

10 JANUARY 2021 – ONLINE [BHAC, 9AM, SNC & TRADITIONAL]

## **PRIORITY [LUKE 14:15-24]**

### **Intro: Jesus, the awkward dinner party guest**

One of the immediate things that struck me when preparing for the sermon this week is how uncompromising with the truth Jesus is. At dinner parties we tend to gloss over disagreeable statements made by others, and prefer to keep things polite and peaceful. But Jesus here is a terribly awkward guest at the Sabbath dinner party of a prominent Pharisee (14:1).

In verse 4, he pushes a hot-button issue by healing a man on the Sabbath and then proceeds to press the Pharisees on the issue. In verses 7-11 he slams all the guests present who had jockeyed for seats of honour at the dinner table. And just in case he hadn't offended everyone, he turns on the host in verses 12-14 and calls out his lack of attention to the poor. It's all very awkward and uncomfortable.

This is not the gentle Jesus that we often characterise him to be. Yes, he is gentle, meek and kind, but he is also tough, strong and uncompromising in his commitment to the truth.

### **1. The Invitation to the Banquet (14:15-17)**

Now you can imagine as a result that the conversation at the dinner party had ground to a tension-filled halt, so someone did what people always do in awkward situations at dinner parties, they filled the awkward silence.

We read again verse 15, **When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."**

Jesus has just said in verse 14 that a generous host will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous, so the anonymous guest jumps in seeking to find some common ground with a religious platitude. But instead of accepting this conversational olive branch, Jesus doesn't let up. He begins to tell a parable that questions the confident assumption of those present, that they would join the feast in the Kingdom of God.

We thus read in verse 16, Jesus replies with a parable: **A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.**

Now before we go any further it's worth pointing out some of the Old Testament background to the passage here. Isaiah 25:6-9 speaks of God's eternal kingdom as a rich feast –

**On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. <sup>7</sup> On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; <sup>8</sup> he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. <sup>9</sup> In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."**

A banquet prepared, death destroyed and forever in the presence of God our Saviour. It is a powerful image of God's coming Kingdom and the person who partakes in it will indeed be richly blessed. Jesus thus uses this image to underpin his parable about the coming Kingdom. He speaks of a great (literally mega) banquet with many guests invited.

## 2. The Invitation Declined (14:18-20)

Have you ever been left in a position where you were hosting a party or a function and literally everybody, or at least most people, pulled out on you? It would be hard not to feel considerably hurt and offended, especially if much effort and expense had been put into the party.

Well it was no different in Jesus' day, and was perhaps even more offensive to pull out of such a banquet once you'd RSVP'd. In an age of delayed communications, at a feast in Jesus' day, a second summons would be issued to all those who had RSVP'd once everything was ready. This is what is described in verse 17. But in verse 18, it appears as though the wheels fall off as **"all alike began to make excuses..."** This was not just a couple of isolated cancellations; this was widespread refusal of an earlier accepted invitation.

You see Jesus is making a comment on salvation history at this point. He came to his own people, the nation of Israel, but far from accepting him, they rejected him and his Kingdom. This was especially true of the nation's religious leaders with which he dines. We see this in 13:6-9 in the parable of the fig tree that bears no fruit at the time of the master's coming, we see it in 13:34, when Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, we later see it in 20:9-19 in the parable of the tenants, where the vineyard of God's Kingdom is taken away from the wicked tenants and handed to others. We see it in 11:29-32 where Jesus laments that Nineveh repented at the teaching of Jonah, but Jerusalem failed to do so in the presence of one much greater. We see it in 11:37-52 when Jesus speaks his seven woes over the religious leaders of Israel.

Those with whom Jesus dines believe that they will join in this heavenly banquet, but given their current rejection of him, Jesus unsettles this assumption. And it would seem from the parable itself that was owing to widespread preference of worldly things that underlay Israel's rejection of their heavenly king.

Let's look at these refusals one by one and consider how they might be a warning for us also.

### 2.1 Property

Verse 18 continues, **The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'**

Property is the first excuse. A sizeable investment, an infrequent expenditure, a really important purchase – surely this warrants not being able to attend. Yet it doesn't cut it in the master's sight. When you stand before God, servicing a large mortgage, or maintaining a property aren't going to be justifiable excuses for failing to follow Christ or neglecting to serve him faithfully.

Though it hasn't quite translated into English as potently as it is in the original, notice that the guest uses the language of necessity of here – 'I *must* go and see it.' Sometimes because we have so subscribed to the Australian dream, rather than gospel vision, we think of bricks and mortar in terms of absolute necessity. We *need* to provide for our kids at least what was provided for us, or even better. We *need* to own, we *need* a certain amount of bedrooms, we *need* a yard. But who has asked this of us? Who has required this of us? Certainly not our Master.

For many of us, we need to stop living like we are trapped and that our hands are tied from serving the Lord, when in reality we are living in a bind of our own making and a mortgage of our own choosing. Though home ownership is not inherently bad, when it becomes the governing principle in our lives, it will steer us away from our faith in Christ who saves us. This surely is a pertinent warning for us here in Turrumurra.

## 2.2 Business

Verse 19, **Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'**

This individual has made a significant business investment – 5 pairs of oxen - indicating that their business holdings are 2-5 times greater than that of the average landholder (Bock, *NIVAC: Luke*, 394). Again, this is a significant capital outlay and an important opportunity for business. In fact when this person is intercepted by the servant, they're already en route, they're already on the move, business opportunities await, so they are go-go-go.

But the fact that we were busy with business and career opportunities also won't excuse us in the presence of God for neglecting to serve and honour him. An established career, an impressive qualification, a large bank balance, a growing business, frequent flyer miles, won't impress God, rather faithfulness will. Who says you need to take that demanding job? Who says you need to work those hours? Who says you need to 'self-actualise' by having a career? Who asked you to be this busy? Who required you to define your identity in terms of a career, or success in terms of prosperity? Certainly not God.

## 2.3 Family

This is the sacred-cow if there ever was one. Verse 20, **'I just got married, so I can't come.'**

There is absolutely no politeness in this refusal like there was in the previous two is there? It's almost as if the servant has crossed a line by asking him to even consider coming.

I remember a couple of years back watching a press conference with a man widowed from a terrorist attack. Upon the suggestion that his late wife was a hero for having surrendered her life in order to remain with a woman and her unborn child, the man protested and asked that this story not be circulated. For he didn't want to have to tell his kids when they got older that their Mummy chose to prioritise protecting the child of another, rather than remaining alive for her own.

It was a tragic set of circumstances, and I'm not wanting in any way to pin a grieving husband and father. But what struck me was the underlying sentiment now commonly accepted that there can be no more sacred responsibility than family, no higher ideal like laying down your life for others. As precious as family is, it's not the ultimate, this is what many of our war vets have understood. It's certainly what Jesus gets at in verses 26-27, just beyond this morning's passage, **If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.<sup>27</sup> And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

Yes God calls us to be faithful and loving stewards of our family members, but have our families become more sacred to us than God? Does a child's extra-curricular commitments trump our commitment to God and his people? It won't cut it when we eventually stand before God.

Like Israel, many of us have sent in our RSVP for God's Kingdom (after all, who wouldn't want to say yes to that!), but in the day to day of our lives we decline Jesus' kingship in the little decisions by enthroning property, business and family. We are saved by faith, but we drift from this faith by prioritising these things over God.

And one of the reasons we so readily do this is because none of them are inherently bad. It's not inherently wrong to have a mortgage, to have a successful business or a loving family. These are all

good things and gifts from God. But we need to ask the question as to whether they have taken priority in our hearts?

How might we do so? Well I think the passage helps us diagnose.

- Verse 18: Like the man with his field, are there things that we feel bound by, that we *have* to do?
- Verse 19: Like the man who was already on the move and on the way to see his latest business investment, what are the things that are causing us to be so busy and always on the go?
- Verse 20: Like the newly married man, what are the things which are so sacred that if anyone questions them, they have crossed a line such that there is no conversation at all?

The responses listed above may well alert us to the reality that we've prioritised good things in our hearts over Christ. If so, how should we respond?

To those younger, be prayerful and informed over decisions you make now that might entangle you later. Speak with older Christians, seek Godly counsel. Be thoughtful. Be careful about the debts you decide to incur. Be careful about the extra-curricular activities you sign your kids up to. Think about whether this pursuit will help or hinder them take their place among God's people.

Yet what of those older who feel so entangled with mixed priorities and are not sure how to respond? This is a difficult situation that requires the wisdom of God's word to be brought to bear in individual circumstances. But three general principles come to mind for me as to how to begin the distanglement process when it comes to entrenched yet misaligned priorities around good things -

- Pray and surrender all to him
- Enlist the prayer and input of Godly people
- Err on the side of sacrifice and generosity
- Know God's grace.

### **3. The Invitation Extended (14:21-24)**

Indeed we see God's grace powerfully reflected in the remainder of the passage don't we?

**The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'** <sup>22</sup> **"Sir," the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'** <sup>23</sup> **"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.**

God has his heart set on welcoming sinners. He not only moves out to the streets of the city, but ultimately into the paddock-lined, unsealed roads of the rural areas, to call in the unlikely guests of the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. That is us. In Luke's gospel, Jesus has made the point repeatedly to the religious leaders that the gospel is unexpected and upside-down - he will extend his Kingdom to those thought to be previously beyond his reach, to us Gentiles!

Jesus longs to have his banquet bursting at the seams and he took the punishment for our misaligned priorities on the cross, and rose again from the dead so that we who were far away might be invited into his Kingdom. He lovingly bids us to come and calls us to compel others to do the same. You may well feel compromised, sinful and hypocritical when it comes to your priorities this day, but know that our Lord who lovingly warns you, is the same one who graciously calls you. And as Romans 8:30 reminds us, **And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.** In His grace he will enable us to hear and heed his word to us today and so persevere in faith to his eternal Kingdom. So may we indeed hear and heed this morning.