble will come first. Second from verse 12 to verse 14 the undeserving will be rewarded. The undeserving will be rewarded.

Jesus tells a second parable this time concerning who we should and should not invite to a feast. Catherine and myself went to dinner with friends last night and when I was writing this sermon I was thinking should we go or not?

Jesus says when you give a dinner or a banquet do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbours lest they also invite you in return and be paid.

Now we all have family and friends we enjoy entertaining. Jesus enjoyed spending a time around a meal with his disciples his family his friends. Jesus isn't talking here of the etiquette of our social lives who we should and should not invite for dinner in our houses he's not.

He's using the opportunity of sitting round a dinner table to talk about something deeper. Again he's pointing forward to that heavenly messianic banquet in the future and exploring the question who will be there?

[15 : 51] Is it a matter of who deserves to be there? By granting a place at the heavenly feast is God to use Jesus' words in this parable in verse 12 repaying them.

They've been devoted to God their whole lives through so they thought. They've observed all the etiquette of their religion. They've been good people. They've put God in their debt so they think and he repays them by granting them a place at the heavenly messianic banquet.

The operative word again verse 12 repaid. The Pharisees thought that God would repay them for their faithfulness to the laws of their religion by opening wide the doors of heaven to them and inviting them to sit at the heavenly messianic banquet.

Words like repay, earn, and deserve belong together. The Pharisees thought you see they were earning their place in heaven by their religious observance.

They thought they deserved salvation. For them salvation was a matter of earning it. And again Jesus paints a different picture.

[17 : 04] He says but when you give a feast invite the crippled, the lame, the blind and you'll be blessed because they can't repay you. You'll be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

In other words, the kingdom of heaven will be filled with those who didn't deserve to be there. Those who didn't earn salvation.

They were unable to give God anything in return for His goodness except their brokenness, their disability, their poverty, their ugliness, and their sin.

But these are the people that Jesus invites to share in His heavenly banquet. They've not earned their salvation but God invites them undeserving as they are to sit with Him in heaven.

What Jesus is talking about here is what we call grace. Grace, the undeserved favor of God or as Peter's wife Marian used to say, God's riches at Christ's expense.

[18 : 10] He's getting to the very heart of Christian salvation. We are given a place in heaven not because we've earned it or deserved it but purely because of God's extravagant grace.

No one will be in heaven because they earned their place there. It shall be a function of God's undeserved grace. He invited us to come to Him as we were, broken, poor, and sinful.

We do not place God in our debt by our good works and our religious devotion. Rather, God has placed us in His debt by His extravagant grace toward us in the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

When this passing day is done, when has sunk yon glaring sun, when we stand with Christ on high looking over all life's history, then, Lord, shall I fully know not till then how much I owe.

chosen not for good in me, wakened from the wrath to flee, hidden in the Savior's side, by the Spirit sanctified, teach me, Lord, on earth to show by my love how much I owe.

[19 : 28] The famous Dundee evangelist Robert Murray McShane wrote these words shortly before he died. If any among us shall be in heaven, it shall not be because we earned it.

We were undeserving. If the future is the key to the present, and by grace we see ourselves at Christ's banqueting table in heaven, as surely we should, let's live lives of gratitude to Him today, humbly loving Him, and humbly loving others, even as He has loved us.

The undeserving will be rewarded. And then lastly, from verse 15 to 24, the outsider will feast, the outsider will feast. This is the most famous of the three parables.

In fact, I use certain words in this parable quite often. Verse 20, I have married a wife. Great excuse to get out of business. It is precipitated by one of the Pharisees saying to Him, Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

Again, see, another reference to the heavenly messianic banquet. Indeed, blessed they shall be, but who will be eating with the Messiah in the kingdom of heaven?

[20 : 48] The self-righteous Pharisees thought, well, it must be us. And so they were smug and self-satisfied with their man made works religion. They thought they had earned their place at heaven's feast.

But Jesus had other ideas. He tells a story about a man who gave a great banquet and invited many people. But they all alike began to make excuses. One excused himself on the basis of his possessions.

I have bought a field. The next excused himself on the basis of his work. I have bought five yoke of oxen. The last excused himself on the basis of his relationships.

Boss me, Ben. I have married a wife. Possessions, work, and relationships, all more important to them than the man who had invited them.

After all, we had a lovely dinner last night myself in Kathmandu, but the ultimate reason we went is to spend time with our friends. The ultimate reason we want to accept a dinner invitation isn't because of the quality of the dinner our friends are going to serve us, but because we just want to be with our friends.

[21 : 54] We value our friendship with them. These people, the man holding the feast had invited, by excusing themselves, are declaring that other things are more important to them in life than him.

Their careers, their possessions, their relationships matter more to them than his friendship. So, God is the host, and those Pharisees, despite all their religious appearances, are putting other things before him.

They are the first invited. They're putting their religious careers before him, their possessions before him, their relationships before him. Most everything in their lives actually comes before God.

He's invited them to the heavenly messianic banquet, but they have turned him down. They've insulted God, even while betraying him with a religious kiss.

Well, the man is very angered by those he'd invited but rejected him, and he tells his servants to go out into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the destitute, the poor, the crippled, the blind and lame, outsiders.

[23 : 09] Then, having brought them, he tells his servant to go out from the city into the highways and the hedges, the byways, and compel people to come in. Press on them the invitation.

All but force them to come in. Because only when the house is filled with people and every seat in the dinner taken shall the doors of the house be shut and the banquet shall begin.

And at that stage, the insiders, the Pharisees, shall be on the outside of the banquet.

And the outsiders, all those crippled, poor, and lame, shall be on the inside of the banquet. The insiders are the religious Pharisees. But because they have rejected God and his Messiah, Jesus, they'll be shut out.

They will not enjoy the plenty and satisfaction of heaven. The outside are the poor, crippled, blind, and lame, the disadvantaged, the destitute, the undeserving, who claim nothing for themselves and have no right to the favor of God.

[24 : 15] But they shall sit at the heavenly banquet of the Messiah, feasting and filled with joy and plenty. If you were to ask those who were once on the outside, but are now feasting at the table, what right do you have to be at this table?

They could not answer because we deserved it or we earned it. Rather, they would have to answer because the host invited me to come and I came.

Their presence at the feast is not a function of their achievements, but purely the gracious invitation of the host. If someone is to ask, let's say we can ask someone in heaven, at the heavenly banquet table of the Messiah, if we can ask them, what right do you have to be there in heaven?

They could not answer it by saying, I earned my place here by my lifelong religious devotion. Rather, they would answer, God found me destitute, poor, and spiritually blind, but he compelled me and invited me to come and I came.

Some think that they have earned the right to be here at the communion table. Some think they have to earn the right to be here at the communion table by their good works and their religious devotion.

[25 : 43] No, no, and no again. What gives a Christian the right to eat the bread and drink the wine of the Lord's table? What gives a Christian their right is that they have been invited and compelled to come by God and they came.

It's got nothing to do with their religious performance. It's got everything to do with the extravagant grace, invitation of God, and God searching for them in the highways and byways of life and compelling them to come in and enjoy his feast.

How must it be for those Pharisees today? Who look on upon those who are enjoying the heavenly feast of the Messiah? They see those at the banqueting table of the Lamb they would not have expected, the poor, the lost, the blind, sinners, the religious, and Gentiles.

They look in these Pharisees from outside and they're not there because it did not compute with them that the only qualification for attendance in heaven is that those who were there did not deserve it and were entirely dependent upon God's gracious invitation.

Now, if you could see your future and you could see that in a year's time you'd be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, you'd change your diet now.

[27 : 13] Right? If you could see into your future and you could see that in a year's time your house will burn down, you'd install smoke alarms right now.

You see, the future is the key to the present. Jesus here gives us a picture of the heavenly kingdom of God and is saying to us, it is only by the grace of God, not by your religious efforts, that you shall be there.

Today, he invites all those who have ears to hear to come to believe and to trust in his son, Jesus Christ. Whoever we are, we hear his gracious invitation.

He compels us to come. We come as we are and we accept God's invitation on his terms. Jesus died on the cross for the undeserving, the humble, and the outsider.

He bore our sins and qualified us for entry into the kingdom of heaven. And all we must do now to avoid being on the outside of that future feast is to believe in him and to place our faith in him, to accept his invitation, to allow him to compel us to come.

[28 : 33] Because, you see, the future is the key to the present. May God bless his word to us. Thank you. Thank you.

Please, come on to the bottom of that 21, will be able to take his coronable and be able to advisable kennel, to be able to get called the after a interview thatBER California told me to be able to and be able to encourage you up to come up to the ■■■■■■■■, but can only be specific prayers and take pray, open the opportunity and children