

Luke's Gospel (continued)

Incidents in the Pharisee's House, Luke 14:1-24

Welcome to our talk on Incidents in the Pharisee's House from Luke's Gospel chapter 14 verses 1-24. We will consider these verses in four sections as follows:

- Religion versus Doing Good, verses 1 - 6
- Pride versus Humility, verses 7 - 11
- Food Banks and Caring for those in Need, verses 12 – 14
- A Mega Feast, Despised but Grace Triumphs, verses 15-24.

Religion versus Doing Good

We will read verses 1-6, *Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him and let him go. Then He answered them, saying, 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? And they could not answer Him regarding these things.*

These verses open with a situation that was not unusual when the Lord Jesus Christ was here. An invitation to a Pharisee's house. A previous occasion is recorded in chapter 7 where the incident is very different. There, forgiveness was the subject of the Lord's ministry. Here we have compassion being shown in the healing of a man who was suffering from dropsy or, as we would know the condition today, water retention in parts of the body.

There were others included in the invitation as we noticed from the above verses. What was unusual in biblical times, was an invitation on the Sabbath day. Now the Sabbath was a day of rest and here we have an invitation which would require additional activity. On the surface, we might consider this invitation as a kindness showing hospitality to the Lord. However, the scriptures record that they were watching the Lord Jesus. So, combining the Sabbath with a man who had an illness, we see that this was an occasion not so much as an act of kindness but an occasion to see the Lord's reaction. Would the Lord break the strict rules of the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath? Hypocrisy becomes blatantly obvious!

The Lord Jesus, being God the Son, was aware of their motives; nothing is hidden from God. The Lord Jesus initially challenges the Pharisees and Lawyers as to whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath day. But these religious people stayed silent. Therefore, the Lord was compassionate to the unwell man and heals him. Then He turns to those who had stayed silent and puts to them an everyday farming community problem. An animal has fallen into a pit, using the illustration of a donkey or an ox, both of which were valuable animals. If this happened, even on a Sabbath day, would they not immediately organise and deliver the animal from the dangerous situation? In both

situations, the man and the animal, needed help. We all have a responsibility to care for animals and a greater responsibility to show compassion to other people.

In the Jewish society of the day, many of the leaders devised restrictions, based on their interpretation of their religious law, and applied the restrictions often to others but not to themselves. Paul, in Romans chapter 2 verse 1, captures this same issue when he writes, *Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practise the same things.* What you say must be the same as what you practise! The Lord Jesus had put two questions to the people assembled in the Pharisee's house. They would not answer the first, hoping to trap the Lord into breaking their version of God's law. In the second question, they are silenced because the Lord showed them their own hypocrisy.

This is a challenge to us all. Are we rightly understanding God's word and do our lives demonstrate to non-Christians a consistency with what we believe?

Pride versus Humility

Let us read the next few verses 7-11, *So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honourable 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.*

One of the features of our nature is to think that we are more important than maybe we are. This is especially true if we have positions of importance because of wealth, natural abilities, place of authority in our employment or career or even in our social standing in the community. We may assume, therefore, that when we receive an invitation to some event that we will be given some place of prominence.

Earlier the people who were invited to the Pharisee's home had contrived a situation to cause both embarrassment to the Lord Jesus and most probably to accuse Him of breaking their strict view of the Sabbath. We have seen how the Lord Jesus dealt simply with the situation and showed their hypocrisy. At the same time, the Lord had observed how the people exhibited pride in seeking the best places at the feast. Pride can be a dangerous thing and when a believer is carried away with such thoughts you can guarantee that Satan will endeavour to use it to cause embarrassment and failure. This will have a negative impact upon the Christian testimony and could hinder any opportunity to reach people with the message of salvation.

The Lord Jesus seeks to remove the element of pride by encouraging an attitude of humility. Taking the low place as Jesus indicates and being content in that situation removes the opportunity for Satan to spoil the testimony. Should the host consider that you need to take a better place, then that is his right and gives honour to you the guest.

When the Lord Jesus came into this world He was marked by lowly surroundings, living in despised Nazareth, never having even a 'penny' to His name, owned no property and had nothing to leave in a will after His death. Yet this same person was none other than the Lord of glory and He owned the whole of creation, He had every right to take the chief place in every situation. Today the Lord Jesus is in the most exalted place in heaven having been raised by the glory of the Father.

We are encouraged to be like our Lord and Master as far as this world is concerned - not seeking a place where the Lord was hated, rejected and crucified. This is challenging in a world which is largely governed by a 'me first' attitude.

Food Banks and Caring for those in Need

Verses 12-14, Then He also said to him who invited Him, When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbours, 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.

We have an economic climate in the world today that has affected many people detrimentally and it is not confined to the United Kingdom. One manifestation of this economic situation in the U.K. has been the appearance of food banks. Concerned citizens and communities realised that many individuals and families were adversely affected so, acting on compassion they have started food distribution centres, commonly known as food banks. Seeing the inability of government agencies to adequately provide for those in need, appeals were made for individuals to contribute food. This has also been taken up by some supermarkets providing food that was nearing its use by date rather than waste the produce.

The Lord Jesus has addressed the people who went after the best places at the feast; now He turns His attention to the Pharisee who had given Him the invitation. The Lord Jesus seeks to re-focus the Pharisee's attention upon those who were in need - not his rich friends who had enough means to respond with an invitation of their own but to those who could not do so. The Lord very pointedly refers to the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. Poverty was a reality in the Lord's day and poverty was exacerbated when there was a health affliction. No National Health Service in Israel then! Israelites were expected to look after those who were poor; it was their duty to do so. The Lord Jesus said that there will always be poor people and two thousand years of progress has not eliminated poverty. Homelessness, sleeping rough, begging on the streets in towns and cities are some of the symptoms of poverty. Families and sometimes single parents are trying to make ends meet because the various welfare payments and basic or living wage still falls short of what they need.

We might not have the ability to invite the poor and disadvantage to a feast but there are plenty of other ways to provide some help to those in need. The above reference to food banks is one such opportunity. Christianity is about two basic issues. Preaching the message of salvation to those who need their sins forgiven and, consequently, doing good works. Good works spring from a heart of love. Having experienced God's love, when it was undeserved, and knowing Christ as Saviour changes people for the better.

A Mega Feast, Despised but Grace Triumphs

Verses 15-24, Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God! Then He said to him, 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 now 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 still 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 my supper.

We now find that one of the people who listened to what the Lord had just said about showing kindness to the poor, said, *Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!* In response to this statement the Lord Jesus uses another parable to bring home more teaching relevant to the Kingdom of God, but at the same time He enlarges upon what He has already brought to the attention of the Pharisee about having concern for the poor.

We are not told who the certain man was, but we do gain a lot from the words 'a great supper'. 'Great' is the Greek word 'mega' and it means that the supper was extensive in every way. Many are invited, the amount of food would be enormous and of the very best and the feast would be for many hours. So we deduce that the man was extremely wealthy, and his house had the space to entertain a very large crowd. A huge number of people were invited. As was the custom in some countries when the time was right for people to come, servants went out to give again the invitation and formally conduct the guests to the banquet. No doubt, much to the surprise of the servants, when they arrived to bring the guests to the banquet, all without exception had excuses for not being able to come.

We are given three examples of the excuses. The refusals are polite and perhaps valid in their place but not when all had been given an initial invitation. The man was great as indicated by the great supper prepared. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that those invited despised the man and his invitation. The servants report back to their master that his invitation had been rejected by all. This causes anger in his heart and he orders his servant to go out into the streets and lanes of the city to bring into his house the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. Let us not miss the connection with the previous conversation the Lord had with the Pharisee about whom he should invite to his house. It is the same kind of people. None of these refuse. But there is still room at the banquet. So, the order goes out beyond the city to the countryside, the highways and hedges, and this time the servant is to compel them to come in to the feast. The master wanted his house to be filled!

Let us just remind ourselves of the excuses. The first excuse was the purchase of land and it had to be looked at. Property is not going to disappear; it would still be there the next day or the day after. The only change might be that the grass had grown a little more. This was certainly a very feeble excuse to refuse this man of wealth. The second excuse was the purchase of animals, ten oxen, presumably for his farm. The man needed to check that the animals were suitable for his requirements on the farm. Even today animals purchased are only acquired after they have been carefully examined prior to the auction. The auction is the place where the seller is hoping for a good price. So, the ten oxen had already been deemed fit and suitable. This was another lame excuse on which to refuse the invitation. The last excuse was the issue of having married a wife and this was used as a reason to refuse the invitation. The Jewish law did give a man exemption from joining the army for the first twelve months after marriage, but this was not a valid reason to refuse this invitation. It was obvious that those initially invited despised the invitation and did not want to go and would use any reason to reject the invitation.

How like the response of many today to God's Gospel invitation to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. Excuses innumerable are used to turn away from the blessing that God holds out to mankind. What about the poor, maimed, lame and blind? This sad description of people highlights need, people who are unable to help themselves. Heaven will be full of people who recognise that they cannot in themselves deal with the fact that they are sinners. They must look outside of themselves to find help in their desperate situation of need. For the evangelist who is involved in

the proclamation of the glad tidings of God's grace, we are told that they must both bring in the lost and compel the lost into the Kingdom of God – God's house is to be filled.

There is however a very solemn warning. The master states categorically that those initially invited will not taste his supper. It is a very serious thing to refuse the Gospel invitation. Every time there is a refusal of God's offer of salvation there is a hardening of the heart to God's entreaty. Eventually the heart will become so hardened that there is no more hope and a lost eternity awaits that person. Those who had slighted the banquet invitation had reached that point in their lives and the master proclaims they will not come into his house ever. In our chapter verse 15 states, *Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!* The house is a picture of the Kingdom of God, the banquet is eating bread in that Kingdom and being blessed is the happy enjoyment of those in the Kingdom.

In summary, we have the Lord teaching that man's religious rituals are in opposition to God's grace as in the healing of the man with water retention. There should be no restrictions to doing good to any person. Do not over estimate your own self-importance; take a lowly place and let others promote you higher. Have a care and concern for those that are less well off as many people do today with our example of food banks. Finally, make sure you do not miss out on God's invitation for eternal blessing. Accept the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour today. There is no greater privilege than to live for the Lord Jesus day by day because He is the one who gave up His life for your blessing.

Thank you for listening to Truth for Today, talk 1108, Incidents in the Pharisee's house.

New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated

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