

Divine Reversal

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. What a joy it is to be here and a great privilege. I want to thank you for letting me come and have a chance to speak to you. I do bring greetings from Sydney, Australia.

The Sydney Diocese over there holds St John's Shaughnessy in very high regard. At our Synod last year we unanimously applauded our support for what is happening here.

So praise the Lord. There's 270 parishes in our diocese and I estimate well over two-thirds of those would remember this parish and the parishes in this diocese every week in their prayers.

We're proud of you and honoured to be numbered among your friends. We're one big family, aren't we? Even across the globe. Well, I love short expressions. Not David's short expressions, though he comes out with some good ones.

I love short expressions in a few words saying a great deal. A classic is a picture speaks a thousand words. See a picture? It will often tell you thousands of things that could not be said in words.

[1 : 17] Today's passage, for example, has only 800 words, but you will see there are two majestic pictures. And as we see those pictures, we'll start to see some wonderful things.

Another favourite short saying is, from the sublime to the ridiculous. Are you familiar with the idea? You'll be talking about something or looking at something or considering something of such wonderful glory and majesty and then you're distracted and brought back to the real world and deal with something minuscule or petty or unimportant.

From the sublime to the petty and ridiculous. It speaks of the contrast, really, that we can often face in real life. And interestingly, in the passage we have today, the two pictures we see has one of what is clearly ridiculous and one what is clearly sublime.

And as we see the contrast, we actually see the ridiculous fussing about of religious people about ridiculous things and at the same time the Lord of life calling us to the sublime and most wonderful calling of being his disciple.

Now, it is interesting. Why is it that we can so easily forget what's sublime and just fall back into the ridiculous and petty? It's something that happens all the time.

[2 : 40] One of the things you might know is that at my previous church, I loved to do street signs. The vision is we have about 30,000 cars drive past our church every week and I would change the sign each week and try and have a short expression.

They'd go, oh, what did that say? And then they'd be thinking about it all the way. I have a favourite. You want to hear my favourite short expression? It's not that short. It's sort of short, but it's repeat. This is it.

Are you ready? The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Isn't that clever?

The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. We all agree that's what should be the case. There's no dispute. When it comes to absolute truths, we all agree that's true, absolutely.

I'm sure of that. What's in dispute though is what is the main thing? And I have visions of people driving past and thinking, the main thing's the main thing. What's the main thing?

[3 : 40] And they're discussing and wouldn't it be great the interactions that people have as they think about what is the main thing? Well, let me ask you. What is the main thing? Oh, there's that nagging question, isn't there?

We live in a post-modern world apparently and we don't even know what the main thing is. We can't know, we're told. Isn't it great to be evangelical? Isn't it great to be Bible believers?

I mean, the Bible tells me the main thing. Isn't it lovely that God says, I want you to know, so let me make it really clear. Why would God make it fuzzy and hard to find out?

We have the Word of God. This last week I was on Main Island, which had nothing to do with the main idea. But while I was there, I spent a week delighting in the Word of God.

I was looking at Luke 14 and I was listening to what Jesus had to say. Reflecting on what he was saying. Meditating on the implications of what he said.

[4 : 41] Feeding on the profound truths that he was making. It was truths that set me free. It is at times, it's not always, but at times you're reading the Bible and you're saying, this is really good. This is more precious than gold.

It's sweeter than honey. It's wonderful to have the truth. So, even in the post-modern world, hey, I'm sorry, but we claim to know what the main thing is.

So, let's look at it. Let's look at this Word of God. I mentioned that there's two pictures. It might be helpful to have your Bibles open. If they weren't open before, open them now to the back section of the Bibles, page 73.

If you're not accustomed to opening your Bible, there's one of your problems. Why wouldn't you open the Bible if you want to know the main thing? Don't rely on anyone that tells you anything that doesn't come from the rock solid truth.

Now, in Luke 14, we have Jesus in both scenes, both pictures. The first picture is ridiculous. It's an exclusive black tie kind of dinner party where there's some rather awkward and embarrassing guests.

[5 : 54] And it's ridiculous what happens. We'll look at that in a moment. But it ends with a sublime, just the contrast is staggering, sublime picture when Jesus speaks to everyone who can hear.

And he says, the absolute most important and main thing is that you are my disciple and you follow me to your life's end. But let's start with the ridiculous because it sheds light on the main thing.

We read in verse 1 of 14 that Jesus is invited to the ruler of a Pharisee's house. You can be sure that it was a distinguished affair.

Pharisees, as you may know, are lawyers. And in their culture, they were well educated like ours, usually on the upper rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, holding positions of influence and power. Now, let's forgive the lawyer jokes, but unlike the lawyers perhaps of our cultures today, they were considered very respectable people who spoke what God actually had to say and were often held up as the model citizen.

[7 : 02] That may not be the case of ours today. But there was a downside of being a Pharisee in Jesus' day and put bluntly, it was they were snobs.

They were elitists. Who they spent their time with, who they were seen with and definitely who they ate their meals with mattered. You wouldn't catch them at the local pub having a couple of beers with their mates.

You wouldn't catch them at the local race course just having a couple of bets for fun. You would catch them in the very front row of the synagogue and looking very important.

And if they had the equivalent of the public statement on the evening news, you would have caught the Pharisee berating the shocking state of the country and how it's gone to the dogs.

You see, they were the moral police. They were strict do-gooders and basically religious wowsers. So, it must have been some party that Jesus went to.

[8 : 02] It was a very exclusive dinner party. It was no doubt a splash affair. Are you familiar with the word splash? I made it up, but it sounds like a good word. Cocktails, fancy hors d'oeuvres, the equivalent of black tie, the equivalent of classical music, though Mozart had not been invented.

And it was just a lovely event, as best as you could be if you're a religious wowsers. But one thing was wrong. There was two rather odd and awkward guests. Let me read with you.

I'll read it to you from verse 1 of 14. One Sabbath, when Jesus went to dine at the house of the ruler who belonged to the Pharisees, they were watching him.

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

But they were silent. Then he took him, healed him and let him go. And he said to them, which of you having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?

[9 : 15] They just couldn't reply to this. The two odd guests at this rather awkward dinner, it hasn't started off very well, The two odd guests are Jesus and the man with dropsy.

We're told that during the pre-dinner drinks at this rather exclusive men's club, they've arranged for a guy from down East Hastings, a street bloke who had rather ugly disease, dropsy, most likely edema, swelling of his limbs and face.

And they sort of, we're told, push him in front of Jesus. Behold, we're told in verse 2, there was a man with dropsy. How did he get there? He's a misfit. And they're watching Jesus. Their plan? If he heals him on the Sabbath, he's in trouble. Well, that's ridiculous.

Jesus knows what's going on and so he foils their plan by asking the question. It's been raised before. In Luke's gospel, we've heard it three times before.

[10:23] And Jesus says, look, you're the lawyers. Tell me, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? And they don't answer. It actually wrecks their plot because if they say yes, then he heals them and that doesn't trick him.

If they say no, then he probably won't heal. It wrecks their plan. It's clever how Jesus can just destroy their plan so quickly. Basically, of course it's lawful. Nowhere in the Bible does it say you can't do good, you can't heal people, you can't help people on the Sabbath.

But they were lawyers and I have friends who are lawyers. Yes, I do. I have brother-in-laws as lawyers. You can't choose your brother-in-laws if you didn't know this stuff. They said no.

They would have said no, it's not lawful because they had a bunch of rules that they had worked out that basically said even though God sees you're not allowed to work on the Sabbath and the Sabbath is for the good of people, we have a whole bunch of rules, really strict, very specific, quite complicated rules that only really we know and you have to keep them.

And one of them is, Jesus, you cannot, don't ask us all the technicalities, but we know you can't heal on the Sabbath. Well, anyhow, he wrecks their plans. And isn't it striking?

[11:41] They want to stop him doing something which is sublime. They want to stop him from performing a miraculous, creative, healing work of God so that their rules are kept.

Well, what actually happens? Jesus hears their silence, turns to Diodropsy and says, mate, I heal you. I don't think he said mate, but I'm sure he said I heal you.

And the man, miraculously, is healed. A work of God. What's missing, though, is no praise the Lord. No, my God has been at work. No, the lawyers all go, blow it, he wrecked our plan. It's interesting we read that Jesus then says to this man, you can go home now.

And after this rather embarrassing fiasco of the pre-dinner drinks, we're told that they now all rush to take their seats. Before we go on to that scene, can I point out something that may not be politically correct?

[12:54] Do the alarm bells go? I always get scared when you talk like this. Let me just tell you something. I actually think the political correctness movement is just like Jesus' day with the Pharisees.

You understand that political correctness today is trying to give us the rules of what is right and wrong, but without God, without the Bible, because they actually know better. And so what they are doing is they have become the elite.

They cannot be challenged. They are actually bullies. And what happens is you cannot challenge what is said to be right or wrong, and if you do, look out.

In their arrogance, the political correctness movement, whoever they are, have created rules that everyone in secret knows are silly. But we are afraid to say it in public in case we get in trouble.

In many ways, they hold people in terror, just as the religious Pharisees did in their day, that we are going to break the rules. Political correctness today is secular Phariseeism.

[14:09] Can I encourage you? We know the truth. May we be a bit more like Jesus, who at least questions the rules, especially when they just don't seem to make sense.

May we have the courage occasionally to say, this is wrong. My friends, occasionally we need to say, the emperor has no clothes. Anyhow, I digressed.

Let me return. Let's look at this ridiculous party. There are three conversations or three discussions we hear, all of which Jesus makes.

I suspect the others were a bit speechless after that first fiasco. Verse 7, Jesus addresses the guests. Verse 12, Jesus addresses the host.

And verse 15, Jesus addresses them all. In verse 7, he tells the parable about when you invite someone, don't choose the place of honour.

[15:14] When you go to a party, don't pick the best seat, take a lower seat. Otherwise, someone more important might turn up and you'll be embarrassed. Sorry, Krista, that's the bishop's seat you need to move.

And Krista, in all her embarrassment, has to go. He says it's much easier to take a lower seat and then, oh, Krista, come up the front. You're important, I'm sure. You are important, aren't you? I'm sure you are. What happens, we are told in this, is there's a rather embarrassing comical bun fight. That's an Australian expression.

The men flustered, rush after pre-dinner drinks to the table to get the best seats. In this context, really, these men of honour are caught at their worst.

And while we're in this context, can I just ask you again, what is the main thing? I mean, we all agree that the main thing is the thing that we must keep main, but what is it?

[16:13] It's clear to these men they've lost sight of whatever it is and Jesus is about to show them. You've lost sight of the main thing. Let me give you one other short saying.

I've got a few of them. I like them. I have a short-term memory loss, so I can only remember sayings that are one sentence long. How about this? This short saying tells you what the main thing isn't.

Very helpful. Are you ready? This is what the main thing isn't. The expression is, it's not about you.

I'll say it again. When it comes to the main thing, it's not about you. You got that? I'm sorry. It's just not about you. When it comes to the main thing, it's not about you.

Some of you might have heard of a man called Rick Warren. He's the pastor of the Saddleback Church in California. He wrote a book called The Purpose Driven Life. Most recently, he was invited by Barack Obama to pray the invocation at his inauguration as president.

[17:19] Rick Warren's well known. He wrote this book called The Purpose Driven Life, about the purpose of life and in some respects, the best part of the book are the first four words. It's not about you.

I find that very helpful, friends. You want to clear the decks when you're trying to work out what life's about? Well, let's start with this. It's not about you. Unfortunately, we live in a society that says it's all about me and that's why we're confused and that's why when it came to the table, they were all fighting because it's all about me and getting the best seat.

Well, as Jesus sits with these Pharisees, if you could somehow condense what was on their minds, if you somehow could take all their actions, all their beliefs, if you could reduce everything they were doing and why, it would boil down to this.

It's all about me. I'm at this dinner because I have things that I want to say, I want to do. I have people I want to impress and I want them to impress me. Every dream, every scheme, all the things that are on my mind, the one thing that is common is this, it's all about me, my success, my fulfillment, my pleasure, my comfort, my power, my profit.

That's what I'm told life is about, me. That's why there's a fight because they all want to be first. I wonder how Jesus made them feel when they'd all found their seats and Jesus is the last one standing, obviously at the end, at the worst seat and he says to them, wouldn't this have deflated them?

[18:51] Why are you fighting over the chairs like preschoolers at preschool morning tea? Would they not have just thought, oh gee, that's a bit right to the core.

It's not about you. You'll notice in verse 10 Jesus says, when you're invited go and sit in the lowest place. Verse 11, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.

He who humbles himself will be exalted. Putting yourself first, thinking the main thing is about you will only mean you will be ultimately humbled.

If you want to exalt yourself now, says the Lord, don't worry. On the last day, you will be humbled.

That's what he said last week in chapter 13, verse 30, where he said, on the last day, some are last who will be first and some are first now who will be last then.

On the last day, the exalted, the first, the me first will be made last. It's not about you. Well, in the second discussion, having made them all feel uncomfortable, he turns to the host and he says to the host, when you invite people to dinner, don't invite all the wealthy, important people that will repay you and reciprocate.

[20:17] No, he says. Verse 13, when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you.

You will be repaid at the resurrection, on the last day. That's when you get your reward. I wonder if you saw the irony. Remember Dropsy?

He was maimed, he was poor, he'd been invited but he hadn't been invited to dinner. They didn't bring this poor man to feed him and give him honour.

They brought this poor man to use him as bait. Did you notice in verse 4, it was Jesus who said, you can go home mate, you've served your purpose, go well and be healed. Now here is a guest and ironically I think, like us, he found that the most important thing about this dinner was that it goes well, that he looks good, that he enjoys it, that his guests enjoy it, that there's a lot of kudos and positive vibes about it and it gets better and better.

And Jesus says, no, no, no, that's not what it's about. Let me ask you, in both verse 11 and both verse 14, it talks about rewards or blessings or benefits but they're all things in the next life.

[21 : 36] Did you notice that? Humble yourself now and you will be exalted in 40 or 50 years in the next life. You want to be rewarded, we'll be generous and serve now and you will be rewarded in the next life in 40 or 50 years.

Now the third and final discussion just highlights just how ridiculous their rules and their excuses had become. It's a familiar parable, I won't read it to you, where from verse 15, having one of the religious people, you may have noticed Jesus said, you'll be rewarded at the resurrection and one of the religious Pharisees thought, oh, that's my cue.

Blessed is he who shall eat in the kingdom of God and all the other Pharisees said, here, here, well said, brother, amen. That's about as radical as you got for those groups.

Basically, he thought, we'll be there, won't we? Won't it be lovely to be at the kingdom feast eating kingdom bread? Here, here, past the cigars and port.

You can tell I've never been to a man's club. So, Jesus tells a parable, let me tell you a story about a man who had a party, invited everyone, but when it came, when it came for the party, he sent his servants and one after the other, people who had already said, yes, I'm coming, gave the lamest, weakest excuses.

[23 : 07] I bought oxen, I've got to go and look at them. Bought a block of land, better check it out. I got married, well, there's a good excuse. What's frightening is in this particular parable, here are people who are forgetting what the main thing is all about.

To feast at a great banquet held by a master is such a privilege, such an honour. It's still a treat and honour today.

It's something you clear your calendars for to make sure it happens. Yet, we're told, in this particular feast, they reject the invitation and the master is angry and he says, go out, invite everyone on these tastings, everyone in other countries, anyone that will come, compel them to come in.

I want my house to be full. I want there to be joyful singing but those that had the privilege of my invitation that reject them, they will not partake of this feast.

Now, it's scary, you know, because remember the point that David made last week when it was talking about the feast there and there will be on the last day people who are locked out with weeping and gnashing of teeth, Lord, let us in, go away, you cannot come in.

[24 : 30] Jesus there and then was saying there will be people who think they'll be in the feast and they'll be locked out there and then. He is addressing the same people except He's not talking about the future there and then, He's talking about the here and now.

He is saying I am the Master. I have come to invite you to be my disciples, to follow me and have life but you refuse to accept me, you reject me and you use your silly rules, your ridiculous laws to exclude me.

that you, you will be excluded. Heavy, sobering words. He was right there in front of them, the Messiah.

We learn near the end of the Gospels they believed He was, they just wanted to kill Him because He was causing problems. It's ridiculous, isn't it?

People can find all sorts of little reasons why they will not follow Jesus. Let me ask you, what possible reason have you got not to follow Jesus?

[25 : 50] What possible excuse can you bring before the living God and say, Lord, right now you can't be first? I'm sorry, I have something else that is a main thing and quite frankly Lord, you can go second, third, maybe fourth.

Think yourself lucky. What possible reason could we ever speak to the Lord like that? But is that not what sin is? That is what sin is. We're all sinners.

Every day I put myself first in all sorts of ways. That's why we had our confession. Oh God, forgive us miserable sinners. Still, I keep forgetting and live for myself and not for you.

We're leaving that ridiculous scene of foolish men using feeble excuses to ignore the main thing. Let's go to the main thing and just briefly see it.

The second picture which begins at verse 25 is the magnificent picture of Jesus now back on the road towards Jerusalem. He knows where he's going. He is going to die.

[26 : 56] He has set his goal and we are told he is now surrounded by great multitudes and we hear him say to all of them what is the main thing.

As he walks, he concludes with this stirring statement, verse 33. What, sorry, so therefore whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

One thing and one thing only can be first. You are to be my disciple. You must renounce anything or anyone else that comes before me.

That's what verse 26 means. if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, cannot be my disciple.

Now, do not stumble on Jesus' words. He's not telling us to hate our wives and children. He commands husbands to love their wives so much that we are willing to die for them. We are even commanded to love our enemies.

[28 : 11] There is no question. The two greatest commandments are love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself. But Jesus is saying loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength comes first and your love for God must be so grand and great that compared to your love for your wife and children you could almost see the contrast as love and hate.

It doesn't reduce our love for our ones that we love. It elevates the sublime love, worship and honour we have for our Lord.

You realise what a disciple is don't you? I mean if this is the main thing we better be crystal clear what we're being main about here. A disciple follows his master.

A disciple learns from their master. A disciple actually loves their master and says I will obey you my master, I will trust you my master, I will seek to become like you my master.

I will give everything, I will leave family and home to follow you my master, I am your disciple, I will discipline my life to be like you.

[29 : 26] Our master my friends is none other than the master of the universe, the master of the Lord of life, the judge of the living and the dead.

he alone is the reason for living, he alone is worthy of all our praise and honour and our master, oh bless him, praise his name, invites each one of us, yes you and me, he invites us, he says follow me, I can't wait till next week, Luke 15, beautiful picture, again of feasts, rapturous joyful feasts in heaven, you know why?

Every time one sinner repents, we're told the angels and the heavenly feasts are parting, God rejoices when yes even you, you wretched sinners and I, that's what the Bible causes, when we turn to him, put our trust in him with the love of a father, he embraces us, he invites each of us to follow him, he calls each of us, be my disciple, follow me and I will make you like me.

Let me ask again, what possible reason have you, what possible feeble excuse have you that you still do not make him your main thing?

Have you some feeble excuse that you have arrogantly been holding before him as if there is something more important? Some of you may not yet be his disciple, I'll be down the front here or up the back there, come and ask me about it, I've been practicing for 32 years and I'm sort of getting the gist of it, it's not easy is it following Jesus, we just keep saying look at Jesus, don't look at me, look at Jesus.

[31 : 28] but for some of us, if Jesus is your master, if you are his disciple, do not cause your master to weep, do not insult him with your feeble excuses, do not use your ridiculous priorities and agendas and what you want for you, join me, join your brothers and sisters, even now as we're about to go to prayer, let us kneel and say yet again, oh Father, we're sorry, we so easily lose sight of the main thing, our world says that we are the main thing but it couldn't be further from the truth, it's not about me, it's about you and Lord as we follow you, may we do whatever it takes to become like you, let me conclude with these words, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, let us fix our eyes on

Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, let me pray. Lord Jesus, we fix our eyes upon you and it is strange how the things of this world grow strangely dim as we focus upon the main thing, the glory of God and giving him first place, everything falls into place in a wonderful way and we find ourselves Lord humbled and yet strangely exalted, we find ourselves Lord giving and yet strangely rewarded with abundance.

Help us Lord God by your Holy Spirit to be broken and contrite and renewed again by the forgiveness that comes through our mighty Lord and Saviour.

For his glory and in his name we pray. Amen. Lord of all good things, we would thank you for your many gifts, the gift of your word, we thank you for the gift of those who unfold it for us.

And we thank you just now for this mighty gift, the gift of prayer. Lead us Lord and teach us always in this great mystery of prayer.

[34 : 20] For here we meet you in our stumbling speech and hear you answer in wisdom and in truth and in your gracious love.

So Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. We would begin by praying for our troubled world.

We would pray, Lord, the Lord of peace for peace where it is so sorely needed. We remember today the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan.

We remember our soldiers who are in conflict there, for the families who have lost sons and daughters there of late.

We pray for peace in Iraq, for peace throughout the Middle East. Amen. When we pray for our world, Lord, we would remember the hungry.

[35 : 32] We pray for refugees. We pray for prisoners. prisoners, these ones who know no honor in the world.

And we would pray for the unemployed, for the homeless, for all of those who are in despair. Lord of the world, give hope where it is so badly needed.

Teach people everywhere to do justice, love mercy, and to seek out the living God, and to walk humbly with this God, who is the very hope and the healer of the nations.

Lord, in your mercy. And we would pray today for the church of Jesus Christ. Christ. We pray for all who preach the gospel throughout the world.

We thank you, Lord, for those throughout the world who remember us in prayer, as we've been reminded this morning. We would pray for evangelists, for missionaries, for teachers of the gospel.

[36 : 57] We remember, and we would continue to pray for those who lead us in these troubled times in our church. We would pray for Bishops Harvey and Harding and for Bishop Ferris.

We pray for our Archbishop, Archbishop Venables. We would remember the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan, Williams, that these, our leaders, would be guided in the wisdom and the mystery of the gospel.

Lord, guide your people. Guide your church in truth, in wisdom and in patience. And guide and teach us in love.

and Amen. Amen. Let's ■ in ■■■■■■, let's see and again.

union, met you in Solomon. Amen. We went to verse Man, let's