

Luke 14A

- End of Chapter 13, we witnessed the point where Jesus declared
 - Israel had lost their opportunity
 - He would not grant them the kingdom until they declared Him to be their Messiah
- And now that Luke has given us this dramatic turn, where does he go next?
 - Well there are still quite a few chapters remaining before the crucifixion
 - Which means the lens of Luke's gospel begins to narrow considerably and time slows a bit
 - We focus down on Christ's teaching to his chosen ones as He prepares to leave them to difficult task of building the church
 - So these lessons in the following chapters are especially relevant to Christians then and today
 - The lessons come mainly through parables spoken to the disciples and crowd
 - And in the form of Jesus' confrontations with the Jewish and Roman authorities
- And just like with Chap 13, the first half or so of Chap 14 is completely unique to Luke, so let's dive into Chapter 14 and follow Luke as he moves forward in his narrative

[Luke 14:1](#) ¶ It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on *the* Sabbath to eat bread, they were watching Him closely.

[Luke 14:2](#) And there in front of Him was a man suffering from dropsy.

[Luke 14:3](#) And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"

[Luke 14:4](#) But they kept silent. And He took hold of him and healed him, and sent him away.

- Here again Luke records a moment when Jesus accepts an invitation to eat with the Pharisees
 - Like we've learned in the past, anytime the Pharisees offered Jesus the chance to share a meal, the atmosphere was never cordial nor the purposes benign
 - The Pharisees had two primary purposes in extending the invitation
 - First, they enjoyed portraying themselves to the crowds as generous and hospitable, especially toward a popular figure like Jesus
 - Secondly, they hoped to find an opportunity trap Jesus in something worthy of punishment under the Law
 - Look at how Jesus begins in verse 1
 - They were watching Him closely
 - Watching = paratereo = observe scrupulously
 - And Jesus wasn't accepting the invitation merely for the sake of a free meal
 - He certainly knew their intentions
 - And even more interestingly, He would purposely walk straight into their traps
 - Yet He never committed any sin so as to give them opportunity to make their accusation
 - And the confrontations gave Him opportunity to point out their hypocrisy and sin
 - Luke (alone) records that Jesus is confronted by this man with dropsy
 - Though the text doesn't say specifically, the language Luke uses here strongly suggests that the man was placed in front of Jesus by the Pharisees to trap Jesus
 - First, note how Luke says that "there in front of Jesus was a man" – suggesting the man is placed there conspicuously

- BTW, Dropsy is an antiquated term for edema – a swelling of tissues due to fluid retention – usually extremities
- Can be caused by malfunctioning of the lymph systems, heart or kidney failure
- This condition was commonly believed to be the result of immorality, so people with this condition generally received little sympathy
- This is a Sabbath meal in a home
 - Which means the Pharisees would not normally have opened their home to a man seen as immoral
 - Making his presence before Jesus even more suspicious
- Basically, it seems clear that the Pharisees have set up this entire moment specifically for the purpose of enticing Jesus into healing on the Sabbath
 - Something they considered to be wrong under the law
- So how does Jesus react?
 - Jesus begins as He often did
 - He asks a question of His would-be accusers
 - He asks them is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?
 - Now the question was simple enough
 - And had anyone else asked the question at any other time, the Pharisees wouldn't have hesitated to answer Jesus
 - They would have said no, it's not lawful
 - In fact, they have had confrontations with Jesus over this same issue at times past
 - The Pharisees don't answer – they remain silent
 - They were intimidated into silence
 - Had they answered no, they would have been expected to support their conclusion

- And there was no direct reference in the Law to support their conclusion
- And having seen Jesus' knowledge and command of scripture, they dared not invite a confrontation with Him over the legalities of the Sabbath
- On the other hand if they had said yes, it was lawful to heal, then they lose the chance to accuse Him
- When they don't answer Him, He does the merciful thing and heals the man, which must have been a very dramatic moment
 - It must have resulted in obvious physical changes in the man
 - The Pharisees couldn't help but marvel at the healing even as they hated Him for it
 - Then Jesus does something very interesting
 - It says he sent the man away
 - Presumably this took place before the meal even began or at least before it finished
 - So, as Jesus dismisses the man, in effect Jesus was saying to the Pharisees that I know you brought him here merely as a pawn in your fight with me
 - So Jesus gives the Pharisees what they wanted and then let's the man leave
 - In effect, Jesus highlights the fact that the Pharisees had no real interest in the man's company – which only added to their hypocrisy
- After the man leaves, Jesus turns his attention back to the Pharisees

[Luke 14:5](#) And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"

[Luke 14:6](#) And they could make no reply to this.

- Jesus' challenge to the Pharisees mirrors one recorded in Matthew during another Sabbath day healing recorded in Matt 12

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[Matt. 12:11](#) And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?"

[Matt. 12:12](#) "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

- As Matt records this different incident, he captures Jesus giving the conclusion we all anticipated
 - The Sabbath was giving by God for men that they might benefit from earthly rest
 - And more importantly, the Sabbath day was given to men so that they might understand it as a shadow, a picture of their Savior, who was to become our spiritual rest
 - A believer rests from his works because he rests in the work of Jesus on the cross
 - But here's Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, the one the Sabbath pictures
 - Doing the work that only He can do
 - And so when the One who is the living reality of the Sabbath comes to do the Father's will, then that work cannot be opposed to any Law given by that same Father
 - His work of mercy was consistent with the purpose of the Sabbath – to give men rest in the ultimate sense of the word
 - Rest from work, from judgment, from sin, and from the effects of sin
 - Doing this good could never be inconsistent with God's purposes in giving the Sabbath day
 - Of course the Pharisees had so distorted the meaning of the Sabbath that it had become a yoke

- A burden on the people that actually restricted the opportunity to do good
- And Jesus' example illustrated not only the Pharisees' distorted perspective but also their hypocrisy
- And naturally, the Pharisees could make no reply to this
 - In other words, Jesus had disarmed them in the moment
 - They could not turn His healing into a cause for making an accusation
- Now Luke moves forward into a new moment during this same Sabbath dinner

[Luke 14:7](#) ¶ And He *began* speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor *at the table*, saying to them, [Luke 14:8](#) “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, [Luke 14:9](#) and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give *your* place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. [Luke 14:10](#) “But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. [Luke 14:11](#) “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- This event occurs apparently during the same Sabbath meal that began the chapter
- As the meal begins, Jesus observes something curious
 - We're told He sees some of the guests picking out places of honor around the table
 - In Jesus day, an important meal of this kind would normally take place around a low table only a few inches off the ground
 - The table was shaped like a U
 - The host would recline at the bottom of the U, facing to the left
 - And the guests would be positioned around the U also reclining to the left

- The most honored positions were the positions immediately next to the host
 - The least honored were farthest away at the ends of the U
- So the guests were seeking to claim positions near the host
 - What this meant was they were also presuming how much honor they had in the host's eyes
 - It's like someone who sits down at their computer and created their own high school diploma, prints it out and hangs it on their wall
 - They are attempting to appropriate an honor that can't be obtained merely by appearances
 - No matter how close they sit to the host, it won't change the actual amount of honor that they are truly owed
 - So, as Jesus teaches, when the host finally decides to recognize the ones who are truly due honor, the imposters are going to be exposed
 - And they won't be allowed to gain honor in illegitimate ways
 - The point here is that pride can often be a dishonest shortcut but in a day to come, the truth will be known by all
- Since we know that Jesus taught this parable in response to the guests' inappropriate behavior,
 - It's important that we ask who were these guests
 - Were they just the Pharisees mentioned earlier in this chapter?
 - I have a theory about who the primary audience was for this teaching in that moment
 - And I don't believe it was the Pharisees
 - Obviously, the Pharisees were supposed to hear this message too, since we know they were there too, but only in a limited sense
 - While they might appreciate the simple ethical point of humility, Jesus didn't expect them to gain the benefit of the underlying spiritual meaning of this parable

- So if not the Pharisees, who was the true audience?
- Well, look again at some of the details of Jesus' teaching
 - First, for the setting of the parable, Jesus chooses a wedding feast, which is different than the moment at hand, a Sabbath meal
 - So He must have a reason for changing the setting
 - If His only purpose in teaching the parable was to correct their dining etiquette, He wouldn't have needed to change the setting
 - So, the reasonable conclusion is that the setting has significance to understanding the meaning of the parable and identifying the audience
- A wedding feast is a common picture of the celebration to be held upon Jesus' marriage to His Bride, the Church
 - In Matt 22, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a man who gave wedding feast for his son
 - In Matt 25, Jesus refers to a day to come when the bridegroom will return for his brides, but only those ready and waiting for him will be taken away for the wedding
 - Just a chapter earlier in Luke we heard Jesus talking about a day when the patriarchs will feast at the Lord's table together with people from all the nations of the world
 - The OT as well often uses the picture of a wedding feast as the moment of glory for the sons of Israel
 - So, if the occasion is a wedding feast, we must be talking about those who have been invited to participate
 - In other words, the church
 - In fact the word church (ekklesia), two Greek words that mean made from invited guests
 - And more specifically the disciples, since they would have no doubt been invited to this meal with Jesus
- So the true audience for the parable were the disciples as you and I today and not the Pharisees

- Remember Jesus' words to the Pharisees recorded elsewhere in John's gospel

[John 8:47](#) "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God."

- Furthermore, Jesus tells the disciples in Matt 13 that he speaks in parables so that the Pharisees won't understand the true spiritual meaning of his teaching
- So, the Pharisees get nothing more out of Jesus' teaching than the ethical and practical lesson in the parable
- So what is Jesus teaching the church (and more specifically the disciples)?
- The parable says that guests invited to the wedding invitation will be seated according to honor
 - But it will be an honor that the host decides, not one that the guests themselves can decide for themselves
 - In fact, if they think too much of themselves, they risk humiliation when the host reveals their true measure of honor
 - So a smart guest will practice humility, and leave it to the host to bestow any honor
 - For whoever humbles himself, he will be exalted, and whoever exalts himself, will be exalted
 - In passing, I should note that this statement can also be used to explain the two different eternal outcomes due believers and unbelievers
 - A believer is one who has humbled himself before God, confessed his sin and unworthiness, and so God will lift him up to glory
 - Conversely, the unbeliever remains stubbornly proud and unrepentant, and so he will face judgment, the ultimate humbling experience

- But what about believers, what's the message here? And why does Luke place this teaching here?
 - Well, the full answer to that question awaits the conclusion of this chapter, but for now we can say this much
 - From the end of Chapter 13, Jesus is going to refocus his teaching in two ways.
 - First, we said that he has confirmed Israel's rejection of Him, so He has ceased to extend the offer of the kingdom to them
 - This means Jesus is no longer teaching the message of the gospel openly to the nation'
 - Rather, He has begun to teach in a veiled way, through parables
 - You'll quickly notice as we progress through the remaining chapters that cover Jesus' teaching that His public teaching is almost exclusively in parables now
 - While his private teaching to the disciples is always focused on their coming roles as ambassadors for Christ
 - Here we see some of both taking place in the parables of Chapter 14
 - Not only does the parable conceal it's true meaning from the hard-hearted Pharisees
 - But it also conveys an important lesson to the disciples
 - They must remain humble and wait while trusting in their host, God, for their honor which will be bestowed upon them at the wedding feast
- Is this a lesson the disciples need?
 - Well remember the argument the disciples had earlier in Chap 9 of Luke
 - We're told that they had a dispute about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God
 - A dispute means they seriously disagreed among themselves about which one had the greatest honor and worth to God

- This is bound to be a real problem for these men if they aren't taught otherwise
- And my theory from what I see in the text is that the disciples were the ones who jostling for the honored positions
 - And Jesus sees their behavior, and intervenes to teach on humility
 - And the teaching reflects not only the general spiritual truth about humility, but it also communicates a specific promise to believers
- The promise of the parable to believers is that God the Father is the one who will bestow the appropriate honor upon His invited guests on the day when He conducts His wedding feast
 - And if we spend our time now during these days we have honoring ourselves, propping ourselves up in our own eyes
 - If we go about printing our own diplomas, spiritually speaking – seeking short cuts so as to convince others we have God's approval
 - Seeking to gain through deception what we haven't earned legitimately
 - Then realize the ruse will only last so long
 - We might be able to fool people now in this life for a time
 - But ultimately, we will be the ones humiliated
- Because the time God has given us here and now is not time for our own pleasure
 - If God were primarily interested in our personal pleasure, then He would just take us home to heaven this instant
 - Because He can grant us infinitely greater pleasure in His presence than could ever be possible in this life
 - So it's self-evident that our personal pleasure is not His first concern for us here and now
 - Rather, He has given us His grace and granted us the privilege of serving Him in His work to build His kingdom
 - And He is looking for loyal servants

- And the more loyal the servant, the greater the honor on the day when all things will be made known
 - He who is faithful with a little, will be trusted with even more, Jesus tells us in a short while in Luke Chap 16
- And just to emphasize this point even further, look how Jesus ends this part of the teaching in Luke 14 :

[Luke 14:12](#) ¶ And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and *that* will be your repayment.

[Luke 14:13](#) “But when you give a reception, invite *the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,*

[Luke 14:14](#) and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

- Jesus moves from talking to the guests (His disciples) to talking to the host of this dinner
 - Jesus advises the host that his honor will be measured by who he shows grace
 - Don’t invite those who have the means to repay you
 - In other words, do select your guests on the basis of their own honor
 - You should not select men and women who are worthy of invitations, because to do so gains the host no credit or glory
 - After all, to invite those who deserve an invitation is really just the expected thing – how could the host get credit for doing what would be natural or expected?
 - Rather the host should strive to pick those who least deserve the invitation

- The ones who could never do anything to repay the host by their own hand
- And by favoring those who could never earn the favor, the host will receive a much greater reward at the resurrection of the righteous
- There is a wonderful double meaning present in these verses Jesus is teaching
 - First, there is the simple message that the church must understand that our honor from God will be greatest when we act out of heart of service rather than selfishness
 - When we show mercy and charity to the least fortunate
 - Those who could never give us any personal reward in this life
 - Then we are trusting in God for our reward, and when we come into His presence, we will experience a rich payday or eternal reward for our service
 - But the second meaning is even more significant
 - Remember that we said that at the wedding feast the host will be the Father Himself
 - And that the Father's own glory is be the point of all that has happened and will happen in His creation
 - Therefore, Jesus is explaining why it is that God chooses the least of the world to call His children
- Remember Paul's words in the first chapter of 1Cor:

[1Cor. 1:26](#) ¶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;
[1Cor. 1:27](#) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
[1Cor. 1:28](#) and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,
[1Cor. 1:29](#) so that no man may boast before God.
[1Cor. 1:30](#) But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,
[1Cor. 1:31](#) so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

- The Father's glory will be all the greater on the day when the last believer comes to glory and the wedding feast begins
 - Because on that day the Son's Bride will be made from those who had no hope apart from Christ
 - People who could never repay the host for the grace and mercy they have received
 - People who reflect even greater glory upon the Father because by their unworthiness, they magnify His generosity that much more
- And essentially Jesus is teaching this host and His disciples, and us today
 - Be like your Father in heaven
 - Show mercy as He has shown mercy
 - Seek your reward in Heaven, not among men
 - And just as your Father, the Host of Heaven, will receive greater glory for having favored the unworthy
 - So will you receive greater glory for having served the least deserving among the world