

It's All About the Supper

Luke 14:1-24

On a particular Sabbath Day Jesus was invited to supper in the home of a Pharisee. It is said of the Pharisees who were present that they watched Him closely. Jesus was more than aware of what was going on and I think we could fairly say that He accepted the challenge.

First, there was a plant at the party, a man was brought in who was obviously ill. Dropsy is the old name for the medical condition of retaining water. A person with a serious case of dropsy would have noticeably swollen feet and ankles, as well as the abdomen, hands and wrists. A person so afflicted would have difficulty moving and even breathing. In view of Jesus' habit of healing without restraint on the Sabbath and the Pharisee's insistence that this violated the Law, it was clearly a set-up. But the man was genuinely ill and regardless of the motives of the Pharisees, the man would have viewed the opportunity to see Jesus as a chance to be healed. He certainly hoped to be noticed and helped. So when Jesus saw him, he asked the room, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" This was what they were all watching for, would Jesus heal the man? Would He have the nerve to heal on the Sabbath in the home of a Pharisee? No one answered Jesus' question. They just waited and so Jesus healed him immediately and without hesitation. Then He said, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath Day?" Everyone understood the argument made by Jesus' question. If you would "work" on the Sabbath to save your animal wouldn't it also be right to "work" to save a soul? Their silence was an admission of their own insincerity.

Put yourself into the room. Jesus, the guest upon whom every eye rests has posed a question, healed a man, and then made an argument that has silenced everyone present. What happens next? My guess is more uncomfortable silence. So far, things have not gone well for the Pharisee faction. Did they have a plan B? We will never know because Jesus spoke into the awkward silence and raised the

tension in the room. "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Jesus did not speak these words into a vacuum but into a room full of people who were always jockeying for position and for their own advantage. Jesus' advice was spoken into the awkward silence of those who were engaged in the very activity that Jesus described.

But is sitting in the lowest place a false humility when you know that you "rank" higher than that? Actually, our actions can have a great influence on our attitude. An act of humility will lead toward a humble spirit and an act of arrogance will probably be consistent with a prideful spirit. When I started coaching Lizzy's basketball team, I wanted them to learn to be aggressive when playing the game. So, I had them work on what I called aggression drills. Roll the ball between the players and have them fight to get control of it. Have 2 players start with their hands on the ball and have them wrestle over control of it. And so on... At one point I had them line up for the next exercise and one of the kids cut the line. I applauded her and said, that's aggressive! Actions will change your attitude. You cannot be nice and polite and be a good basketball player while you are playing basketball. Obviously, basketball players have to learn how to compartmentalize their aggression if they are also going to be nice people. Jesus taught the crowd to practice humility and that by doing so they would be able to set aside their spirits of entitlement. Losing that spirit of entitlement, or lowering your expectations is one of the most effective steps that you can take toward personal happiness and satisfaction. If I sit in the lowest place and stay there then I am in the seat that I chose and why should I be unhappy about that. If I am asked to move, then I will not be moving to something worse and again, why should I be unhappy about that? High expectations lead to great disappointments.

So far, the supper has been a strange experience of Jesus speaking truth into an awkward silence. The awkwardness represents resistance to Jesus and to anything that He might say. But Jesus has not just said anything, He has spoken directly to their weaknesses. And they have had no answer. Into this silence Jesus spoke once more. "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

The only poor, maimed, lame or blind person present was the one they brought in to set up Jesus so that He would heal on the Sabbath Day. Those who had been invited to the supper received the invitation as a vindication of their importance. Their presence at the supper where they could watch Jesus in order to catch Him in some mistake was evidence of their status and significance. They saw themselves as gaining God's approval just by being who they were in the place where they were. So, again Jesus spoke into awkward silence to demonstrate that they were quite mistaken. If one were to throw a supper in order to gain the approval of heaven, then it would not look like this, Jesus was saying. A supper pleasing to God would be for the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind, the people who could never pay you back for the favor.

Jesus was not saying that you should not have family dinners or that you should never have your friends over, not at all. But He was saying, when you do have your friends over, don't fool yourself. This is not what ministry looks like. Ministry takes the blessings of God and distributes them to those who are in need of them.

And then, out of the awkward silence, a voice was heard, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!" This was a voice of protest. What will it be like to eat bread in the Kingdom? Won't we all be there? Won't it look like this? What do you mean Jesus that this is not a spiritual gathering? How could you say that our being together in this way does not please God?

So Jesus answered, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come for all things are ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them, I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded and yet there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. for I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste of my supper.'"

The subject of Jesus' story was that brought up by the voice of protest. Jesus described the experience of the great supper of the kingdom as different than what was expected. They thought, looking around at each other with the certain exception of Jesus and whoever was "with" Him that the supper will be like this since we are all going to be there. Jesus described instead, a supper where the invited guests all made excuses rather than showing up. God will throw the party, Jesus was saying but you will all find a reason not to come. This was what was happening. Jesus was the party but they would not join Him. His teaching was clear and correct but they refused to admit the obvious. The void they left was being filled by the ones they despised, "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." These were the cursed people, the sinners who were unworthy. Jesus welcomed them. It was more important to Jesus to take care of the man with dropsy than it was to be on good terms with the Pharisees. Unhindered by their boycott, God will find a crowd to enjoy the great supper of the Kingdom.

We cannot take our spiritual opportunity for granted. God's call is urgent. You and I are not essential. If you and I do not respond in obedience to our Christ, He will find others. And they may be people that we were convinced could never do the job. Life is complicated. But keep it simple and put God first.