

Associate with the Lowly, Part 1

Luke 14: 12-14

Well, we are back in Luke 14. Jesus teaching on the subject of humility and he's doing that while he is sharing company with the proud, eating a meal. He's been invited to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees on a Sabbath day. It's after, an after-synagogue dinner, hosted by a wealthy powerful man, probably located in Jerusalem. And they, he and the guests, they are watching him carefully. They were watching because they had set a trap for Jesus.

There's a man there with dropsy, a, a man swollen with fluid, he's in need of healing, he's probably suffering from a chronic, very severe heart condition. And so, the Pharisees, the lawyers, and the Pharisees, wanted to see if Jesus would violate their Sabbath tradition.

That's their view, that's not scripture's view, but violate Sabbath tradition by healing a man on the Sabbath. So, Jesus, as we have already studied, he's exposed their cynical trap, he confronted it, he ignored their traditions, and he healed the man.

But it was after that, that Jesus really went to work on them. So, the instantaneous healing of a man. That does not work at all. It took no effort at all whatsoever from Jesus. Unseating the stubborn, blinding, religious pride of this company, that's another matter entirely. The religious pride that would concoct such a scheme as this. The audacity to attempt the impossible really, to entrap the Son of God.

Well, that's the level of pride that was on display here in the course of this afternoon meal and Jesus is surrounded by people who exude and live out this kind of pride. So, after the healing, as everyone took seats around the table, Jesus observed in verse 7, how they were all choosing the best seats for themselves.

They're trying to scramble even in that occasion, always trying to scramble for the top of the social ladder. But there's another thing that Jesus noticed here, which gets us into the text, that we'll look at for today.

Jesus had a chance to observe the guests themselves. To take stock of the company. He's noticed who has been invited and then also who had been excluded. So, after confronting the pride of the guests, teaching them a lesson on humility, he turned his attention to his host in verses 12 to 14 of Luke 14, and he's going to do the same thing.

A principle that we talked about last week in verse 11. That he just applied to the guest, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Now he's going to apply that principle to his host. Look at the text there, "He said to the man," verse 12, "He said to the man who had invited him, 'When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your

brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors lest they also invite you in return and you'd be repaid.

“But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

So, the subject here of this beatitude, of this offer of blessing to the rich, to get them out of the woes of that are upon the rich, and get them into the blessing and the favor of God. The subject here is hospitality. Hospitality.

Getting also to the motivations of hospitality, showing hospitality. Those who are able to offer hospitality to others are those with some means, aren't they? Anybody who can invite people over means that they're going to share out of their own provision, they're going to be able to share what's extra, and be able to have people over, host them.

Those who are able to offer more extravagant hospitality on more occasions, they're obviously those with more significant means. So many of us are the former. We have enough, enough left over after paying the bills, that we can invite people over for an occasional meal.

This ruler of the Pharisees, this man who hosts Jesus and the other guest, he is of the latter. He is a man with significant means. He hosts guests for meals, he hosts guests for banquets, for parties, for receptions. And so, though Jesus speaks directly here in our passage, to a man of significant means, what he says to that man, it really does apply to all of us, no matter what our means, or condition in life, or station in life is.

The principle in this text, it really does confront all of us. Everyone, it would seem, wants to appear to be generous. No one likes a miserly, stingy person, but why do we do what we do? Why do we give what we give? Why do we

show hospitality? Why do we serve? Why do we give to others?

One more thing to mention before we look at the particulars of the text, you notice maybe as we read, that Jesus tells his host, first, whom not to invite in verse 12, and then in verse 13, about who he should invite.

So, both pieces of the counsel there, the negative and the positive, you notice that he gives the reasons why. But it's important to point out that Jesus is not stating his case, in either/or terms. That is, never invites your friends and relatives for dinner, only invite people from one of these disadvantaged groups.

You know, so like the poor come on Sundays, and crippled on Tuesdays, and then blind people Fridays, and that kind of thing. That's not what he's saying. He's not putting this counsel in either/or terms. It's more like a, a both/and. The language, the Greek, and all the words he uses in the tenses of the verbs makes that very clear. Ian

Howard Marshall puts it this way, that Jesus here is speaking in, in, "in a Semitic idiom, meaning not so much of the former."

So only inviting friends and relatives, as rather, consider the latter, invite the poor and the disabled. So, he's not excluding the one in order to include the other, he's saying include both. Don't be exclusive, on the one hand and then exclude the others. Again, that's just to emphasize the point, first, to be aware of your motivations for showing hospitality.

Do you "Do what's good and give and lend expecting nothing in return?" If so, Jesus says "your reward will be great and you'll be sons of the Most High." So, we need to consider what are our motivations in giving. Do we give expecting nothing in return? Do we give with our hands wide open? So that's the question really put to us. Why do we do what we do? What explains the good works that we do in our lives, works that are seen by others?

Are we motivated by love for all of our neighbors? Maybe even the difficult ones to love, the, those who are unseemly, those who, in Sermon on the Mount terms might be counted enemies, do we love them? Or are we motivated by love just for our kind? Are we motivated just to share table fellowship with people who make us feel comfortable? That's the question. Are we motivated by love for all of our neighbors? And love for all neighbors is a friend of humility. Self-love that's rooted in pride, very selective about associations.

So, two questions for our outline. First question, just two: Is our hospitality too narrow? Is our hospitality too narrow? Narrow hospitality may, not must, but may be an indication that pride and self-love might be motivating factors. Rather than humility and love for all neighbors. Not always, but maybe.

Consider it for yourself, look at verse 12. "He said to the man who had invited him. 'When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or



your relatives or rich neighbors lest they also invite you in return and you'll be repaid.'"

As I said, Jesus' host, he's a ruler of the Pharisees, he's a man of means. This man, gotta consider many years of hard work, doing business, making investments, also as a Pharisee, many years of study. He has not been slack in his life. He made good connections. All of that resulted in high social rank, means, influence in society, those are things that he worked for.

To maintain that status, he hosted large groups of people, held huge, sometimes even extravagant banquets, served expensive foods, fine wines, provided elaborate, expensive, entertainments and all the rest that goes with hosting those with means. Notice though, Jesus is not only addressing elaborate feasts and big banquets. He says "When you give a dinner or a banquet," so the word dinner, *ariston*, in its strictest sense, it refers to the earliest meal of the day. So, what we call breakfast. But later usage of that word extended the meaning to the noon meal.

So, it was very commonly used to talk about lunch or a luncheon, and then also to, to dinner.

But the point is, that the first one that Jesus mentions there, is a relatively casual, informal meal. Jesus point in saying, giving the two things, "When you give a dinner or a banquet," he's painting a mild contrast between a less formal casual meal, like a luncheon, and then a formal meal, like a reception, or a wedding banquet, a feast.

Jesus' host, he invites people to his home for both kinds of meals, on both occasions, both informal and formal as well. So less formal meals like lunch or dinner, they're routine for someone like him, more formal gatherings like feasts and banquets for a man of his means, perhaps less frequent, but probably fairly common for him in his life.

So, it's by broadening the occasion, for making invitations, why one might make an invitation, extend an offer of hospitality. A casual lunch versus a formal

banquet, this is what allows Jesus words to be applied to all of us regardless of our means. Jesus speaks to the host, but as you look down in verse 15, it shows us others are listening in as well. There are others who are listening into this conversation.

So, since Jesus knows that others are listening into this conversation, what he says is widely applicable and it really does come down to those of us who are reading about this conversation with the host, includes us as well. So, Jesus says, "When you give a dinner," or a lunch, "or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors," consider the first. And doing a lunch, inviting people over for a dinner or a lunch.

Who do you typically invite over for a casual meal like a lunch? Casual, less formal occasions, they're usually reserved for friends and brothers, right?

The first two in the list, people with whom we share an affinity with, with whom we have a closer relational intimacy. Because when it's casual, we don't want to have to be on, do we? We don't want to have to watch our manners, and conform to expectations about social etiquette, maintain social and situational awareness. We really, we really just want to relax and let the guard down.

Casual meals, close relations, more formal meals like banquets, receptions, wedding feasts, all that etiquette stuff, it's on, in full display. Those are occasions for inviting more distant relations, and visiting relatives, and oh the way, yes also rich neighbors. Distant relations, whether geographically distant or relationally distant, distant relations expect to be invited at more formal gatherings. So, excluding them would be, at the least, offensive, and maybe even imprudent. They're added to the guest list, at the very least to avoid offence, but especially inviting rich neighbors, it's just good business sense. Especially for a host like this or a ruler of the Pharisees.

Alfred Plummer put it this way. He said "it is pleasant to entertain one's friends, seemingly to entertain one's relations, but advantageous to entertain rich neighbors." Why is that? Why is it advantageous to invite rich neighbors to their events? Because of the social principle, called reciprocity.

Reciprocity, that's referring to an unstated, but very real social contract, where an exchange is made for mutual benefit. It's about giving to get. It's seeing a social occasion as an investment on a future return. Four times, actually in the text here, we see this principle of reciprocity, mentioned in the text, referred to.

Twice in verse 12, they invite you in return and then you be repaid. That's twice in verse 12, and then twice in verse 14. They cannot repay you and you will be repaid at the resurrection. So, four times this principle of reciprocity, it's thematic in the text.

So, the expectation of reciprocity and social situations, that's, that's, not just a thing in Jesus' day, like in the ancient Near East culture, that's how they did it in their culture. This is, this is throughout time, throughout history, it's a universal social expectation, especially so among the wealthy. Doling out social favors, honoring others, publicly, that is, by inviting them to your receptions and parties, sitting, in them, in the seats of honor, where they can be seen, where they're visible to all.

Extending that kind of social benefit puts others in one's debt. So, as we pointed out, Jesus is not saying here, I just want to remind you, he's not saying, never invite friends and relatives to dinner. Only invite the disadvantaged people to lunch, dinner, banquets and all that. "Do not invite" there, is a present imperative, and it's used with a negative. It could be taken in the sense of stop inviting your friends, relatives, rich neighbors, but that's clearly not the sense here.

He's not prohibiting his hosts from inviting people that he knows and loves into his home. That's not what he's saying. That's wrong on several levels. The most, the basic being, that it violates the honor your father and mother. If you can't invite your own father and mother into your home, you're dishonoring them. So, Jesus is not commanding this man, or us, or anybody to dishonor close relations.

There's a second sense. More of like a general precept that he's giving. Don't, and really, it's literally, don't make it a habit of, only, inviting friends and brothers. Don't make it to a practice, and put only friends on the guest list. Why is that? Because those are invitations that invite repayment. They invite reciprocity, they involve some degree of expectation.

From your friends, you expect friendship. There's nothing wrong with that. That's what makes that person a friend to begin with. Is that they, you offer friendship, they get friend, give friendship back. But there is an expectation. From brothers you expect love, understanding, shared history. Again, nothing wrong with that. That's just

the situation God's placed us in. From relatives, in-laws, extended family.

Well, maybe less expectations of familiarity, but certainly an expectation that you've been checking the box, in making the invitation, avoiding offence, touching base, keeping good relations, not offending mother-in-law or father-in-law, whoever it is.

So, if you invite friends and brothers only, those who, who, you like, those who you love, it may be that you're only interested in keeping yourself relationally at ease. It may be that you're trying to stay comfortable, looking out for yourself, not putting yourself into an awkward situation by getting outside your comfort zone. If you only invite those who you have a duty to love, like relatives and in-laws, then you've got to admit it, you're just trying to stay out of trouble. That's all you're doing.



Inviting wealthy neighbors. What's that about?

Inviting wealthy neighbors those who, because of connections and influence, able to provide avenues for employment, or opportunities for investments.

Maybe those people who are rich neighbors, who can come over and grace your home with their company and you being in the same company. They just have the ability to increase your social profile, elevate your status. Those, those are the invitations that certainly expect something in return.

This ruler of the Pharisees, he'd been on both sides of the equation. He's been the invited guest of neighbors, those who want something from him, and he's done the same to them, inviting them back into his home, because he's seeking some benefit from them as well. It's a customary expectation. It's a fact of life. It runs through cultures, through time, this desire of giving to get. Inviting each other on the basis of reciprocity, it's spending social capital as an investment, not as, not as a gift. They give to get.

So, business favors, political influence, making connections, it all accrues to some benefit, doesn't it? It mitigates, helps them mitigate it against an uncertain future. Giving the get, turning social duties like this, social responsibilities into advantageous responsibilities, and this is exactly what Jesus is warning against, not prohibiting out right. There are some things that are expected in business, inviting people over, and of course the social occasion, there's more going on in that social occasion. He's not prohibiting it outright. Sometimes that's just the way the world works and operates in company and business and all the rest. But he's warning against it.

At the end of verse 12, says "When you give a dinner a banquet do not invite your friends your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors." And why not? "Lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid." Notice how he speaks about that. Comes across like a friendly warning, like don't invite them, lest perchance, you run the risk of being repaid, as in gasp, you know, Oh my, I perish the thought. Wouldn't want that to happen. This is catching

their attention. Because he is elevating in their minds that there might be something wrong with the way the world works, with the way they've been operating, unconscious of it even.

Of course, you invite people over because there's a mutual benefit. Who doesn't do that? But what can seem like a generous offer of hospitality can really be quite inhospitable. That's what Jesus experienced in this text, didn't he? He was invited over, but there was more going on that he didn't know about. What was he invited over for then? Because they loved him? What can seem like hospitality can be so disingenuous, and insincere, and ungenerous. This is expectation of reciprocity, that's to blame. To be repaid in the end. That ruins the generosity of any invitation.

So, he's saying, watch out, because by inviting friends, brothers, relatives, rich neighbors, you're putting yourself at risk. Putting people like that on your guest list put you in the danger, of reciprocity, that they might invite you back. Warning. There's that little twist

we talked about last week. Giving the parable to his guests. Where Jesus says something that grabs his guests' attention. Here he says something that grabs his host's attention, causes that man to stop in his tracks, and wonder, and ponder what is he getting at. Makes the man curious.

What is so wrong by inviting friends, brothers, relatives, rich neighbors and letting them return the favor? Isn't this the way the world works, giving to get? Well, yeah, that is the way the world works. And if that's what you're after, if that's what you want, keep inviting them. Just be warned that is all the repayment that you'll get. Your hospitality hasn't been grounded really in generosity, but in reciprocity. So once your hospitality has been reciprocated, once your friends, brothers, relatives, rich neighbors, return the favor, that's it. Better enjoy it cause that's all you get. That's all that's coming your way.

Jesus said something similar over in Matthew, chapter 6 during the Sermon on the Mount, when he warned about

practicing righteousness before other people, to be seen by them. In fact, just turn in your Bibles, it's worth noticing and drawing your attention to in Matthew, chapter 6, Matthew, chapter 6, right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount.

In the Sermon on the Mount, you understand, especially as Matthew draws out the Sermon on the Mount, he is confronting the predominant, religious view of the people that he's speaking to. So, all the Jews. This is the predominant, religious practice that they had learned from their religious leaders, the scribes, and the Pharisees, and the priests. And they had been practicing this, not just by precept, but by, by observation, learning by example.

They've been following the practices of the scribes and the Pharisees, and you can see this corrective pattern showing up as early as Matthew, chapter 5, where he says, that pattern, "You've heard it said, but I say to you." So, he's correcting their false understanding and he's trying to unseat a false form of religion, that's so predominant

and pervasive in the culture. He wants to point them back to the truth of God's word, back to the true meaning of the Old Testament.

So, as we come into chapter 6, having already said, "You've heard it said, but I say to you," now he goes, chapter 6, verse 1, to talk about, verse 1, bew, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people. To be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your father who is in heaven." Very similar to what Jesus is warning about in Luke 14:12.

First, notice what he says about giving in verse 2, "When you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." Look, if you're giving in order to get public recognition, if you're motivated by the praise of others, well, as soon as others see you do it, you've been repaid in full, so enjoy.

Same thing with praying, verse 5, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they've received their reward."

Whatever you do, religiously praying, giving, fasting, any religious works, hide it from the view of others. Why? Because as soon as others are seeing it and you are letting people know, you've been paid. You got your paycheck. You did your work. You got your paycheck.