

## A Meal with Jesus (Luke 14:1-24)



All of the events told in Luke 14:1-24 take place in one location on one Sabbath day. It starts when a very important Pharisee, possibly a member of the Sanhedrin, invites Jesus to a Sabbath meal in his home as a guest of honour among many influential people.

### A. Jesus of the Gospels

#### 1. What is a Sabbath Meal?

Communal meals in those days were more than a social occasion. Inviting someone to a meal along with other elite guests was a way of affirming their social status. Clearly, the Pharisees and the lawyers at this table were among the rich and the powerful.

Sabbath meals were carefully pre-planned to exclude hot dishes like roasted meat or warm soup because roasting or boiling was 'work' according to Judaism. The cold meal would have been a stark reminder that they were 'observing the Sabbath.'

#### 2. Why was Jesus invited to this Sabbath meal?

Jesus accepted the invitation to the Pharisees' headquarters filled with the leading Pharisees and lawyers. Jesus' adversaries were present in full force, 'watching Jesus closely.' (14:1) Most likely the ruling Pharisee invited Jesus to intimidate Him into submission to their theological stand. How would Jesus respond in this situation?

Already in Luke 13, an open confrontation took place in a synagogue between the Pharisees and Jesus on the issue of healing on Sabbath. So, the polite pleasantries at this table belied the tension, which is brought into the open again, now for the third time. (6:2, 9 C.f. 13:14-16)

#### 3. Do you know the 'Jesus of the Gospels'?

Was Jesus really someone who was polite toward everyone, charming and tactful? This sentimental view of Jesus is not the 'Jesus of the Gospels'. Jesus broke all social norms. He confronted the religious elites head-on repeatedly and publicly. This is why the religious people hated Jesus and ultimately crucified Him.

- I. Jesus exposed what is wrong with their theology to their face, beginning with their gross misunderstanding of Sabbath to the hypocrisy of their religion.
- II. Jesus gave the religious elites at the table a lesson on 'humility' after pointing out how foolish they were, covertly fighting for the most honourable seats at the table.
- III. Jesus pointed out to the host what true hospitality is and tells him he had the wrong guest list.
- IV. Jesus told a parable, saying to them in effect, "Don't be so sure you will make it into the kingdom of God. Actually, none of you will make it the way you are."

Can you imagine the guests' faces at this table? Do you and I know this Jesus? Are we prepared to invite this Jesus to our Sunday lunch table?

### B. Healing

1. At an early part of the meal, a man came in their midst swollen from excessive fluid retention. He was obviously planted by the Pharisees to trap Jesus. All eyes were on Jesus to see if He would heal again on the Sabbath day in front of the leading Pharisees in the home of a ruling Pharisee. (v1) According to Judaism healing was 'forbidden' on Sabbath because it was 'work' unless it was a life-threatening situation.
2. Jesus took their unspoken challenge head-on and brought it right into the open. '*Is lawful to heal on the Sabbath?*' (v3) In other words, 'Is healing on Sabbath biblical or not? Can you back up your stand from the Scriptures?' No one could answer Jesus, and He healed the man right there before all the eyes watching Him.
3. Jesus then asked another question, "*Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?*" (v5) Judaism suggested 'a bedding or something equivalent

should be thrown into a pit to help an animal to scramble out of the pit on Sabbath' (Shabbath 128b). There was even a discussion on 'how the hauling out of certain animals on the Sabbath may be justified.' (Shabbath 117b) Jesus again exposed their folly as well as their hypocrisy, 'You do more for your animals on Sabbaths than for your people?' Again no one could answer Jesus, and by now all conversations probably stopped dead.

### C. Humility

1. Next, Jesus tackled the subject of practical humility when He saw the guests trying to get the most important seats at the table. Jesus quoted from Prov 25:6-7, *"Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king, and do not stand in the place of the great. For it is better that he says to you, "Come up here," than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince, whom your eyes have seen."*

If you go for the most important seat and you get sent back, you will get the last seat because all other seats would have been taken. Is it possible Jesus' seat was initially taken by an over-enthusiastic guest, and that guest was sent to the back seat?

2. We all have a Pharisee streak in us. Why not just take any seat and let the Lord look after our 'ultimate position'? In fact, why not start at the bottom? So that somebody else can have a better seat than us? That way we are making room for God to exalt us. And if God doesn't quickly exalt us, then the seat we have may be the best one for us at the present time.

Jesus teaches on humility at least five times in the gospels. (Luke 14:11, 18:14; Matt 18:4, 20:27, 23:12) *"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."* The keyword here is 'whoever.' This is the universal principle, and there is NO exception. Our job is to humble ourselves and God's job is to exalt us. If we don't do our job, then God has to do our job. He can do both much better than us.

*'Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.'* (1 Peter 5:6)

3. This was an endemic problem in Pharisaic Judaism. Jesus was saying to them, *'Your religious circle is full of professionals and career Pharisees seeking status and fighting for higher positions.'* When we encounter this in the world it is distasteful. When this happens in religion, it is so much worse. We need to ask ourselves, 'Am I like this in any way?'

By now the guests at the table would have lost their appetite.

### D. Hospitality

1. Jesus was not done yet. Jesus now talks to the host about his guest list. 'Why did you invite that man over there? He looks very rich to me. Why did you invite this man over here? Yes, he is your relative.' Jesus was saying the man's guest list revealed a lot about him. This must have been very disturbing to the host.
2. Jesus is asking, "Why do you invite someone to your meal table? Because his presence will make you look more important? Because he will invite you back and get you into his elite circle? Do you invite people, looking to GET something in return?"

If we show hospitality expecting nothing in return, then God will repay us with interest for every meal we serve on the day of resurrection. God doesn't forget. Therefore, we are safer inviting people who can't give us anything back.

3. At this point one of the guests spoke out, probably trying to save the host's face, *"Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."* (v15) In other words, "How great that we the Pharisees will be there at the resurrection!" Note there was sharp theological disagreement between Pharisees and Sadducees. Pharisees believed in the resurrection whereas Sadducees didn't. Sadducees were the 'liberals'.

### E. Hubris (Overconfidence)

1. Jesus told a shocking parable here, that was devastating to the Pharisees. He challenged their presumption that because they believed in the theology of resurrection, unlike the 'liberal' Sadducees, that they would be assured of their place in the kingdom of God. Jesus in effect says to them through the parable, "No, I don't think you will make it."

2. In the ancient Middle East with no watches, time was somewhat elastic. So, the host sent out a 'double invitation'. The first one was to inform the guests which day the feast would be held and to extend his invitation. Then based on the response the host would slaughter the animals and make preparation for the feast. When the second invitation went out, it was to gather the guests. Since they already accepted the first invitation, they were expected to come without delay. However, when the time came, they backed out of their commitment with feeble excuses. This was a great insult to the host who prepared the feast at a great cost.
3. Their excuses were (a) *I bought a field so I must go and have a look.* Who would buy a field without looking at it first? (b) *I bought yokes of oxen (10) so I must go and have a look.* The same logic applies. (c) *I just got married.* What stops him from bringing his wife to the feast? All three were really saying, 'Sorry, but you caught me in a bad time.'

The master was furious at their excuses. He prepared the best for them, and he was met with, 'Sorry, something more important came up.' Anything and everything in life - business, car, marriage, etc. took precedence over the master's invitation. 'Despising God's offer of grace' is something He hates. Esau's contempt for his birth right caused him to forfeit it - forever.

4. So, the master sent his servants to bring the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind in the city squares, on the highways and the streets to fill his house. The story ends with the master saying, "None of those who were invited shall taste the supper."

So, there will be two groups of people on that day, the people who were invited but didn't come, and the people who were not invited but came.

5. The kingdom of God will be full no matter what. And there will be two surprises on that day. Many who were initially invited and said "Yes" will not be there. And many whom we thought we'd never see in God's kingdom will be there. The master told his servants to compel them to come and fill his house. So, God's house shall be filled. So, if somebody says, "No" to your sharing of the gospel, just go to the next person and the next.

And when God speaks to our hearts, we need to respond. The same invitation may never come to us again. The place God has prepared for us in His kingdom is available to us now. But if we despise God's invitation, it will be given to somebody more willing than us.

6. The Jews were the first to be invited. They said "yes" then later refused to come. So, Paul said, "Okay, I will now go to the gentiles." (Acts 28:26-28) And the gentiles came into the kingdom of God by the droves in the past two thousand years. Praise God, by God's grace many Jews are entering the kingdom today by receiving their Messiah!

*"And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev 22:17)*

*"He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (Rev 22:20-21)*