

Awkward Dinner Guest

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[0:00] I have an apathetical question for you.

! The question is this. If you could have anyone over to your house for dinner, living or dead, who would it be?

Just think about it for a second. I promise we will come back to the question, but let's talk about the practice of hosting itself. Have you ever thrown a dinner party?

It's a stressful affair, isn't it? You're concerned to have all the food cooked in time, but not overcooked. You have to finish the food too early so that the food gets cold before it's eaten.

Then there's the sitting arrangements that you have to concern yourself about. Of course, the quality of the food goes a long way, but there's also the company of the guests to consider.

[1:23] You don't want awkward silences, after all. Or worse, you don't want a night of bickering and yelling at each other. Some of you might have had those in Thanksgiving dinners in the past.

It's never fun. It's never fun. You want things to be amiable. The conversation to flow as easily as the wine. And you want your guests to say as they're leaving, what a delightful evening.

We absolutely must do this again. Now, that feeling and wanting that as your host a dinner is true today and even more true in a first century Eastern honor culture.

A lot rides on hosting and inviting people into your homes over a meal. But we also have to realize, to be a guest also comes with its own stresses as well.

After all, you're not in your own house, so you cannot be as loose and carefree as you would like to be. Especially when it's a high status gathering, such as we have here in Luke 14.

[2:34] This is in a backyard barbecue with neighbors and family members. This is an invitation to the home of the ruler of the Pharisees, we're told.

The ruler of the Pharisees will have been the leading man in the city. And undoubtedly, the people that he invites into his home for this dinner party will have also been leading families, the influential, the movers and the shakers of the society.

This is the kind of party you stress about if you're invited to. You're wondering what to wear. You're already thinking and practicing who you're going to network with at the party, so you might be noticed and advance your prospects and so on and so forth.

So as you read through Luke, you'll notice that meals are important. I mean, if you look through the whole Gospel of Luke, Luke especially sets a lot of importance on meals.

Jesus often reveals aspects of his kingdom in this setting, in this context. And there's another layer to this particular Sabbath dinner party that Jesus was invited to.

[3:52] We know that it's a Sabbath dinner. And the context is that Jesus has been preaching and teaching throughout Judea. And he was journeying, now he is setting his eyes on Jerusalem.

And he is now journeying to Jerusalem to accomplish that which he came to do. To be the sacrificial lamb.

But throughout this whole thing, there has been tension between him and the Pharisees. Now, here's the marvelous thing about Jesus.

Often we remember that he ate with tax collectors. Don't you remember that? You know, he ate with sinners and tax collectors. In fact, the Pharisees accused him of doing that. But oftentimes we forget that he also ate with the Pharisees.

This isn't the first time he's eating with the Pharisees. This isn't the first time he went into their homes. The truth is that Jesus eats with whoever will invite him to table. He also ate many times, as we said, with tax collectors, but he also ate with the Pharisees.

[5:00] He does not discriminate in his table companions. It is because Jesus' love and kindness and compassion knows no partiality.

And in fact, Jesus also invites all to come to his table. That's the note of last week's Gospel reading and sermon.

That's what it reveals to us. Remember Luke 13, verse 22 to 30. Jesus says that all are welcome to his table. But he also says that although the invitation is for all, the means of getting to his table is exclusive.

The door, we're told, is narrow. Entrance requires you to come through the only entrance by which you can approach God, his son Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the door. And to enter into his kingdom and feast at his table, you must come to an end of yourself. Recognize your sin laid at the feet of his cross.

[6 : 12] So many will assume that they can enter based on their geographical proximity, their closeness to Jesus. But Jesus will say, as we read last week, I do not know where you come from.

So I want us, as we go through this chapter 14, to have this central revelation of Luke 13, verse 22 to 30, before us.

Namely, that Jesus is the narrow door. So, by the way, you can follow along on page, I think it's 1038 of your pew Bible.

I invite you to open to Luke 14 as we go forward and follow on along. So the Sabbath, this is the tension here.

The Sabbath is one of the major points of contention between the Pharisees and Jesus. We've already seen in Luke 6, that Jesus healed a man with a withered hand. Despite the protestation of the Pharisees, he healed this man.

[7 : 18] In Luke 13, Jesus healed a woman bent over for 18 years. And Jesus healed this woman on the Sabbath.

In the ruler of the synagogue, when Jesus performed that healing, rebuked Jesus publicly. He said, six days, there are six days in which to work, the ruler of the synagogue says.

There are six days in which work ought to be done. But come, and he says to the people, come on those days to be healed. In fact, he was saying this, especially, there should be no healing on the Sabbath day.

But Jesus responded to the ruler of the Pharisees by calling them hypocrites. Saying that they will not hesitate to give water to their livestock if it was thirsty.

And now they refuse healing to this poor woman who has been oppressed for 18 years. And the third and final Sabbath healing in Luke is in Luke 14 that we see here.

[8 : 20] Now, as you're reading the first verse of this chapter, one Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of the ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. Right away, I want you to think, this looks like a setup.

Because that's what it is. An issue is not really law-keeping, but self-righteous hypocrisy. That's the tension between the Pharisees and Jesus over the issue of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees have so made the Sabbath a burden on people and twisted the meaning of it and the intended practice of it from what God had originally given it to be.

God gave the Sabbath to his people to remind his people of the eternal Sabbath rest, which was the culmination of his own work at creation in Genesis 2.

Remember what happened after God, the triune God, finished the work of creation. What did God do? On the seventh day, he rested.

[9 : 29] That was meant to be an eternal rest that God invites Adam and Eve to enter into. All of creation to enter into God's rest.

But what happened? Man's sin disrupted the Sabbath rest of God. Adam's sin, my sin and your sin, disrupts the Sabbath rest of God.

So much so that God then gave a command to his people that they should mark every seventh day as a day of rest.

He gave that command to Israel to mark every seventh day as a day of rest. He gives that command to us as well. By the way, the Sabbath rest command is not just for Old Testament. It's not an Old Testament command. It's a commandment that it still stands for us as believers today. This isn't part of my sermon, but I want to challenge us to think hard about it.

[10 : 31] Sabbath rest. What it means and what it means to walk in obedience to it. It's hard, I imagine, because we're Americans after all. Work is almost our God.

But God has invited us to the Sabbath rest. And so, He gives it to Israel to remind them of His Sabbath rest. He gave a command of Israel every seventh day to come, to enter. It's an invitation to enter into His rest and to look to the promise that He will send His servant who will make the way for us to go in, back into that eternal rest that He has created.

God's servant through whom we can return to God's Sabbath rest. Who is this servant? He's the Lord of the Sabbath. He's Jesus Christ Himself.

So, you can see how blind and foolish the Pharisees are to lecture Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath Himself, about the importance of the Sabbath.

[11:34] When what they should have done is fallen on their knees and worship Him, and thank God for His mercy and kindness and power. But they were blinded by their servant religion, incapable of seeing the one whom God has sent to bring them back to Himself.

Now, so this is the background of the invitation to dinner that Jesus received. Jesus was not dining here among friends. He was in the wolf's lair.

He's among enemies who were trying to trap Him. Look at the end of verse 1 there. They were watching Him carefully, we're told by Luke.

Verse 2 shows us the means of the trap that they've set up for Jesus. You might wonder at this point why a man with dropsy will be there at dinner.

Dropsy will have been considered a disease that makes one ritually unclean. You know how the Pharisees feel about ritual uncleanness. But they were able in their hypocrisy and in their bitter and hateful heart, they were willing to invite this man to dinner so that they can set up this trap.

[12:47] Presumably, under normal conditions, this man will not be on the guest list. But he's present here as a tool to trap Jesus.

Now, dropsy, we know it today as edema. It's a swelling of the body due to excess retention of fluid. Now, during Jesus' time and for centuries after, people thought it was a disease. But in fact, dropsy is a symptom of a deeper malfunction in the body.

It can be the result of congestive heart failure or kidney problems. And the symptoms of that is the retention of fluid in the body. I did a lot of looking through WebMD for my sermon this morning, if you guessed.

I didn't know that off the head. But there's a wonderful irony about this malady to which the Pharisees are oblivious to.

[13:52] There's a proverb in ancient times that says, nothing is as dry as a man with dropsy. Because although your body is filled with fluid, you have an insatiable thirst.

So you see, the man is a perfect metaphor for the Pharisees themselves. When Jesus had called, Jesus earlier called the Pharisees greedy.

Because they're greedy for the things of this world rather than the kingdom of God. He described them as full of greed and evil. He described them as lovers of money. So dropsy is often the metaphor for greediness.

And the Pharisees, of course, are not the only one who suffer from this human condition. The human condition without God is to acquire and keep acquiring money, fame, power, and still thirst for more of it.

Because it never satisfies. So Jesus was invited to dinner by people looking to trap him by his words and actions. Now, I wonder what you would have done if you had gotten this invitation.

[15:05] What would you have done? Perhaps find a way to decline the invitation? Or maybe you go, but you keep your mouth shut. You know? You just toe the line.

You don't try to ruffle any feathers. But not so with Jesus. I want us to go back to our apathetical question. If you could have anybody living or dead over for dinner, who would it be?

Now, many people would have said Jesus as the answer. Many people often say Jesus. Often times people even ask the question, If you could have anybody over to dinner other than Jesus, who would it be?

Because Jesus is the go-to answer. I mean to show us though that if you read the Gospels, Jesus should not be on the top list of your answers to invite to dinner.

Because he doesn't seem like he's a fun dinner guest. He's going to call you out on your sins. He's going to call you out on your hypocrisy.

[16:06] He's going to make the dinner party be full of awkward silences. That's what he did here in this passage. He calls people out on their sins and hypocrisy.

Having him as a guest will offend the rest of your guests. All those important influential people that you're trying to curry favor with. They're going to leave the party hating you. Deriding you. Because you are friends with this guy who doesn't know how to, you know, be a good guest at a dinner party. That's Jesus. So maybe you should reconsider that when people ask you that question.

Unless you're willing to go through all of this at a party, then maybe you can say Jesus. So Jesus went to this shindig. But he's not going to dance to their tune, you see.

He sees right through them. But instead of trying to appease them, he continued the work for which he had come to do. What is that work to which he had come to do? He said it in Luke 4.

[17:12] He said to proclaim goodness to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind. Set at liberty those who are oppressed. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That is his work. That is still his work. Through his church. Jesus' mission is not beholding to any man.

He took the man that they set as a trap. He healed him. And he sent him away. But before he healed him, he asked the Pharisees this question in verse 3.

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? They were silent. Verse 4. He says to them, 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? They could not reply to these things. Jesus reveals, rightly calls out the hypocrisy with this direct questioning. None of them sitting down to eat on the Sabbath day will hear that their son had fallen into a well and say, Oh well, well now son, just hang tight.

[18:30] Let, once Sabbath is over, I'll come and get you. No, none of them would have done that. No parent will do that. They won't even do that for their ox.

Oxen. Rather, they will summon all the help they can get to rescue their son or even their livestock. So Jesus knows this.

They know this. Yet they are trying to withhold healing and deliverance from this man who is oppressed.

But Jesus isn't done. Notice the contrast. So he's already called them out and silenced them. This is the first awkward silence I did in the party already. But he's not done.

Notice verse 1. They were watching him carefully. But look at the contrast in verse 7 there. They were watching him closely in verse 1. But Jesus is the one now noticing them.

[19:29] He has silenced them. And he sees them. The way they do their parties. The way they up-nob with each other. And instead of being silent, because he doesn't want to ruffle any feathers, Jesus does not do that.

Because he is the truth, after all. He calls them out. Look at the parable there in verse 7 to 11. These people are used to the habit of self-promotion.

Right? By the way, this is not just the Pharisees that do this. We do it in our world too. Right? Look at the charities that we have in our world. Often times, you know, you have a press release when the corporations or people or the big names, you know, give money to charity organizations.

Why do they have the press release? So people can know how good and how generous and how kind I am. So that people then will extol my goodness.

It's not altogether bad, but it reveals the heart of man. The natural heart of man. Is that we want praise. And we seek praise. You scratch my back, I scratch your back.

[20:41] That's the kind of thing. You invite me to your dinner, I invite you to my dinner. And we just, you know, get our own network going. It works in the business field. That's how businesses operate.

It works, unfortunately, sometimes in the church of Christ as well. So the parable is there in verse 7 to 11. He told this parable to those who were invited.

When he noticed how they chose the places of honor. And he says to them, When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor.

Why? Don't go sitting in a place of honor because the host might come and say, Well, actually, that seat is reserved for someone more honorable than you.

Don't go to a party and sit in the reserved section. Because what would happen? You would have to get up from that place of honor, in front of everybody else, and with deep shame and embarrassment, walk to the back of the room to sit.

[21:46] Rather, Jesus says, When you are invited, When you are invited, Sit in the lowest place. Verse 10. So that when your host comes, What does he do?

He says to you, Friend, What are you doing here, sitting here? Move on higher to the place of honor. Then you will be honored, Then you will be honored, Jesus says to them, In the presence of all who sit at the table with you.

But Jesus says in verse 11, For everyone who will exalt himself will be humbled, And he who humbles himself will be exalted. Now, it's easy to read this parable and see its practicality. It's a very practical instruction by Jesus. This is a great way not to lose face, And not to be totally embarrassed when you are in public gathering.

We can read it as that. In fact, you might even say to yourself, This is really good advice. It might make me even look more impressive, If I humble myself, And sit in the lowest seat.

[22:51] And then when I am called to go to the place of honor, I can stroll to the place of honor, And people can see, Oh, this is an honorable person. But not only am I honorable, I am also humble.

You know? There is the practicality in that advice. And we can take it as that. We can take this reading of the parable as that. The parable as just a moral tale. And that would not be bad in itself. It's useful. It's great practical advice. But to leave it there only reveals how very bad our heart truly is. If that's all we read as we read this parable.

Oh, this is a way to actually procure more, You know, make myself look better. It reveals to us, If we read it only as that, How truly devoted to self-worship and self-promotion we are.

And we ought to see that Jesus' culture, The way the Pharisees operate, Is not different from the way we operate in our world.

[23:53] We are not immune to this. You are not immune to this. Alright, maybe I'll speak for myself. I am not immune to this. After all, we have a way, Well, we have corporations that do press releases, But even us, right?

In the 21st century world. We have our own little forms of press releases. Call Facebook and social media. You know? And we post things about our life. That's not bad.

I'm not making any judgment on those things. But there's a way in which we are prone to toot our own horn. And it's a natural human condition to do that.

But so how are we to read this parable though? And not just take it as just practical advice. How are we to read it? I think we must read it in light of chapter 13, Verse 22 to 30.

Our Gospel reading last week. Specifically the question that Jesus, That was put to Jesus in verse 23. Lord.

[24:55] That's chapter 13, verse 23. Lord. Are those who are to be saved, are they few? That's the question.

And look at his answer in verse 24. He says to the questioner, Strive. Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many I tell you will seek to enter, And will not be able to.

And then he goes on in verse 30. Some are last, we will be first. And some are first, we will be last. So this self-promotion, seeking man's praise and accolgement.

Jesus says it's futile to live that way. It's futile. The world's morality is bankrupt. It will gain you no entrance in the kingdom of God.

If you will be saved, Jesus answers the questioner. You must stand on the truth of God's word. And the truth of God's word is hard.

[26:01] It's a mirror. It's a mirror on the world. God's word is a mirror to ourselves. That reveals to us the depth of our depravity and sin and ugliness.

We are sinners. That's what God's word reveals to us. We are devoted to self-idolatry and self-promotion. Even our good deeds, God's word says, are filthy rags before a holy God.

We are not worthy to approach him. We have no means by which we can attain to life with God. Notice that in that gospel reading last week, Jesus didn't answer the man's question.

Rather, he tells us. He tells the man, he tells us. Be concerned about yourself. Don't be concerned about the number of those who will be there. But be concerned about yourself.

Instead, make sure you know how you can enter in, receive salvation. And Jesus says, there is only one way. Strive, Jesus says.

[27:11] Bishop Dave last week told us that the word is the rule for agonize. Agonizo. It's an agonize. The striving that we are called to do here that Jesus calls us to do is an agonizing

sacrifice.

It requires devotion. Not devotion to yourself, but devotion to God. Striving through the narrow door. But it's also not a call to work by your good deeds to enter in into the kingdom of God.

Rather, it's the warning that the way to enter in is through Jesus Christ himself, who is the door. So stand upon his word. Trust him.

Strive in coming to him in repentance. In recognizing your own depravity. And falling on the mercy of God. That's the striving we're called to do here. So those who come to the cross of Christ.

Those who come through that narrow door. Made by a sacrificial death. Are those who confess their faults. Are those who recognize that they are miserable offenders.

[28 : 17] In need of God's mercy. Are those who recognize their unworthiness. And confess it. And plead for mercy. And ask that God will restore them.

Salvation, Jesus says, is for those who humble themselves before God's majesty. Whereas the proud. What happens to the proud? They will be brought low.

This is why it's dangerous to bring Jesus along to a party. No one can escape the way he exposes our self-righteous hypocrisy.

No one can escape it. Look in the last verses of this section. Verse 12 to 14. Jesus now turns from the guests.

No one is escaping here. He turns to the host of the party. He said also to the man who invited him. When you give a dinner or a banquet. Do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors.

[29 : 17] That's what this man has just done. And the only reason Jesus is there is so that they can trap him. And the only reason the man who drops it is there is so that he can be a tool to trap Jesus.

Jesus says, do not invite only the popular and the well-known. Lest they also invite you in return. And you'll be repaid. That's actually the *modus operandi*.

That's the way things function. You invite me, I invite you. And Jesus turns that practice on its head. And says, that is not the way it ought to happen. Jesus in verse 13.

When you give a feast, invite the poor. The crippled. The lame and the blind. Because... Why? Why do you invite them?

Because they cannot repay you. It's not a *quid pro quo*. But you will be repaid, Jesus tells us. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

[30 : 15] If you invite your friends and it's just, you know, I scratch your back. You scratch my back. You will receive your reward on this earth. A temporary reward.

That will burn away. That will fade away. But if you invite those who are less than. The outcasts of the people on the margins. Your reward is being scarred up in heaven.

And by the way, I want us to see here that the poor that Jesus is mentioning. Are not just those... It's not just physical poverty that Jesus has in mind here. I think it is.

It is physical poverty. It is people who are actually lame. Those who are actually crippled. Those the Pharisees will have considered under margins. Ritually unclean. Jesus didn't invite them.

But it's not just that. It's also those who are spiritually poor as well. Jesus' ultimate concern is not just with the physical condition.

[31 : 11] But with the spiritual condition of these people. It's a given that when you have a party, you invite your friends. And your neighbors.

And your family members. That's a given. It's a given that you will prefer them. But this is a call from the Lord of the Sabbath.

That to show the same kindness to those who will not reward you. To show the same kindness to those who might not agree with you. Those who may be hard for you to love.

Those who by worldly standards will be considered your enemies. Those are the people that God also calls you to bring and to invite.

To the feast. And your reward for faithfully resembling your father in your dealings with these people. Your reward is stood up for you at the resurrection of the just.

[32 : 16] Jesus tells us. That reward is everlasting reward. It's an eternal reward.

Where moth and rust cannot enter to destroy it. I have one more question. Before we pray. For us to ponder.

We've already seen here that Jesus is not a very comfortable dinner guest. But I wonder. Do you take Jesus with you. When you're invited into the halls and corridors of this world.

Or do you leave him at the door. Because you think he'll embarrass you. Because Jesus will. As we see here. He will. He'll. And this is not an excuse by the way. To go out to the world and start calling out people. You're not Jesus. I'm not Jesus.

[33:17] There's not an invitation to go out and just start calling out people's sin. But the reality is that when you take Jesus with you everywhere you go.

The very act that you are in Christ. That you believe his word. That you stand upon his word. That you. You yourself. Recognize yourself as a sinner in need of mercy. And you walk in that way. And you live in that way. And you love in that way. Will invite the scorn and derision of the world.

It's a fact. When you take Jesus with you. It will mean. That people will look at you and say. Well that guy is not a.

Let's not invite him again. But oftentimes we're tempted. Not to take Jesus with us. Because we know that will happen. We're tempted to leave Jesus at the door.

[34:15] I wonder what we will look like. If we take Jesus with us. Everywhere we go. Brothers and sisters in Christ. Where there is no door we walk into. No group that we're member of.

That we will not. We will say along with Paul. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. We will stand upon his word. We will take him with us. Wherever we go. And that will invite scorn. And derision. But it will also invite people. The crippled. And the lame. And the blind. Who need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because you see. The crippled and the lame and the blind. Are not just physically crippled. The lame and the blind. They are spiritually. Those who are hungry. And in need. Of this message. And gospel of salvation. And those are the people we are. Not inviting.

When we. Don't take Jesus with us. With us. This is the challenge for us. Holy Trinity. Take Jesus with you. And invite. Those.

[35:13] Who are out there. Not just your friends. Do invite your friends. Invite your neighbors. But invite. Your enemies. That neighbor that. Doesn't like you. That doesn't talk to you.

Step out of your comfort zone. Be as Christ. To that person. Invite them to the feast. That the Lord. That the Lord has set for us. That they may hear the word of God.

Come to faith in him. And then. Come. As. Members of the kingdom. To feed on his body and blood. And be partakers of that kingdom.

Coming through that narrow door. Into eternal life. Into everlasting life. May God help us. Let us pray. Lord.

We thank you. For your mercy and goodness to us. That when we were unworthy. Undeserving. You called us. You invited us.

[36:11] We were the crippled. And the lame. The blind. Blind in our sin. Yet you open our eyes. And your mercy. Help us Lord.

To be like you. To invite those who are around us. Who are crippled. And lame. And blind. Help us Lord. Not to be like the Pharisees. And the Pharisees of our world today.

Who only do good. So that they can receive a claim in the world. But help us Lord. To do good. To show kindness. To reflect the goodness of our father. To those.

To everyone we come in contact with. That everyone will be our neighbor. Everyone will be our friend. Even our enemies. Our perceived enemies Lord. Give us grace and forbearance to stand. When people will. When we take you along with us. And people look at us funny. And think of us as. As not. Great companions.

[37:12] Help us Lord. To continue to persevere. And stand on your word. Knowing. That our reward. Is not in this world. But it's stored in heaven. With you.

Give us this grace. By the power of your Holy Spirit. We cannot do it in the flesh. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.