

LESSONS FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - The Parables - Pt 14
Sunday, October 31st, 2021, 6:30 p.m. - Teaching # 2140
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**THE CALL OF GOD'S KINGDOM - THE ULTIMATE TEST OF LIFE'S
ORDINARY ACTIVITIES**

Luke 14:15-24 - "When 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!" [16] But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. [17] And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now 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 parable that gave birth to that great hymn of the church, "I cannot come to the banquet. Don't trouble me now. I have married a wife. I have bought me a cow..." It is interesting to look back at the events that led up to Jesus telling this story. In fact, this parable of invitations to a feast, was told while Jesus was *attending* a feast thrown, according to the first verse of this chapter, in a very prominent home of one of the religious leaders. It was probably one of those affairs that sets you apart from the riff-raff when you are on the "A" list of prospective attendees.

In fact, the people were so anxious to affiliate themselves with the host of this banquet, they fought over the best seats - the seats at the table where the host would be seated. That's what **verses 7-14** are all about. Take the lower seat and be moved *up*, instructed Jesus. Don't take the best seat and be moved *down*.

Now obviously, those words, if heard by all, made for some rather awkward moments at the banquet. Many of the prominent guests were left looking down at their shoes. Right at that moment a guest - one who wanted to change the subject - uttered the words of **verse 15** - **"When 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!"**

At least this one unnamed man seems to understand how important the kingdom Jesus proclaimed really was. These seats at earthly banquets weren't the ones to be seeking after. It was much more important to eat the feast of the kingdom of God.

Now, you would think this proclamation would gladden the heart of Jesus. You would think He would sing the praises of this one anonymous individual. Finally, someone understood what the secret to life was all about. Finally, here was someone who knew what was worth pursuing and possessing in life.

But then events take a strange turn. It's right at this point that Jesus launches - **publicly** launches - into this parable all about people being invited to enter and partake of the kingdom of God. And, more specifically, it's all about the **obvious lack of interest** in the invitations they received.

I think we're meant to see the contrast between the people fighting for the best seats next to the host of this splashy supper and the guests in Jesus' parable who couldn't be bothered sitting close to the Son of God in the Father's eternal kingdom.

So that's how all these events connect together. People love ***hob-nobbing*** with the well-to-dos at the affairs of this world. They fight for the best seats and will sacrifice everything to get in. But even though some religious people ***proclaim***, "**Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God,**" most are far more interested in using their time and energies for other pursuits. Most of the people in Jesus' hearing that afternoon weren't as interested in the kingdom of God as they should have been.

That's Jesus' point. And to make this point, Jesus tells the following story about the invitations given to a great banquet:

1) **FINDING GOD'S KINGDOM, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, IS THE GREATEST DISCOVERY A PERSON CAN MAKE**

In this parable coming into the kingdom is like attending a great banquet. I take that to mean, whatever else may be involved in conversion, above all, it is an ***immensely satisfying, fulfilling experience***.

It seems Jesus labored to correct our false impressions about His rule and reign in our lives. People constantly think God is wanting to ***take something away from life***. People view Him as stern, joyless, and demanding. They hear Jesus' words about ***taking up the cross*** and ***losing your life to find it***, and they interpret those words to mean something joyless and unfulfilling.

Yet Jesus stretched human language to argue the opposite. He said finding God was like ***coming home after being lost***, like ***finding buried treasure*** or a ***pearl of great price***, like ***coming to a wonderful banquet when you are hungry***.

The common ground to all those accounts is the ***joy*** found in them. And that shouldn't surprise us when we listen again to Jesus' explanation of ***why*** He came: **John 15:11** - ***“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”***

That's it. ***Jesus saw the fulfillment of your joy as the mission of His life***. He ***said*** so. ***Joy*** is the goal of God for your life.

So that's the first point. Finding God is, more than anything else, like coming to a great banquet when you're hungry. God is to your deepest satisfaction what a feast is to a starving stomach. That's what makes the next point of this parable so surprising:

2) **WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THE PEOPLE INVITED TO THE BANQUET DIDN'T WANT TO COME**

The parable makes this point with emphasis:

Luke 14:18-20 - “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.’”

Now remember, this parable was launched on the heels of that marvelous confession, **“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”(15)**. Jesus has a very specific mission in telling this parable. He’s trying to show these people that ***great verbal appreciation of the kingdom was often given by people who refused to enter it.***

That’s the whole point of the parable. It’s fine to talk God talk. It’s fine to give praise to Jesus. It’s even fine to tell others that Jesus means everything to you and they should come to Jesus too. But many times those ***words*** are uttered by all sorts of people who ***don’t press into the kingdom when it conflicts with other commitments.***

What good is it to ***praise*** the kingdom if, all the while, I am not ***pursuing*** the kingdom? And yet, in this parable, Jesus says this is a constant problem. Notice, ***the host in Jesus’ parable can’t find one person who will drop everything else to come to the banquet. Not one!***

Listen to these sharp words of insight by the late **Marcus Dods** in his wonderful old commentary on the parables. He talks of those who found excuses to turn down the invitation to come to the banquet:

“That which exhibits the true character of these men is their actual treatment of the present invitation. Not what they *said* about it, not the *flattering terms* in which they replied to the host, but their conduct when summoned to come, right away, to the feast. It is this conduct, and this alone, which marks off the real friend of God from him whose false devotion causes him to spout, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” *We are all prepared to utter such sacred sentiment*. But the pious *contemplation* of heavenly blessedness is one thing. The *entrance* into such habits and pursuits that enable us to *participate* in the kingdom is something else.”

3) **THE EXCUSES THAT KEPT THE INVITED FROM THE BANQUET SEEMED NECESSITIES IN THEIR OWN MINDS**

Jesus identifies three excuses in His parable:

- a) **The first says, “....I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused” (18),**

It's unlikely this was the first time this man had opportunity to see this land. He must have at least glanced at it **before** making his purchase. If he didn't go himself, he must have at least had someone else put the deal together for him. And the purchase was already completed. The deal was done. Where was the urgency - the deadline - in seeing the land right at this moment?

Then again, perhaps we can't blame this deal-maker. Certainly this is the most exciting part of the venture. Now that the land is his, he can mentally **divide it up**, and **plan his crops or subdivisions**. I mean, this is the part of the project he's been waiting for since he saw the land in the first place. This is what the purchase was **for**.

Perhaps, when the invitation first came, this man wasn't committed to such vast endeavors. It's not that he doesn't like the idea of going to the banquet. He still would like to maintain good terms with the host. He's **polite** enough. But the invitation doesn't seem as doable **now** as it did **before** he was a successful land owner.

That's the point. Things are different now. There is only so much time in the day. He now has other obligations he didn't **have** before closing this deal. This is how life piles up. And certainly the host will understand and accept that. It's nothing **personal** against the host. He loves the host and wouldn't hurt him for the world. Under better circumstances he would certainly be in attendance. But now, alas, necessity **compels** him to look after his property. The call of the Kingdom is felt as an **interruption**. And that's the point at which his devotion to it is tested. "Regrets, but please excuse me."

- b) **The second said, "...I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused"(19).**

Most of us can't understand the sizable investment this would have been in Jesus' day. Not an ox, nor a team of oxen, but **five teams with fitted yokes**. This was the capitalistic dynamism of the day. A man could pursue any dream he wanted, perform any task necessary with five yoke of oxen.

Obviously, **opportunities** were awaiting this prosperous, aggressive entrepreneur. He was positioned to do what others could only dream of. And special opportunities **don't last forever**. You have to strike while the iron is hot. Special opportunities call for special measures. It takes unusual commitment and planning and stamina if you're going to seize the day.

This man has **big commitments** staring him in the face. These are the times that make the soul's core ripe for realigning. The usual priorities just won't get the job done. Certainly banquets are a fine thing, if you have the time. But with five yoke of oxen and opportunity waiting, who has time? Again, (and this is surely Jesus' point) the call of the kingdom is felt as an **interruption**. The banquet may be fine for other people. Certainly, there's nothing personal against the host - "Please, consider me excused."

- c) **Finally, the third excuse is given - "And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come'(20).**

Perhaps this is the most probing portion of Jesus' parable. He specifically addresses the relationship between family commitments and the kingdom of God. He does this intentionally. And the point He makes is **family** commitments and **kingdom** commitments are **two** commitments, not **one**. And He does this because he knows **family commitments** are the options of choice for people who don't want to feel guilty about ignoring specific kingdom demands.

Think about it. Why would Jesus deliberately include **domestic obligations - home commitments** - in this parable at all? I mean, we can all relate to the crass materialism of a person who places power and wealth above love for God. But can one do the same thing with **family**? It doesn't seem possible. Family commitments **are** kingdom commitments, we would argue. When you do **family** well, you do **kingdom** well.

But wait a minute. That's also true of **business** commitments and **financial** commitments. God's kingdom manifests itself in **everything** that touches my life. I bring love for Jesus into **all** areas. Jesus is Lord of **all** or He's really Lord of **none**.

No, Jesus obviously has something else in mind in this parable. He's wanting to show how people use **all** of these areas of life - all of which are areas that come under His Lordship - as **threats** to His kingdom rather than **expressions** of His kingdom. That's the whole point of the parable.

I think many Christians miss this. I think many Christians picture those two commitments (family and kingdom) as the same thing. But they are not. They're **related**, but they are not the **same thing**. At great risk of being misunderstood, let me explain.

Many Christians feel that anything done that is good for their family is pleasing to God **automatically**. I would submit to you that that statement, just as it stands, is **close** to true, but is **untrue**. Rather, anything I do that is good for my family **that doesn't compromise my primary commitment to God**, is pleasing to God.

Let me give some obvious examples. It's a good thing for me to **provide materially** for my family. The Bible commands it. But if I work overtime every night to give my kids the best clothes, education, and food money can buy, to the point that I never have any time to **pray** for my children, I'm not pleasing God, even though, in my mind, I am doing the work for the good of my family.

It's good for my family if I spend relaxing, recreational time with them. It's nice if I can afford to take them camping, or to Disney Land, or the Wonder Land. But if I do all those things, and do them every weekend, so they grow up totally uninvolved and unlinked to the church, then I'm not pleasing God, even though I am trying to do good things for my family.

The very best thing I can do for my family is ***show them that God comes absolutely first in my life, just as I want Him to come first in theirs.*** We have to show them that in practical, sometimes costly ways. Take them to the beach on Saturday, not on Sunday. Visit grandma in Sarnia on Saturday, not on Sunday. Make them pray and read their Bibles even when they want to watch TV. Teach them to invest in missions, not just movies.

By your ***own example***, teach them their time ***isn't*** their own to be used however they please. You do this by ***showing*** them how ***inconvenient*** the demands of the kingdom frequently are in terms of your own daily schedule. Show them how ***you*** respond with the call of the kingdom becomes an ***interruption*** to your own schedule. There is ***no other way*** to teach devotion to Jesus in a busy world.

This is the ***whole point*** of this parable. Even when ***good priorities conflict***, God must always come first. And God must be ***inconveniently*** first, at times. You can't ***tell*** your family that. You must ***show*** it from the priorities of your own life. Understand my heart in these words: ***You don't want to show your family you put them first. You love them best by showing them you put God first.*** Your family is only safe in ***second*** place. Never ***first***.

In short, ***put God first, even above the pressing, real demands of family life.*** Jesus tells the story the way He wants it remembered. The host won't let me use my home to keep me from my commitment to him.

4) **IN EACH CASE, THE ACTIVITIES WERE GOOD ENOUGH THAT THOSE INVITED TO THE BANQUET WERE CERTAIN THE HOST WOULD UNDERSTAND THEIR COMMITMENTS**

It just seemed fair that the host would let them off the hook. They had totally justified their excuses in ***their own*** minds - "Please have me excused." They didn't feel guilty or condemned.

It never dawned on any of them that the host would actually expect them - every one of them - to drop these commitments and immediately come to the banquet. That one central thought never seemed to have crossed their minds.

But - and this is Jesus' point - that is ***exactly*** what the host expected. In the mind of the host, not one of those excuses had substance. In the mind of the host not one of those invited guests had any reason, ***other than the pursuit of their own desires***, to stay away from the banquet.

Mark it down - ***Jesus said the host was furious with each one who refused - Luke 14:21-24 - "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.'*** "

Not one of the guests considered it a big deal to be too busy with other things to put the banquet first. None of them was doing anything **bad**. Nothing appeared **sinful** in their commitments. It never seemed to register with any of them that they were **losing the kingdom entirely** by being too busy with other important things - even **family** things.

But that's exactly what was happening. Not one of them got into the banquet. The host **didn't** understand their excuses, legitimate and unquestioned as they were in their own minds. Those people weren't as **compelled** to stay away as they thought. They simply didn't **regard the host highly enough** to come when he called.

So this parable really picks up the theme of the **pearl of great price** and the **farmer who found buried treasure in his field**. In each case, **everything else had to be sold to possess the treasures of the kingdom**.

It's a severe, kingdom parable. Marcus Dods says of this parable, **"It speaks to all who would shout, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the coming kingdom of God," and it searches out the heart behind the words....What is it for which we will defer any engagement? What is it we will never, never forget? What is it, given the business of our days, that we shall never, never neglect? What is it which we will never find tedious or an unwelcome interruption? That is the true kingdom of your heart."**

That's a **brilliant** quote. The desires many people have for the kingdom of God are mostly **sentimental**. Those desires must be tested before they can be claimed as genuine. And God will see to it that those kingdom desires **are** tested. His invitation will only be issued on **His** terms, not **ours**. That's the message of this parable. And if ever the church needed to hear it, it's today.