Parable of the Great Dinner

Spring Quarter: Justice in the New Testament
Unit 2: Jesus Calls for Justice and Mercy

Sunday school lesson for the week of July 29, 2018
By Rev. Earnestine W. Campbell

Purpose: To realize God’s greatest hope and intention for the world.

Scripture Lesson: Luke 14:15-24 CEB

“When one of the dinner guests heard Jesus’ remarks, he said to Jesus, ‘Happy are those who will feast in God’s kingdom.’ Jesus replied, ‘A certain man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. When it was time for the dinner to begin, he sent his servant to tell the invited guests, ‘Come! The dinner is now ready.’ One by one, they all began to make excuses. The first one told him, ‘I bought a farm and must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I bought five teams of oxen, and I’m going to check on them. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ When he returned, the servant reported these excuses to his master. The master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go quickly to the city’s streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.’ The servant said, ‘Master, your instructions have been followed and there is still room.’ The master said to the servant, ‘Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

Key Verse: “Go quickly to the city’s streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.” (Luke 14:21)

Another Parable

The Adult Bible Studies Summer 2018 Series’ author begins this week’s lesson urging us to remember the Purpose Statement throughout our study of the lesson as it relates to the Luke verses in our text. We engage in another parable as we have done throughout the summer series lessons. The writer wants us to briefly review the lessons from two and five as a reference and will also provide further insight into the understanding and interpretations of parables as short stories that illustrate a larger truth.

The writer further wishes to convey that storytelling has been used to communicate important matters throughout human civilization. Such stories are used culturally for a better understanding of things like rites of passage, family indoctrination, and for confirmation about the history of the church and its clouds of witnesses. Additionally, parables serve as “spiritual truths” that aid in making sermons memorable and create a strong connection to the characters and actions of the narrative. Jesus’ parable-telling, for
example, helps listeners relate to the character(s) from the story and causes listeners to make judgments about characters.

The Text in Context

The parable in this week’s lesson, Luke 14:15-24, is an extension of other accounts in the Gospel of Luke. The preceding text is used where Jesus was gathered around the table “in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees” (Luke 14:1). In the gathering, Jesus witnessed the guests jockeying for “the best seats at the table” (verse 7). Because of their need to feel important and their bad behavior in the quest for the best seats, the author says Jesus used “shrewd guidelines for hosts extending invitations.” In other words, he provided instructions for those hearers to consider appropriate behavior in response to an invitation. His response also included this address: “All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up” (verse 11). Furthermore, the author communicates that Jesus’ teaching proved that he was speaking less about “table manners” and more about extending invitations to those who are not related nor have a social status similar to the host (high earthly places). “Don’t invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame and blind” (verses 12–13). Jesus used this parable and our lesson’s parable to symbolically describe God’s kingdom, which is for all persons regardless of their station in life.

Teacher, ask: How difficult is it to invite persons that are not similar to you to an event? What is the fear or threat?

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Luke 14:15

As we begin the exegesis of the text, the writer says that the parable is a complement to the previous lesson in which eating in the Kingdom (Luke 13:29) is compared to Luke 14:15 and the rejection of the expected guests (Luke 13:28) is compared to 14:24. Jesus’ parable was in response to the question from one of the dinner guests about how to behave at the dinner table, and about to whom the invitations of the host should be extended. One of the dinner guests said, after hearing Jesus’ teaching, “Happy are those who will feast in God’s kingdom.” It appears that the dinner guest was making the connection between the great banquet and the kingdom of God. To this point, the writer connects verse 15 with the great messianic banquet at the eschaton (end of age) to the Hebrew prophets and uses Isaiah 25:6 as an example: “On this mountain, the Lord of heavenly forces will prepare for all peoples a rich feast, a feast of choice wines, of select foods rich in flavor, or choice wines well refined.”
Additionally, the author points to Matthew’s “banquet” parable (Matthew 22:1-14) as similar to Luke’s, but with some distinctions: according to verses 3 and 4, those who were invited received two invitations, the servants that gave the invitations were mistreated (verse 6), the host/king executed the original persons that were invited (verse 7), and one of the guests that was “improperly dressed” was thrown out (verses 11-14). Matthew’s banquet parable explicitly tells the story of how the least of those were grossly mistreated at this earthly banquet, which is a stark contrast to Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of God, where all should be welcomed with grace.

In Luke 14:15-24, the writer states that the text “treats us to a story in which we reason that wedding feasts were grand celebrations.” It also explains that these grand celebrations could take up to two weeks, and that a response was necessary because of the required preparation by the host to accommodate all the guests.

**Verses 16-20**

The text reads that Jesus said, “A certain man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. When it was time for the dinner to begin, he sent his servant to tell the invited guests, ‘Come! The dinner is now ready.’ One by one, they all began to make excuses.” The writer suggests that the invited guests had initially responded that they would attend, and at first glance, the responses seem to be exaggerated excuses and deliberate insults. However, the writer brings plausible legitimacy to those “excuses.” Two of three excuses (concern about making a living, and concern for the well-being of a family) could be viewed as economic situations. The third guest had just been married, and Jewish culture would exempt a newly married man from serving in the military. To this point, the writer refers to Deuteronomy 20:7: “Is there anyone here who is engaged but not yet married? He may leave and go back to his house; otherwise, he might die in the battle and someone else would marry his fiancée.” Deuteronomy 24:5 reads, “A newly married man doesn’t have to march in battle…” However, the writer ultimately decides that they were all “excuses” because what the host’s invitation in the parable really represents is eternal life in God’s kingdom. In other words, the host/king’s invitation is about God’s invitation, and these people rejected God because of their self-interests.

**Teacher, ask:** In what ways are Jesus’ reversals in God’s kingdom related to how the world operates?

**Now what?**

**Verses 21-24**

Nevertheless, the host is determined to fill the house, and after the rejection from his social equals in response to his first invitation, he turns to the lower social class (verses 13 and 21). These “second-class” citizens are treated like the upper class. Still, there was
room for more, so the master instructed the servant to go to the highways and lowly places and extend invitations so that the house would be filled. Similarly, during Jesus’ time, the Pharisees decided whom they thought belonged in God’s kingdom, which is why Jesus taught this parable. Just as the affluent citizens who rejected the master’s invitation were left out, those rejecting God’s invitation will be lost and left out, but the doors to His kingdom are open with love and grace for all.

**Teacher, ask:** What other ways can these parables be used to tell stories about how the world and society work?

In conclusion, the writer summarizes the three groups of the three invitations as 1) the religious establishment, 2) the Jewish people, and 3) the lower social status society, or “undesirables.” The ones who did not reject God’s kingdom invitation were “the poor, crippled, blind, and lame,” and those in the “back alleys.” Those who tried to keep their elite status are now the outcasts because of their rejection of God.

**Closing Prayer**

Father, God, we thank you for the opportunity to realize and receive your greatest hope and intention for the world and us. Let us not just be hearers, but doers of your Word. May we be open to inviting and receiving those that are challenged and marginalized. Let us be mindful to respond to your invitation without selfish excuses. Amen.

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*The “Adult Bible Studies, Series Summer 2018, Justice in the New Testament” is used for the content of this lesson.*