

The Wisdom of Christ
Grace and Judgment
Bible Study 5 - Luke 14:15-24

Goals:

- 1) To be able to describe the core truth of each parable in a sentence.
- 2) To be able to explain crucial cultural and literary facets of each parable.
- 3) To be able to describe how each truth challenges the way you live your life day to day.

Expectations:

1-2 hours of prep work (reading the parable, answering the questions and preparing to discuss your findings and create a plan for real life application)

Note:

Much of the information in this study, especially the cultural observations, was taken from Kenneth Bailey in his books *Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Both would be wonderful for additional reading.

Suggested Homework:

- 1) Print out these studies or have a way of filling them out and accessing them on your phone.
- 2) Read Luke 14:15-24 before completing this study. When you finish the study, reread the passage again.
- 3) Complete the following questions after the introduction.
- 4) Come to the group with 2-3 observations from the text/study and 2-3 ways you need to apply the lesson.
- 5) Read the parable three times this week. As you read through it, connect it to your experience of God's grace and seek to focus on that this week.
- 6) Meet with another member of the group to discuss issues of accountability and growth this semester.

Introduction:

DISCUSS: How did you experience God's grace this week?

DISCUSS: In your opinion, what makes a decision good or bad? Why is it important to make thoughtful decisions in life?

DISCUSS: What are some examples of decisions that would cause you to miss God's best for you?

Review:

Background for Luke: The original reader- Written to Theophilus, a patron who wanted to know more of Jesus Christ. Luke compiled Luke and Acts as the answer to how the Church got started and who Jesus was.

Purpose: Luke's purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, who came to save the world through his death. The parables we will study this semester will articulate different parts of that main thrust- the Son of Man's sacrificial death for all as Savior. The Son of Man is a distinctive title of note as well. It comes from Daniel, Son of *Man* focuses on the unique ONE of mankind who ultimately fulfills God's purpose of being the visible representative of the invisible God and in the process redeems the rest of humanity. There is only one OF US who has fulfilled God's plan. There is only one OF US who redeems us. And those who by faith express their solidarity with the SON OF MAN will also be redeemed to fulfill God's purpose for humanity. Luke contains a distinctive approach to humanity in the book (as noted below), and consequently an emphasis on Christ's humanity as the human Messiah.

Audience: Luke is writing specifically to Theophilus, and more broadly to Gentiles, especially those who are disenfranchised or ostracized by society. **Luke wants those people to know that the Son of Man cares for and died for them.**

Luke shows particular attention on the oppressed, unfavored and gentile recipients of Jesus' ministry, such as Samaritans, women, Romans, gentiles, children, tax collectors and other non-religious elites. Luke wanted to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, who came to save all.

Luke 9-19 has been recognized as a great chiasmic artistic/poetic masterpiece. Known by many names, this account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is laden with brilliant poetry and magnificent composition of the parables and anecdotes within. This is the section we will mainly be focused on in this study.

Review Questions:

- 1) Summarize the main point of Luke's gospel in your own words.
- 2) Describe the person Luke is trying to teach.
- 3) What was one truth from last week's parable that you had the opportunity to apply this week? Did you take advantage of that opportunity?

Please read the Parable (Luke 14:15-24) before continuing, if you have not already done so.

Literary Background

This week, as we deal with the Parable of the Great Banquet, the literary features of this parable are more poetically driven than literarily focused. That affects how we study this in that the structure

will not overtly tell us what the main point is or focus our attention in any significant way, but instead will further texture our understanding of the setting. This parable could have easily been titled “the parable of the seven speeches” due to its poetic construction.

Text: Luke 14:15-24

15 When one of those who were reclining *at the table* with Him heard this, he said to Him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

16 But He said to him, “A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many;

17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited,

‘Come; for everything is ready now.’

18 “But they all alike began to make excuses.

The first one said to him,

‘I have bought a piece of land
and I need to go out and look at it;
please consider me excused.’

19 “Another one said,

‘I have bought five yoke of oxen,
and I am going to try them out;
please consider me excused.’

20 “Another one said,

‘I have married a wife
and for that reason
I cannot come.’

21 “And the slave came *back* and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave,

“Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’

22 “And the slave said,

‘Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’

23 “And the master said to the slave,

‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel *them* to come in, so that my house may be filled.

24 ‘For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.’”

QUESTION: What does the formatting show about the discourses? Are there any parallels you see in verses 18-20?

Step parallelism

The step parallelism is designed to show relation similarly to the standard parallelism. Usually, there are repeated words, and the same progression of thought. It draws our focus to see how the two phrases or sets are different and similar. In summary, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

My silly example:

A The one *drinking Coke* will be *happy*,
B and he will also be *full of joy*.

A I *drink Coke* and feel *happy* inside,
B and within my heart my *joy* is *full*.

Here, we see common words used and a similar progression. The author then may be seeking to draw attention to this particular progression. In addition, the change from speaking about anyone who drinks Coke to personal experience further shows another facet to the truth of the material. Remember, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

- A) The first said to him, 'I have bought a field,
 And I must go out and see it.
 I pray you have me excused.'
- B) And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen,
 And I go to test them.
 I pray you have me excused.'
- C) And another said, 'I have married a bride,
 And therefore-
 I cannot come.'

Note also the concluding statement of the master in v. 24
For I tell you (pl)
None of those men who were invited
Shall taste my banquet

These stylistic features, although poetic in focus, do accentuate the main thrust of this parable. On the one hand, it is about the response of the guests initially invited, who decline coming to the banquet. The other half is strangely not about the response of the guests invited second and third, but the attitudes and responses of the man hosting the banquet.

Cultural background:

--Please highlight two sentences in this section you found particularly interesting or that helped your understanding of the parable.

The Request/ The Banquet:

In a day of Facebook invites and big events where the absence of one or two guests often goes unnoticed, it seems unusual that the host would take offense to the rejected invitation. However, in the Middle Eastern culture, there are many facts which display the insulting nature of these men's refusals. There are a few things of note, not the least of which is the nature of such a feast.

The parable begins by stating that a banquet is about to take place. When the banquet was ready, the host sent his servants to the invited guests to let them know that the banquet would happen that evening. At first glance, we can easily give some lenience to these men, for how many people could you really scrounge up for a party the day of? And how could one expect that all these men would come and why would he be so grievously insulted when they declined? What is not apparent in the text is the notion of two invitations for great banquets such as this. In our day of refrigerators, frozen food and Domino's, throwing together a party and adequate food takes very little time and resources. However, killing a calf or other large animal would have produced too much meat for one person or family to possibly use. Without having access to food storage and preservation, arranging for this level of service to one's guests was not entered into lightly. Typically, the lord would invite his friends and colleagues to join his feast and upon learning how many were going to come, he would then decide what he should provide. For example, should he prepare a chicken or two (2-4 guests), or a duck (5-8 guests), or a goat (10-15 guests), or a sheep (15-35 guests) or a calf (35-70 guests)? Once the feast was ready, he would send a servant to invite these men to join the festivities. Because a man's word was his bond, all who were invited this second time were expected to come; for they had already agreed in coming, and the master of the feast has allocated a portion of the feast for him, a portion which will go to waste (another culturally shameful activity) shortly after the meal.

What the contemporary reader does not immediately grasp is that this invitation going out at the beginning of our story would have been the second invitation, not the first. These men had already agreed to come, and now the master will have wasted this animal he has prepared for his guests. Upon looking at the excuses of the men in question, this becomes even more obvious, for the excuses are very insulting, obvious cop-outs. Have you ever asked someone out on a date and they gave you a lame (and very fake) excuse? (Maybe you've given one of these excuses to keep an interested guy or girl away!) As we dig deeper into the significance of each of these actions, we will begin to see the portrait Jesus is painting. As you look at the text, please also note the focus of this parable. One would think it is addressing the people who now may come and partake of a feast to which they were not initially invited, soaking in the grace of the master, yet through the parable, the master's focus (and wrath) are much more directed towards the men initially invited and the great shame they experience for turning down the master with pathetic excuses.

QUESTION: What is one reason withdrawing from a banquet would be insulting to the host? Why it would be insulting?

Real Estate:

Our first excuse-maker claims to have bought a field, and is in need of seeing it. Even in America today, this is utterly ridiculous. This would have been even more unthinkable then. Imagine this

conversation happening in today's real estate market: "Yeah, I picked up this piece of property today. The guy I met in line at Wal-Mart told me he was selling this rental house of his, and it sounded like a great deal, so I bought it! I'm not sure about its history, features or actual value, but it seemed like a great deal! I need to go look at it tonight and make sure I got a bargain." No way! In today's market, there are dozens of documents which need to be signed, agreements with banks, sometimes even environmental tests and structural examinations. It would be unthinkable to close on a property so fast, especially without seeing it and making sure that an investment of that importance was well placed.

In the Middle East, buying property was an even more demanding task. One had to go through various forms of inspection and payment, and given the value of land in those days, it is unthinkable that this friend of the master has bought this property without even seeing it! It was common practice for the buyer to be well-versed with every square foot of the property- its history, owners, yearly rainfall, and annual yield. It is an obviously false statement designed to get out of the feast, which he has already agreed to partake of. On the same subject, one's word was so important, that even if he were telling the truth and had bought the property (which he hadn't yet seen) extremely quickly, it is likely that if this man had explained his situation to the seller, that seller would have postponed negotiations until the following morning. In Middle Eastern society, no man deliberately tries to shame his buyer. If our man's excuse was true, it will be to the seller's shame as well for disturbing the community business and causing this man to offend the feast giver.

From the context, it is obvious that this fictitious excuse was created by the man invited to the feast to shame the feast master and waste his time, his goods and his generosity, which certainly explains why the master is so offended when he discovers this man's refusal to come to the banquet.

Oxen:

Our second invited guest has also made a last minute purchase which prohibits him from partaking of the feast prepared for him. Instead of real estate, he has purchased five yoke of oxen and needs to examine them. Again, this excuse is simply absurd. In the Middle East, when it became known that someone wanted to sell oxen, all the prospective buyers would come to a field where the oxen were driven in teams. All observe the ability of the oxen to work together. If they cannot pull equally, they are worthless. Compare this excuse: "I cannot make it home tonight for dinner because I just paid for five used cars on my credit card, which I bought over the phone, and I am on my way down to the used car lot to find out their age and model and whether they will start." The excuse is obviously fabricated. He is essentially telling this man that these animals are far more important than his relationship with the host.

Just as above, this would have been seen as an extreme insult to the master of the feast, so both the seller and the buyer would have delayed the sale until the next morning so as to avoid insult if possible. However, the master is supposed to be insulted. The rage evidenced by the inviting man is understandable when seen in light of the ill treatment he has received from his guests.

A Wife:

The third guest invited declines attending the feast because he has a wife. Even though in the original language, not specifics are given in regards to time, the assumption that he is newly married does not make the excuse reasonable. Firstly, it cannot be true that this wedding was taking place the same way, as it may seem to say. In a Middle Eastern community, large events were never held the same day, so that the guests would not have to choose. It would have been completely unacceptable for this host to plan a feast on the same day as a wedding. Another piece to this excuse is that great feasts were held in the afternoon. If this man attended, he could still come home to his wife at the end of the day, which makes his excuse that much more insulting.

The last concept of note is the place of women in Middle Eastern society. His excuse is more acceptable than the oxen-buyer, but not by much. The oxen-buyer asserts that these animals are far more important than the host; this man asserts that a woman is far more important than this host. It is the same kind of excuse given here, and the intent is the same (obviously a woman had a much greater standing than cattle- the insult is about lesser things in society being used as reasons to dishonor greater things). This excuse is clearly a disrespectful and pointed insult toward the master of the feast.

QUESTION: What excuse do you think is most offensive based upon what you read? Why do you think that?

Inviting the Outsiders:

As we have seen above, each of the invited guests refuses to attend the master's banquet, making terrible excuses with no real desire to cover up their disdain for the host who has invited them. The host takes a surprising action next. One in the Middle East would expect the host to seek vengeance upon these impertinent men, but instead, he extends grace to *unworthy* guests. The master is furious, and we will see at the end once again that the host makes strong statements in summary against these excuse-making men, but there is greater grace poured out. This will not be a humiliation for the host after all; he will have his feast without such men.

There are two specific groups of outsiders who are invited to join the festivities. The first are the blind, lame, lowly. These are the kind of people who are not in the same social class and were unworthy of such a great honor as attending a feast of a nobleman. Yet this master orders his servant to fill his house with those unworthy guests of the city. A feast is the greatest communal event one can have for his region. To be invited to a feast in another region was a wonderful honor. So great would the honor have been that it is likely that the invited unworthy persons would have initially refused until told over and over that there was no mistake; that had truly been invited to this great feast.

The second group invited is brought in after those unworthy from the city begin to arrive. The host sends his servant back out, and this time to the highways and hedges, to call unworthy outsiders. This action is left uncompleted by the servant at the end of the parable. And this omission would have been intentional. What Jesus (and Luke) is pointing to is the call to the gentiles. This parable is a clear description of the rejection Jesus will experience from the Jews, His own chosen people, and the unworthy and gentiles who will receive life through his sacrifice instead.

And in this, we see God continuing the plan he had set forth throughout history. God calls a people to himself, his representatives among the nations to declare his nature and relate the character of God. God is calling out his people and treating them to the greatest feast in history. Yet there will be some who will resist this call. The feast will continue, and God's plan will be accomplished, but will you be there to enjoy it?

Conclusion:

We get a chance to see the grand scheme as well as God's emotion in response as it relates to Israel's rejection of the Christ. This parable deals with the juxtaposition of grace and judgment, two very different fates for the characters involved. In the end, it ought to sober us to know that some of the invited will insult the Master and offer pitiful excuses as to why they would not attend his grand banquet. The question we must all ask ourselves is this: "How have I turned down God's best for me and rejected the great banquet he wants to bless me with." In the context of this parable, Jesus is referring

to salvation and the Gospel, but the implications of grace and judgment are far-reaching in our personal responses to Jesus' call in our lives.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) **DISCUSS:** What is the main point of the parable in one sentence? What is one cultural feature that strikes you strongly?

- 2) **DISCUSS:** How does this picture of guests refusing to attend a banquet relate well to making a decision to follow Christ? What part of the parable (if any) makes you think of decisions you've made in your life spiritually?

- 3) **DISCUSS:** How have you seen the decisions of others effect their lives down the line (don't gossip by sharing names or exact situations, but just discuss some of the destructive effects of turning down God's "banquet" you've seen)?

- 4) **DISCUSS:** How might you be giving lame excuses to God? How can one make sure he or she doesn't make poor decisions and miss out on God's best?

- 5) **DISCUSS:** A companion passage is Luke 13:1-9. How are the messages of these two passages related? How is repentance a crucial part of this story?

- 6) **DISCUSS:** Please write down one step you can take to guard against this type of excuse-making.

ANSWERS: (spoiler alert)

- 1) This parable is about God's grace for the unworthy and his judgment for those who decline. Answers will vary.
- 2) The picture of the banquet works well because it is a gracious host offering something really good to people who don't deserve it (even those who were in the right social class were certainly not deserving of the host's kindness). The response of the host is to judge the first men invited, but it is not completely wrathful. There is also grace for more. This also goes to the shame of those who pass on God's best for them, just as it is a shame for the invited guests who have refused. Answers will vary.
- 3) Answers will vary.
- 4) Answers will vary.
- 5) Luke 13 describes the condemnation side and its emphasis is on repentance. In the same way, we have excuse-makers who receive judgment. What condemns the fig tree from Luke 13 and the ungrateful guests in this parable is that neither group repents.
- 6) Answers will vary; please seek to have each person describe one practical way in which they can guard against the destructive effects of sin and remain/become open to God's blessing.