

The Lowest Place

Luke: Certainty of the Truth

Luke 14:1-35

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Who's watching who?

A couple of years ago, I started watching Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D on Netflix with Flannery and Ruby. We've been moving pretty slow. No binge watching. We just started season three on Friday night. S.H.I.E.L.D is a spy agency tasked with protecting the world from alien lifeforms and from Hydra, the Nazi-esque bad guys. Season three begins with the director of S.H.I.E.L.D, Phil Coulson, spying on Rosalind Price, the leader of another secret agency. He's studied her background. He's watched her every move and knows where he can trap her. Ultimately he corners her on a subway car. He thinks she's alone, but finds out that the passengers on the train are actually her agents. He's outnumbered. He hasn't trapped her; she's got him trapped. And she's been watching him too. In fact, she knows far more about Director Coulson than he knows about her.

In our passage this morning, we find Jesus, yet again, eating dinner at the house of a Pharisee. This time it's at the ruler of the Pharisees. We're told in verse 1 that the Pharisees were watching him carefully. They were spying on him. They were trying to trap him—to catch him doing something against their religious tradition. But what they find is that Jesus has them trapped. He's been watching them too. And he knows far more about what they're up to than they know about him.

Luke 14:1-24¹

¹One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ²And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" ⁴But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵And he said 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?" ⁶And they could not reply to these things.

⁷Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸"When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, ⁹and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

¹²He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

¹⁵When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

ready.’¹⁸ But they all 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.’¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’²⁰ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’²² And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’²³ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.’²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage is divided into four parts. There’s a healing at the dinner party (vv. 1-6). Then Jesus gives a discourse on humility (vv. 7-11). He continues his discourse and teaches them a lesson about hospitality (vv. 12-14). Finally, Jesus rounds out his teaching and gives a parable about the eternal dinner party (vv. 15-24).

A HEALING AT A DINNER PARTY (14:1-6)

Let’s start with the healing at the dinner party, in verses 1-6. This teaches us that those who reject Jesus are hypocrites.

Religious Hypocrisy

In order to catch Jesus, the Pharisees place a man with dropsy in front of him (v. 2).² They want to see if he’ll heal him on the Sabbath. When confronted with this man, Jesus asks the Pharisees a question. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” (v. 3)? The Pharisees didn’t say a word, because Jesus had impaled them on the horns of a dilemma.

You see, the Mosaic Law didn’t forbid healing on the Sabbath. But their religious traditions did. So if they say, “it’s not lawful to heal on the Sabbath,” they would be going against Scripture. But if they say, “it *is* lawful to heal on the Sabbath,” they would be going against their religious traditions.³ They thought they were going to trap Jesus, but he had them trapped. They couldn’t say a word (v. 4a).

So Jesus goes on and heals the man (v. 4b). Then Jesus turns it on them. He says, “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?” (v. 5)? The obvious answer is that they would pull out their son or their ox, regardless of what day it was. The point is also obvious. How much more should Jesus heal this man of dropsy, even on the Sabbath?

They were trying to expose Jesus, but Jesus exposed them. Jesus was holy; they were hypocrites. They wanted him to do something they weren’t willing to do. They wanted him to refrain from saving a sick man on the Sabbath, but they wouldn’t have refrained from saving their son or ox. So they were speechless (v. 6).

Ambrose Bierce was a well-known writer after the Civil War. The War led him to become a very cynical atheist. He wrote a book called *The Devil’s Dictionary* where he defines words with penetrating

² Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Luke*. The pillar New Testament commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2015.

³ Andrus, Mike. “[Table Talk](#).” Sermon, First Evangelical Free Church, July 31, 2005.

satire. This is how he defines a Christian: “One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the spiritual needs of his neighbor.”⁴

That’s a warning for us all. And it certainly applies to the Pharisees. They thought their rules applied to everybody—that is, everybody but themselves.

They were watching Jesus, but they couldn’t catch him doing anything wrong because he was spotless. They were the ones who were found out! They were hypocrites. Their intel on Jesus led to a dead-end. Jesus’ intel on them was spot on.

Spiritual Dropsy

In fact, they were the ones in need of healing. Many commentators throughout the centuries have seen the physical dropsy of the man in this story as an illustration for the spiritual dropsy of the Pharisees. Dropsy results in a person’s body being swollen with water. But even though they are full of water, they were always thirsty. In fact, the more a person with dropsy drinks the thirstier they become.⁵

The Pharisees were full of pride—pride of position and pride of possessions. But they were never satisfied. They always wanted more. The more attention or money they received, the more they wanted. They needed to be released of their pride, so they could receive the kingdom of God.

Jesus goes on to show this in the three sections that follow. Jesus talks about the kingdom of God using the metaphor of the table. He takes the very setting they’re in and uses it to teach them about what they needed in order to receive the kingdom of God.

If you’re here this morning, and you’re skeptical about Jesus, don’t allow your scrutiny of him to get in the way of his scrutiny of you. Allow this text to examine you.

A DISCOURSE ON HUMILITY (14:7-11)

Let’s turn now to Jesus’ discourse about humility in verses 7-11. This teaches us that we must humble ourselves to be exalted.

A dinner table in the ancient Near East would be shaped like a “U.” The host would sit at the bottom of the “U.” The most distinguished guest would sit on his left. The next on his right. Everybody else would sit around the sides.⁶

At the Pharisee’s table, Jesus saw that everybody was vying for position (v. 7). So he says that if you’re invited to a wedding feast, do not sit in a place of honor (v. 8). If you do, someone more important than you may show up late, and you’ll be kicked out of your seat and put in the lowest place (v. 9). It would be better to start in the lowest place and be moved up than to be demoted (v. 10).

Chuck Colson tells the story of General Alexander Haig, who was the White House Chief of Staff during the Nixon administration. General Haig was known for having an ego the size of Texas. But

⁴ Quoted in Garland, David E. *Luke*. Zondervan exegetical commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011.

⁵ Garland

⁶ Bock, Darrell L. *Luke*. The NIV application commentary. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1996.

on October 5, 1971, he was humbled. That night, he went to the Concert Hall at the Kennedy Center and decided he would sit in the Presidential Box. Can you imagine the pride he felt as he surveyed the crowd, which always looks up to see who's sitting in the Presidential Box. Little did he know that, on a last minute whim, President Nixon had decided to attend the concert.

The whole story is rather humorous, but we'll jump to the conclusion. Haig had to vacate the box and apparently spent the remainder of the evening standing in the hall because the concert was a sellout.⁷ What a shame! Literally.

It's better to begin in the lowest place and be moved up than to start in the highest place and be moved down. If you start at the bottom, there's only one way to go. The cream always rises to the top. The humble will be exalted.⁸ That's what Jesus says in verse 11. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." And that's what Peter says in 1 Peter 5:5-6. "Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you..."

Jesus saw right through the Pharisees. And he sees right through us. The only way to enter the kingdom of God is to humble ourselves.

But how do we come to a point where we see our need for humility? How can we avoid the error of the Pharisees? J.C. Ryle says "The root of humility is right knowledge. The man who really knows himself and his own heart—who knows God and his infinite majesty and holiness—who knows Christ and the price at which he was redeemed—that man will never be a proud man."⁹

We need to see God clearly. He's holy. And when we see God clearly, we'll see ourselves clearly. We'll see that we're sinners. And when we see that we're sinners, we'll see our need for Jesus. And when we see what Jesus did for us, when we survey the wondrous cross, how in the world can we remain proud?

In Philippians 2, Paul tells us to humble ourselves. And the way he tells us to do that is to think about Jesus. "Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (vv. 6-11).

If we want to enter the kingdom of God, we have to place our faith in Jesus. We have to trust what he did on the cross for us. And that requires humility. And doesn't it make sense that those, who are now followers of Jesus, would continue to live lives of humility, like Jesus. We must take our seat in the lowest place now, knowing we'll be exalted on the last day.

⁷ Andrus

⁸ Andrus

⁹ Ryle, J.C.. "[Luke chapter 14](#)." in *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel*. Mongerism.com.

A DISCOURSE ON HOSPITALITY (14:12-14)

Let's look now at Jesus' discourse on hospitality in verses 12-14. These verses teach us that we must look to the interests of others.

In verse 12, Jesus says, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid." Why does Jesus say that we shouldn't invite our friends and family to dinner? Why does he prohibit us from having wealthy people over? That seems a little extreme.

But I don't think he's saying that we *can't* invite these people to dinner. His point is that we shouldn't *exclusively* invite people to dinner who can repay us or reciprocate. And more to the point, we shouldn't *exclude* the needy (v. 13). Do not exclude those who can't repay you or reciprocate.

It's all about motives. When you think of hospitality, are you thinking about what you can *give* or what you can *get*? Do you like being seen with important people? Or at least talking about being with important people? Do you like people telling you what a great cook you are or how lovely your house is? Do you want to network with important people so you can further your business ventures? When you invite people to a meal, is it really about them or is it all about you?

Now don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with taking a prospective client to lunch or befriending the wealthy. They need friends too! And there's certainly nothing wrong with having your family over for dinner. Again, Jesus wants to know what your motive is. Where's your heart?

Jesus is driving at the need for humility in this whole passage. And one way we can check our humility is by looking at our motives in hospitality.

If you were to examine your guest list over the last year, what would you find? How many have you had over who are below your social level? How many that you didn't know well? How many were truly needy and unable to return any favors? How many were unbelievers that you were trying to reach? Or perhaps some of you need to ask, "Have I had any guests at all?"¹⁰

All of these questions can help probe into your heart. Do you have a humble heart or do you have a heart that is driven by your advancement?

In Mike Andrus' sermon on this passage he says, "The best hospitality is *given* not exchanged." Jesus' point is that humble hospitality will look to the needs of others instead of our own needs. Humble hospitality will seek repayment by God in the end, at the resurrection of the just (v. 14), not now.

You see, all of this pushes on our understanding of grace. As we'll see in just a minute, Jesus has invited us to an eternal dinner party. And there's nothing we can do to repay him. We didn't deserve being invited. We should never have been on the guest list. But we are!

If we understand that grace, we'll be humbled. And then we'll show the same kind of grace. We won't do things for others to advance our own interests. In humility, we'll consider Christ, and look to the interests of others.

¹⁰ Andrus

A PARABLE ABOUT AN ETERNAL DINNER PARTY (14:15-24)

So, we've seen Jesus expose the spiritual drowsy of the Pharisees. They're swollen with pride. And they can't get enough recognition and money. Jesus has shown their great need for healing! And he's done this by exposing the way they go about attending a dinner party and inviting people to a dinner party.

But now Jesus turns to a parable about the *eternal* dinner party in verses 15-24. He wants to show how they'll respond to his hospitality. How will they respond to his invitation to the great heavenly banquet?

This is what we learn: We must accept Jesus' invitation without excuses.

Have you ever had a bunch of people over for dinner and one of your guests completely does something that makes everybody feel uncomfortable? That's kind of what Jesus is doing at this party. He starts by offending everybody there by healing a man on the Sabbath. Then he starts criticizing everybody there.

One man in the crowd is thinking "this is really awkward." And so he tries to change the subject. In verse 15 he says, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

But Jesus doesn't let up. This man, being a good Jew, obviously thinks he'll eat bread in the kingdom of God. He thinks he'll sit at the table at the eternal banquet. But Jesus says, unless you respond favorably to *my* invitation to that dinner, you won't taste the food that's going to be there (v. 24).

Excuses, Excuses

He makes this point by telling a parable. There were all kinds of people who were invited to this banquet (v. 16). But when the servant went to call people to eat (v. 17), the people on the guest list started making excuses (v. 18a). Jesus highlights three.

One guy said that he'd just purchased a field and needed to go look at it (v. 18b). Now that's kind of strange. Who would purchase land without looking at it first. And even if he had, the field would still be there the next day, after the banquet. Clearly he didn't want to come to the party. I see this as the excuse of possessions. Our stuff can prevent us from being effective disciples. It may be a vacation home, it may be a hobby, it may be sports, but "things" are allowed to keep us from getting serious with God.

The next guy's excuse was his career. He said that he'd just bought five yoke of oxen and he was on his way to try them out (v. 19). This man's a farmer. His business is obviously booming. And he can't be bothered by a dinner party. How many people are so wrapped up in their career that they don't have time for Jesus? It's a common excuse.

The third excuse is family. This guy had just gotten married, so he couldn't come (v. 20). This is completely bogus. In Deuteronomy 24:5 we learn that the Mosaic Law gave newlyweds a year off of work to focus on their marriage. This guy wasn't busy. He had all the freedom in the world to come to the banquet. But he didn't want to be there. Again, family is so often used as an excuse in our day to neglect our relationship with Jesus.¹¹

¹¹ All three from Andrus

And like work, it's a sneaky excuse. You see, work and family are good things. But how often do good things get in the way of ultimate things—the things of eternal life. The road to hell is not primarily paved with great crimes and scandals. The road to hell is primarily paved with inverted priorities and excuses

Our possessions, our work, and our family are the main excuses Jesus lists for neglecting his invitation to eternal life. But there are others. Some say it's because they were wounded by the church as a child. Or that they can't take all the hypocrites in the church. Others say they'll wait until they're older. Some want to consider other religions.¹²

What are the excuses that are keeping you from Jesus invitation to eternal life? What's keeping you from getting right with God?

At the bottom line, all of our excuses are an exhibition of our pride. Maybe we think we don't need God's mercy because we're pretty good people. Maybe we think other things in our life are more important than God. All of this is pride.

Only the spiritually hungry will eat.

So what does Jesus do in the face of excuses? Look at verse 21. "So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'"

In Luke the physically needy become a picture of those who are spiritually needy. And what is needed to enter the kingdom of God? What is needed to respond to Jesus' invitation to eternal life? We must realize our spiritual need! We must realize that all of us are spiritually poor, spiritually crippled, blind, and lame. Like the man healed of dropsy, we need healed of pride. But we have to *know* that we're spiritually needy. And only those who are spiritually hungry will eat at the banquet of Jesus.

In fact, in verses 26-35, we learn that if you want to be Jesus' disciple, you have to take up your cross and follow Jesus (v. 27). That is, you have to die to yourself and be humble.

We also see that if you want to be Jesus' disciple, you have to renounce everything (v. 33). And that includes renouncing your pride of position and pride of possessions.

You have to see you're a sinner in need of salvation. You have to look to Jesus who died to pay for your sins. Bottom line: you can't hold on to what you have. You can't hold on to your morality. And you can't hold on to your position and possessions. You have to let go of it all and cling to Christ.

Unless you respond to Jesus' invitation in humility, you will not participate in the eternal feast with Jesus. I urge you to respond today.

¹² Andrus