

Luke 14:7-24 AM

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[0 : 0 0] Let us pray. Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight.

O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen. You may be seated. Amen. So gracious is Jesus that he comes to release us from everything that keeps us from receiving his rest and resting in his grace.

Would you join me, please, in Luke chapter 14? If you need to open the Bible again, it's on page 873. And Jesus brings this message to us, to people, at a dinner party on the Sabbath at a big-shot Pharisee's house.

So the Pharisees were the religious rulers of the day. They were the spiritual keeners. They were the Bible believers. And one of the rulers of the Pharisees had invited Jesus over, and Jesus accepted the invitation.

And my, oh, my, what an interesting dinner guest Jesus proves to be. He's a bit of a live wire. He's kind of like that unpredictable uncle at Thanksgiving dinner.

[1 : 2 2] You're never not quite sure if he's going to speak up, and when he does speak up, you're never quite sure what he's going to say. And you don't know if he's going to derail the conversation and kill the mood at the party. Well, in Luke chapter 14, Jesus doesn't disappoint.

We're told that the Pharisees, in verse 1, were watching Jesus carefully at this meal. They had invited Jesus to trap him. They were actually really hard at work on the Sabbath. But what we soon discover, and this is the point of our passage here, is that Jesus was actually watching the Pharisees fairly closely.

He has come to show them what they need to be released from in order to bring them rest and salvation and a freedom they do not presently have in their lives in order to release them from every form of self-righteousness that they've built their lives on.

And self-righteousness in this passage is supposed to be like it's the spiritual version of the physical disease of dropsy. It's a spiritual disease where we have an insatiable thirst to prove ourselves in the eyes of God and others.

And the more you feed it, the more it grows in your heart. The less satisfied you become with your life, and the more weary and tired you become as you seek to prove yourself to God and others until eventually you die in a full-strength yet futile attempt to save your own life.

[2 : 4 7] And so at this dinner party on the Sabbath, the day of rest, the Pharisees are watching Jesus, but Jesus shows them that he's actually been watching them. And they have come to trap Jesus, but he has come to set them free and give them true rest.

And the key question for us this morning that I think flows out of this is what is keeping us from receiving the rest that Jesus has come to offer us? Like what's holding me back from responding to Jesus' invitation?

What is hindering me from enjoying his grace? And Jesus does this in a really interesting way. He tells three parables.

And each of the parables is like a little picture that opens up a window into our hearts. It reveals something about us that hinders us from receiving what Jesus has come to bring.

And the point of Jesus revealing each of these things to us is that he wants us to then be released from them. So each parable is a revelation of something we need to be released from in order to receive Jesus' rest.

[3 : 5 1] And each parable is God's grace because he is seeking to release us through it. He wants to release us from three things. It's pride, calculating relationships, and ordinary yet very relatable

excuses.

So first he starts with pride in verse 7. Now he told a parable to those who were invited when he noticed how they had chose the places of honor.

Jesus notices that we have a way of constructing our lives and of relating to one another, even those of us that say we are the religious, in which we seek to exalt ourselves over others, to position ourselves, to place ourselves, to seek positions of prestige and power.

So Jesus here is highlighting, he's seeing how this is working as people are finding their seats at this dinner. And he says to them in verse 8, when you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor.

Basically, don't do what you're doing. Lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him. And he who invited you will come and say to you, give your place to this person, and then with shame you will have to take a lower place.

[5 : 10] He says instead, take the place of lower honor, the seat of lower honor, and then if anything happens, the host is going to come to you and say, friend, move up to a more honorable place.

And the point is made in verse 11, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Now this is really significant here.

Jesus is putting his pulse on something that goes deep into our own culture and deep into the culture of the ancient world. At meals in the ancient world, there was a place where friendship was expressed, but where reputations were maintained and honor was often gained.

So where you sit, especially in proximity to the host, communicates something about your position and your power and your significance in the life of the whole community.

Now this is something that can sometimes be hard for us to grapple with in Western cultures.

Because in Western individualism, who I am seems to rise and fall much more on what I do and accomplish in life.

[6 : 16] But in cultures of honor and shame, in communal cultures, who I am has to do with my position and my place and my reputation within the community. It has to do with what others think of me.

It has to do with who I'm connected to, my position and my place and my reputation in the community. And so what happens is life becomes all about upward mobility, the hope of gain, or saving face, keeping away the fear of loss.

Interestingly, I think this actually functions in our world a little bit today. The ancient, what happened at the ancient table in the ancient world, I think happens on social media today.

The exchange of honor, the positioning of ourselves in the world, what others think of us. It's who responded to my tweet, how many followers do I have on YouTube, who was interviewed on my favorite podcast or on my own podcast.

So much of this is the way in which we establish our honor and our value in the eyes of others. We build our reputations and our platforms, our sense of belonging and our significance in the world. So this is not something that is foreign to us.

[7 : 28] And Jesus basically says at this dinner table to all the guests, don't get caught up in the prideful honor game. It will steal your rest. It will feed your pride.

You will never be content. And it will keep you from seeing that my feast is not about what you can grab and grasp. It is all about what you can gain by receiving.

And that's the point of verse 11. That's the point of verse 11. He who exalts himself, he who seeks his own honor in this life is going to be humbled.

But he who humbles himself does not seek his own honor in this life. will actually be exalted and honored by the God in the end. So the real point of this parable is not that honor is a bad thing for us.

It's that we are not to seek our own honor in positions of prestige and reputation. We are to allow God to give us the honor that God wants us to receive from him.

[8 : 29] So, Jesus comes to us first and he says, you have to be humbled in order to be exalted later.

You have to intentionally place yourself in a position to receive the grace of God. You should no longer play into your pride. You need to be released from this constant positioning and seeking of honor.

And then the second thing that Jesus says as he goes on in verses 12 to 14 is he says, you need to be released from calculating relationships. I think this is connected, but he goes at the host in particular here.

Notice how scandalous this would have been for Jesus. He is standing up and he's going after the host that's invited him to this feast. Look what he says in verse 12.

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

[9 : 35] Notice reciprocity. 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 for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

This is very fascinating. Jesus, he highlights our tendency to think of relationships in terms of what I can gain from them. He puts his finger on our tendency not to see people as ends in themselves, but to see them as means to ends.

They're means. We use people in order to exalt ourselves, in order to boost our reputations. People are viewed as an opportunity to further myself and achieve my goals.

And Jesus says the whole guest list of the host that has invited him shows that he's living in this world of gift exchange. And the reason why he's extending gifts to others is because he wants to receive something in return from them.

So in reality, his generosity is in some sense really about him. Now, we could come away reading this parable thinking, oh man, I really need to invite different people over to my house.

[10 : 54] Right? And that may not be a bad thing. I think when the grace of God really settles into your heart, it actually transforms who you're willing to associate with and who is part of your friendship group.

But I would like to suggest that I don't think that's actually the main point at this point. I don't think Jesus is just saying we're supposed to be a different type of host than this host was.

I think Jesus wants us to see here that he is a very different type of host than this host is. It's not about how do we relate to people primarily, it's about how does Jesus relate to us.

And how Jesus relates to us should transform the way we relate to other people. But the point here is something about the nature of grace in the kingdom of God. It's saying Jesus does not offer us grace in order to get something out of us.

Jesus offers grace to people that he knows will never be able to repay him. There's no amount of work that they could do. There's no amount of gifts that they could offer him.

[11 : 59] They would make it seem to him, oh, this is a person I'm going to give grace to because they will be able to give this to me. With Jesus, it is not an I scratch your back, you scratch my back situation.

It's not I invite you to dinner, you invite me to dinner. And I think the point that's being made here is that God does not relate to us based on what he can get from us.

He's not like the host at the party whose reputation depends on us, who has something to gain from us. Everything he offers us is pure gift, and I think that means that salvation in the Christian life, the Christian life is not paying Jesus back for what he's given us, it's gratitude.

Just thankfulness. So Jesus not only seeks to release us from pride, but he seeks to release us from this understanding of grace which thinks that it's not free.

Which thinks that somehow I can pay God back for what he's given to me. which thinks that somehow I need to live a life of calculating relationships. And the third and final thing that Jesus seeks to release us from is he seeks to release us from excuses.

[13 : 11] And we see this in verses 16 to 24. He tells this parable of a great banquet and invites, a man invites many guests and when the banquet is ready he tells the guests, look, the feast is out on the table, the table is set, there's more chairs than you can imagine for people to come in, please come, it's time.

And one after another people give excuses. So look at verses 18 to 20. But they alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, I have bought a field and I must go out and see it.

Please have me excused. Second excuse, another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to examine them. Please have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come.

So the servant came and reported these things to the master and the master of the house became very angry. Isn't this interesting?

I'm going to suggest in a moment that I actually think there are kind of four excuses in this passage and this is just the first three but these are the most obvious ones and the most ordinary. Now if you really get an invitation from someone you really admire, you normally rearrange your schedule to be there, right?

[14:25] So if like Taylor Swift invited you over for dinner or maybe Taylor Swift isn't your thing, maybe you're more of a Bono person or LeBron James or Michelle Obama, you name it.

If somebody came and invited you over you would probably rearrange your schedule to be there, right? There's this wonderful little story of Eugene Peterson when he taught at Regent College where Bono actually was in town doing a concert and went to Regent to knock on his office door and invite him over for dinner.

He wanted to talk with him and Eugene heard about this and he basically had somebody send a message back to Bono saying I'm in the middle of translating Isaiah so I can't right now. And so he actually didn't go.

He actually didn't go to dinner with Bono. There's something about how you respond to an invitation that reveals your priorities, right? It reveals what your heart really values.

And there's something about these excuses that are in one sense so ordinary and so relatable to us. I think that's part of what's a bit disconcerting about this passage is on the one hand you have somebody saying I've got property to attend to, I've got work to do, I've got family that needs caring for.

[15:38] Like these are all good things, all good gifts from God. We might add a whole bunch of other things like I've got exams to study for, I've got applications to send in, I've got emails to respond to, I've got retirement to prepare for.

It's like all these things that are normal daily stuff of God that are good gifts from the Lord himself and yet there is this way in which the good gifts of God and the normal daily stuff of our lives can like a vine grow in our heart and take up more space in our heart than the Lord Jesus himself.

These things of the world kind of like in the parable of the sower, these cares of the world can end up taking up so much space in our heart that anxiety chokes out the spiritual life in us so that these good gifts of God actually kill our admiration for the Lord Jesus and our understanding of the magnitude of the grace that he's bringing to us.

And so part of what's so concerning about these excuses is how subtle they are and how relatable they are and how ordinary they are like any one of us could be saying these. And yet there's something about them that is actually a little more sinister if we look more deeply at them.

Notice how somebody says look I've bought a field I need to go inspect it. Who of you has bought a house before they've inspected the house? This person says I need to go I've bought some cattle I need to go check examine if they're strong and doing well.

[17:11] Who buys cattle without examining that the ox are strong and can do the work. There's a sense in which here the excuses actually have a sinister intent.

The people that are giving the excuses are actually in a sense shaming the host who is offering the invitation. They're saying to him I don't want or I don't need your generosity.

I've got things that are far more important to me. And that's why I think you see that the host gets angry. He's upset that people have refused his generosity.

He's upset that people don't think they need him. He's upset that people have rejected him because the great desire of his heart is for all to come into this magnificent banquet.

For all to be released from everything that keeps them from receiving his rest. For them to come join Jesus and his friends at the feast. And so we see that the host sends out wave after wave of invitations to more and more people like concentric circles going further and further to the outstretches and recesses of the place in which they leave and he's saying I want anybody and everybody to come because I want a full house.

[18:35] And it's really fascinating in verse 23 and I think this is where the fourth excuse I think might be hidden behind verse 23. He says and the master said to the servant in this final round of invitations go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled.

Did you notice that language of compel people to come in? Why would people need to be compelled to come in? I think part of the understanding here is I don't think this means that Jesus is wanting to force people to be his friends and join the feast because everything we see in the gospel is Jesus doesn't force anybody.

The only thing that keeps people from entering their feast is their unwillingness to receive the magnificent grace that he's brought for them. I think the key here is that Jesus is inviting more and more people that seem less and less likely in the eyes of the Pharisees to belong to the feast. And as it goes further and further out to people that seem less and less likely to receive the invitation it is more and more likely that people will feel unworthy to accept the invitation. And this is really significant in the ancient world because if you live in a world of reciprocity where it is expected if you are invited if somebody gives something magnificent to you you have to be able to reciprocate it to them or that will be a source of shame for you and shame for them then you're not going to accept this.

You're going to say I'm unworthy I'm poor I have nothing to offer this host I should actually refuse this invitation. And precisely the point here is that we don't have to have anything to offer to accept the invitation.

[20 : 26] And Jesus says the excuse that I'm unworthy have nothing to offer do not belong people need to be convinced that that is not an excuse because Jesus grace is different than all the other experiences they've had of people in the world.

I won't come because I don't need you was the excuses at the beginning I won't come because I can't offer you are the excuses at the end and both of them rest on the same reality of self-justification.

Living in a world where I am my own judge I remember one time when I was early in pastoral ministry in a different country I got a call one time from a dear spouse who said my spouse has just attempted to take their own life will you please come over I had no idea what I was doing but I got in the car and I went over to the house and sat with this couple as they weeped as they just wept and his attempt was not successful but he kept saying to me I'm not worthy I'm not worthy I've failed at work I've failed as a husband I've failed as a father I have nothing to offer anyone anymore and it was just self-loathing to the point of self-destruction and I think one of the big misconceptions about repentance in the Christian faith is that it is a form of self-loathing and self-misery it's just not true it's about acknowledging that I am not the judge of myself only God is

I'm not the judge who can exalt myself and I am not the judge who can say I am unworthy to be in Jesus' presence where there is pride there is great despair around the corner and both are based on the same fundamental conviction that I am my own judge and I can justify myself pride says that I'm better than others but despair says I'm worse than others and in the final verse of this parable Jesus explicitly says that he and he alone is the judge he says for I tell you none of those men who are invited shall taste my banquet he and he alone is the king notice how in verse 15 it starts with blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God and then it ends in verse 24 Jesus saying those who are will taste in my banquet so he's saying this kingdom of God banquet is actually mine I get to decide who is a part of it and I get to decide who receives the invitation so big picture here in chapter 13 of Luke

Jesus says enter through the narrow door you are being offered an invitation to a feast that is too great to deny don't delay come in and dine with me and then in chapter 14 Jesus is revealing more about this feast and in particular he's trying to reveal to us what is it that keeps you from entering in what is it keeps you from responding what is it that keeps you from receiving my rest and then in chapter 15 we're going to see that the biggest thing may be actually our view of who God is and so here in chapter 14 salvation is pictured like this great wedding feast a great banquet the host is inviting everybody he's eager for you to be there there are seats for everyone there's more grace than you could imagine everybody is invited as J.C. Ryle said more grace is given than there are hearts to receive it and the main point of the three parables is what is it in your life that is keeping you from receiving it what is it that's keeping you from resting in the grace that God has given you is it because you are bearing the weight of feeling that you have to build your own reputation that you have to seek honor that your life won't have significance unless you are above others is what's keeping you from receiving the grace of God because you're stuck in this cycle of calculating relationships where you think what you give is what you're going to get or what others give you is what you have to reciprocate and you have no categories for just receiving pure gift and responding

in gratitude and thankfulness realizing that everything has been given and everything has been received or is it the normal excuses of daily life whether it's

[25 : 12] I have family I have work I have things to attend to or simply I'm unworthy the question is what is keeping you from entering into the feast that Jesus is giving you and as we go to chapter 15 in Luke I think we're going to see and this is where I want to end that the real roadblock to accepting Jesus and enjoying his kingdom feast has to do with our view of God and his grace our view of God is too small too stingy too much like us we take our experience of human relationships and we project it on God what we need is Jesus to come to us and show us what God is really like what we need is Jesus to come to us and show us that God doesn't compete with us for honor so he's not afraid to humble himself before us and serve us on the cross and then exalt us in salvation what he needs to show us is that God doesn't have anything to gain from us he doesn't need anything from us and he doesn't invite us into his kingdom because we're going to boost his ego and build his reputation he just delights in blessing us he loves to offer us what we cannot return to him he loves welcoming those who will never be able to repay him everything he does is out of pure love for our benefit free of charge the only condition being that we will repent and receive it so one of the astonishing things in this whole chapter is that Jesus is a really bad dinner guest but it turns out that he's an incredible host he has an extended invitation that that world had never seen before and he was asking all the people present as he does today will you join my feast my brothers and sisters I speak these things to you in the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit amen