

## **Dinner With Jesus: Sacrifice Your Status (Luke 14:1-14)**

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Last week we took a look at one of the most common ministry practices of Jesus: sitting down for a meal with others. We found that Jesus greatly desired to be with, befriend, and save sinners. People with questionable pasts, terrible reputations, and alienating circumstances are often the very people Jesus most enjoys spending time with. We spent some time considering what Jesus' intentionality among the outcasts might mean for our own lives, and how we might make changes to bring a wider variety of people to the seats at our tables.

This morning we'll see Jesus joining yet another party, but with an entirely different group of people. He will still have the same hope – to help them understand what they must do to truly live well, and truly live in obedience to God. But this time, his calls for correction will be far more clear and far more divisive. This time, Jesus is not going to be dealing with a repentant sinner, but instead with skeptical, potentially dangerous, and powerful people.

Our passage begins with Jesus having arrived at the home of a Pharisee. The “Pharisees” were one of several groups who held power and influence over the Jewish people in the 1st century.

The Pharisees believed all Jewish people should strive for strict, legalistic obedience to God's law. However, even with this radical commitment to doing things right, they still struggled with sin. The Pharisees chased after wealth and power, believed in the importance of status, and they avoided contact with anyone they believed was “sinful”. Their worldview, both the good and the bad, was in constant tension with the grace, forgiveness, and freedom that characterize the teachings and ministry of Jesus.

As we study this passage, we need to keep this conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus in mind. It's a key part of the context that lets us know, right from the start, that this is not going to be your average dinner with Jesus.

*1 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body.*

Luke 14

As I mentioned last week, there were extremely important social dynamics attached to who should be invited into your home to sit at your table and share a meal with you at this time in history. Someone as powerful and influential as a “prominent Pharisee” would only invite people who could either help him maintain or advance his own status. Anyone included at this meal would have to fit into the accepted social and religious boundaries of the Pharisees. The excluded would be those who might damage their

reputation or compromise their righteousness. The sick, poor, and marginalized would not have made the cut.

From v3 we know there were other Pharisees and teachers of the law present at this gathering too. This is a party for the elite, the wealthy, the influential...and, perhaps awkwardly, Jesus too.

Jesus is out of place at this table. He is most certainly not wealthy, and is already a highly questionable individual in the eyes of most of the Jewish elite. He is influential, but in all the worst ways and with all the worst people. His followers are fishermen and tax collectors. He is constantly surrounded by the sick and suffering. He has strange, even scandalous interpretations and applications of Scripture.

So, what was Jesus doing at this dinner? Why was he invited? In v1, it says he was being “*carefully watched.*” What this likely means is that the prominent Pharisee was hoping to be the one who finally caught Jesus in a compromising, humiliating situation. They were waiting for Jesus to say something foolish, do something wrong, and then destroy his reputation for it. This is not a dinner party. It’s a trap waiting to be sprung.

Perhaps that’s why, in v2, “*a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body*” was permitted to get so close to Jesus. Normally, such a person would not be allowed anywhere near the eating area of a Pharisee or his guests. His very presence risked their ceremonial cleanliness and their reputations.

And yet this suffering man *\*somehow\** shows up directly in front of Jesus. The whole room is now watching. The Pharisees would likely toss the man out, and perhaps make sure he’s punished. But what about Jesus? What will he do with this man in his moment of pain and need?

*3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. 5 Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” 6 And they had nothing to say.*

Luke 14

Jesus begins with a question: “*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?*” The only answer he receives is a terrible, merciless silence.

The Pharisees believed in order to maintain their carefully cultivated righteousness, a strict observance of the Sabbath – with no work of any kind being done – was necessary. Yes, this man was clearly suffering. But they felt his suffering did not warrant them risking their own standing before God. They knew they needed to keep their distance. What they wanted to find out was, would Jesus do the same?

Jesus is in no mood to play games with the suffering of others. He meets the Pharisee's silence not with words or theological debate, but with undeniable, miraculous action. He turns, takes hold of the man, and heals him before their very eyes.

The point of this story is not appropriate behavior on the Sabbath. The point is in the picture of Jesus, standing with the Pharisees on one side, and the suffering man on the other, and choosing between the two. Will he side with the included or the excluded? Will his Kingdom be one of status and influence, or one of restoration and kindness and love?

Jesus reaches out and *touches the man in need of a Savior*. According to the Pharisees, Jesus just compromised his righteousness, ruined his standing before God, and wrecked his reputation.

Which does not bother Jesus at all. Because Jesus knows that sometimes *it is worth becoming tarnished in the eyes of the world in order to do what is right in the eyes of God*.

The Pharisees only wanted Jesus around if he was going to play by their rules and increase their own power. They only wanted parties that had the right sort of people at the table. They only wanted righteousness they could make and maintain on their own. They only wanted sacrifices that benefited themselves.

But Jesus eats with tax collectors, spends time with the poor, touches those who hurt, seeks out and spends time with sinners.

Jesus was totally unconcerned about being seen with the wrong sort of people. He was unbothered by spending time with the marginalized, the despised, and the neglected. Jesus was constantly sharing his life with people who had questionable morals, terrible theology, and a desperate need of grace and good news.

Jesus did not busy himself with building, preserving, or even glorifying his own reputation. Jesus came to bring God and people closer together. In order to do that, he was willing to **sacrifice his status for the sake of others**.

Can we say the same for ourselves? Are we willing to **sacrifice our status for the sake of others**? Are we willing to be unconcerned with the world's judgment of our reputation as we instead seek to be with people who need kindness, compassion, and a lovingly shared Gospel?

*Are you willing to give up on the pursuit of all that proclaims your status to the world so that you can have more to give to the people God brings into your life?*

*Are you willing to move toward people who are different from you, get into the lives of people who have desperate needs, or sacrifice your social standing to be with people who embrace ideologies and lifestyles different than your own?*

*Are you committed to distancing yourself from the wrong kinds of people, and making sure everyone knows who you are against?*

*Or are you committed to seeking out all people with genuine love, treating them as your neighbor, as your friend, just as Jesus has treated you?*

Sacrificing our status for the sake of others is not easy. But it is the way of Jesus. We must see the outcasts. We must embrace those who suffer. We must be willing to let go of all that might stand in our way of drawing near to the people Jesus himself is seeking to save.

**Spend some time this week considering whether or not there is anyone you are intentionally neglecting or distancing yourself from because deep down you are afraid of how it might look or what it might demand of you to share your life with them.**

If you discover that you do have people you're avoiding in this way, then your next step is a simple one – simple, but not easy: Do what Christ did. **Sacrifice your status for the sake of others.** Reach out and connect with them. Give them your attention, show them your compassion, and be genuine with your love.

If the Pharisees had hoped to expose Jesus as a fraud, that plan just blew up in their faces. It's pretty hard to argue with the results of a very sick man miraculously being healed after no more than a touch.

In v7, the tables turn – we're told that Jesus has been watching the actions of his fellow party goers, and he's got some things he'd like to address:

*7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. 11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

Luke 14

The style of gathering Luke is describing in this story was known as a *symposium*. Couches were arranged around a table, and guests would take their positions as assigned, or according to what they perceived as their own level of importance. There was a traditional spot for the most important guest, at the head of the table, with the host nearby. The couch for the least-important people was typically to the left of the VIP, and across from the host.

It's not hard to imagine Jesus easily finding a spot on the couch for the lowest guests, and getting comfortable while the rest of the room did their dance of establishing status and inflating their self importance. Then, as everyone settled in and checked the room to see how they measured up, Jesus all of a sudden said, *"I have something I'd like to share with you all."*

Luke describes this as a parable – a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. Because it is a parable, we are not meant to think that Jesus truly cares a whole lot about seating arrangements or the best way to be noticed or receive honor from others. He wanted these Pharisees, these leaders of the people, these influential and powerful men, to understand that there is something far more important than protecting their prestige.

There is a futility in living a life focused on your own glorification. Jesus makes it clear:

*"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

Seeking one's own interest is ultimately self-defeating. This is something God has always decreed, always taught, always tried to get his people to understand. Pursuit of your own glory is ultimately pointless. Being impressive to others is a hollow, meaningless goal.

Instead, Jesus reminds us that we must **sacrifice our status so we may willingly choose humility.**

We live in a culture that celebrates the proud. We want our leaders to be the strongest, loudest, toughest people in the room. We are too often willing to overlook character flaws or sweep unsettling accusations under the rug if it means our favorite author, performer, preacher or political candidate can maintain their image of being the best. We draw confidence from being a follower of those with the biggest following. We crave being known for our greatness. We despise those who threaten our positions at the top of the ladder.

God's Kingdom has no regard for our self-centered reputations. It is our hearts that will be examined. It is our humility that helps make us who God most wants us to be.

God is not impressed with our accomplishments. God is never in awe of how high we climb, how smart we are, or how successful we become. The love of God is never, ever stirred by our superiority.

*“God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble”* – a Proverb (3:34) that the early church took to heart (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

We’re not called to be the best of the best. We’re called to be humble, and to trust that from that place of humility, God will lift us up and put us right where we’re supposed to be.

We’re called to sacrifice our status, to put our concern for how great we are far away from our hearts and minds, and instead choose humility.

Jesus is not quite done – he has one final thought for the host of this party. It’s about his guest list, and especially who has been left out:

*12 Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

Luke 14

In these final verses Jesus is going head-to-head with a common Greco-Roman practice known as reciprocity. Things like hospitality, gift-giving, and favors not as matters of generosity, but as social transactions that demanded a return. If you gave someone a cup of sugar, they were obligated to return that, plus more, at a later date. If you invited people over to your house for dinner, you could rightly expect a similar invitation where you would be treated with honor and enjoy a lavish spread.

This all sounds fine...until you consider who would have to be left out of this sort exchange. If you only give to those you believe have something to give back to you in return, then you are never going to extend hospitality to those who need it most. The *“poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,”* the people most in need of kindness and care will be left out of your equation.

If your generosity is contingent upon the potential for reciprocity, then you are exploiting ideal hospitality for selfish gain.

Jesus says that will not cut it in the Kingdom of God. If you give only on the basis of what you can get back, then you are too focused on yourself, your position, and your status. Jesus gives a sobering warning to the prominent Pharisee, surrounded by his well-to-do, highly influential friends: **Sacrifice your status so that you will be blessed.** Not immediately, not in this moment, not in the temporary ways of this world. Become the sort of person that is totally unbothered by giving without repayment. Because that is the sort of person that will enjoy the true riches of God’s blessings after the return of

Jesus, the coming of God's eternal Kingdom, and the resurrection of those whose righteousness comes from Christ and Christ alone.

How might you be a blessing to someone who cannot bless you in return this week? How might you prepare your heart to be this sort of a person, to give up on the desire to get things back, and instead trust in the reward God has promised for you in the future?

Don't meet Christ's command to sacrifice your status with wary, unsure, self-interested silence. Reach out to help someone in need. Choose to live humbly. Give generously, especially to those who cannot give back. Follow not only the words of Jesus, but his example as well. From the cross, Christ reached out to save us. From the cross, he chose the humility and humiliation of death. From the cross, he gave forgiveness and salvation to us who can never give anything back to him.

Sacrifice your status, just as Jesus sacrificed everything, for you.