
Prayers

To God

Weekly theme - dedication to the Lord God

Praise God for His power to save and His power to bless. Praise God for His dedication to this task and praise Him for what it means to you to be dedicated to Him

For myself

Pray about your eyes; where they look, what they see, what they wait for, what they ignore and what they fail to perceive. So much of our character is conveyed by the choices we make about these things, knowingly and unknowingly. Pray to offer your eyes to God, that He might have control of them and guide what you see and why you see it.

For others

Lord God Almighty, people have learned to explore this world and to go further, behind the atmosphere of this world into space. But You, O Lord, see and know every part of this universe; You have made each star, each cloud of gas and each planet thought capable of supporting life. You know the truth about the universe and about each particle from which it is made; so forgive the limitations of our simple science. Reveal to us the greater mysteries of Your universe so that we may understand You better, understand our world better, and give You even greater glory! **AMEN**

Meditation

Would you talk with the Lord about life
Or would you seek to live it with Him?

Would you ask Him to explain why evil exists,
Or accept His help in order to defeat it?

Would you talk to him about music and worship,
Or fall down on your knees in homage?

Would you discuss the meaning of discipleship,
Or draw strength from His teaching to live it?

Would you ask Him to let you do greater things,
Or rejoice to do even the smallest of tasks?

Would you seek His wisdom about life's problems,
Or be willing to repent without question?

Would you hear His words and consider them later,
Or open your heart to Him immediately?

Be honest with yourself and do more than think;
The Lord needs to see your response!

Bible Passage

Luke 14:7-14

⁷ When Jesus noticed how the guests picked the best places at table, He told them this parable:

⁸ ***“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the highest place, for someone more important than you may have been invited.***

⁹ ***The one who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat,’ then, embarrassed, you will then take the least important place.***

¹⁰ ***“But when you receive an invitation, go instead to the lowest place so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a higher place.’ You will then be honoured in front of all your fellow guests. ¹¹ For all who lift themselves up will be humbled, and those who humbles themselves will be lifted up.”***

¹² Then Jesus said to His host,

“When you give a dinner or supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours lest they return the invitation in order to repay you. ¹³ Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ You will then be blessed, for although they cannot repay you; you will be paid back at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Review

You will remember from yesterday that Jesus was attending a meal on the Sabbath with some Pharisees when He was presented with a man in need of healing (14:1-6). On the occasion of that meal, however, much more happened than a dispute about healing on the Sabbath day. Jesus used the event, and the attention He gained through healing the man with dropsy, to challenge the Pharisees there about their attitudes towards God and other people. In this passage, Jesus gives us firstly a parable about humility and status (14:7-11), and secondly, a saying about attitudes and generosity (14:12-14).

Both halves of this passage are directed against the Pharisees, but contain teaching about God's Kingdom consistent with the rest of the Gospels. The climactic saying at the end of the parable, *‘For all who lift themselves up will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted’* (14:11) not only sums up the entire passage, it is found elsewhere

in the Gospels. In Matthew 23:12, Jesus says the same thing not to Pharisees, but to the disciples as He teaches them to come to terms with the priorities of the Kingdom. In Luke 18:14, Jesus says something similar to illustrate the difference between the worship of a Pharisee and a tax-collector. Lastly, Peter refers to this teaching when he calls on young men to honour and respect those who are older (1 Peter 5:6). It is therefore likely that Jesus used this phrase more than once, and He saw it as a general rule of the Kingdom of God. Early Christians then applied it to other situations as they faced them.

In order to understand the setting Jesus speaks of here, we should take a look at how people ate in the first century A.D. They did not sit down on chairs at tables, as we do. They reclined on sofa-chairs each capable of taking three people, and these large chairs for reclining were commonly arranged with one at the centre and others clustered around in a 'U' or a horseshoe shape. Grouped in the centre of the reclining chairs were low tables containing bowls from which food could be reached by all those gathered for the meal.

There were varying practices throughout the Roman Empire, but in general, each nation or social group had an etiquette concerning seniority at meals. The most senior position was in the centre of the reclining couch at the head of the 'U' or horseshoe arrangement, with the next most senior to the left and right, on the same reclining couch. In general, the best position on each reclining chair and was its centre, and the further away from the head of this arrangement, the lower in seniority the person invited to a meal.

In the first century, people were used to this form of seating arrangement, and even family meals were subject to these signs of status. Today, people generally know that seating at formal occasions is done to a plan, for example, at wedding banquets where there can be a hierarchy in the seating plan indicating closeness to the Bride and Groom. By and large, though, private meals in the home and casual 'eating out' require few such demonstrations of status, and we can certainly discuss about whether this is beneficial or not!

It is not too hard for us to understand the scenario Luke presents (14:7f.), despite the cultural differences in eating habits and arrangements between the first century and today, and the points Jesus makes are clear enough. We can imagine the jostling of people arriving at a meal and trying to get the best 'place' either in terms of general influence at the meal table, or in order to have the ear of a particular important person. It is vital however that we hear what Jesus says through this relatively understandable situation.

Without speaking about the Kingdom of God, in which as we have just discovered, the '*last will be first and the first last*' (13:30), Jesus presents us with a similar theme but from a more human perspective. He unravels the logic of what happens when people fight each other for status, pointing out that the one in charge of the occasion will put people in their place (14:8,9). Jesus may have wanted people to perceive from this that God will work to correct the presumptions of status amongst the religious, the rich and the famous, but there is a more obvious message. Jesus reveals that humility is clearly the best course of action if any of us want to find our rightful place, both in this world and in God's Kingdom (14:10:11). This is not a message to be read quickly and cast aside, it is necessary advice which tackles the dire human sin of power and status seeking.

Jesus then moves on quickly to give a more penetrating analysis of fellowship at the meal table, which reflects more accurately the Kingdom of God. He is not so much worried about the status of those who are invited, but the invitation itself. Who can come to the meal, and what does this mean in terms of fellowship? Behind all Jesus says in verses 12-14, we can imagine a heavenly banquet opened by God for people across all the barriers of human society. But Jesus tells His listeners to do something similar; He wants the host in this story, and now we who read what He said, to be as open hearted as God. We must be as generous as Jesus and as loving to others, whatever their background!

Jesus was at an exclusive, invitation only meal, arranged for like-minded individuals, in this case, for Pharisees. Yet he calls His host to offer such banquets with gregarious generosity, opening up his house to everyone in need out of pure humanity and compassion. The '*poor, crippled, lame and blind*' from our perspective are people who have fallen on hard times. In Jesus' day these were people whose lives were condemned to a living hell, and people did not want to think about those for whom such tragedy had come. But Jesus tells those gathered at the meal that such generosity marks out true righteousness, and its reward '*at the resurrection*' in God's Kingdom.

We cannot escape this radical message from Jesus' lips. It is a call for us to open our homes not merely to those from whom we can gain a return invitation, and thus expand our social circle. Our eyes and our hearts are to be more open than that. Meals, those precious moments of fellowship and sharing, are to be shared not to bless our spirits or to pander to our own social and personal needs. They are to be shared with people of real need in the world, people who need love, food, healing and care. We are to reflect God's Kingdom in what we do here and now.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V8 '*wedding feast*'

Other translations:

'wedding celebration' (CEB)

'wedding banquet' (NRSV)

The Greek word 'gamos' means the wedding feast, at which the wedding takes place. In European culture, we have a wedding first in church and then a feast afterwards. But in ancient times, the wedding took place in the course of the feast itself, hence the importance of the feast itself, which marked the actual event.

V14 '*resurrection of the righteous*'

There is no dispute about the translation of this phrase, but apart from a similar phrase found at the end of one of Paul's sermons in Acts 24:15, this is the only place where it is found in the Bible. It certainly summarises what Christians believe about the resurrection, providing we believe that the 'righteous' are those who are saved through their faith in Christ (see Ephesians 2:8f.)

Further Comments

Parables based on proverbs

There is a strong connection here between the New and the Old Testaments, and it is just possible that as Jesus dealt with this situation, He had a certain verse of the book of Proverbs in mind:

⁶ *Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence,
and do not claim a place among great men;*

⁷ *it is better for him to say to you,
"Come up here," than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.*

(Pro 25:6-7)

By looking at this passage of Scripture, we can pick out another important feature of this passage. Proverbs reminds us that it is God who calls to us '*come up here*', just as it is God alone who grants us access to His feast in heaven. According to Jesus' teaching then, God has opened the doors of His heavenly banquet to all manner of outcasts and people in need (amongst whom the Jews would have included the Gentiles).

Far better, says Jesus, for God to call us 'up here' than for us to presume that we are 'all right' and have a place of privilege at the heavenly banquet, because like the Jews we presume we are God's children for some earthly reason like lineage!

Discipleship

Application

Applying the rule of humility

The Bible teaches frequently about humility. In addition to the texts mentioned in the review, Jesus says for example, '*take my yoke on you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart ...*' (Matthew 11:29), and the book of Proverbs says, '*when pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom*' (Proverbs 11:2). At the heart of humility is a spirit broken before God that is content to be a servant in all things, and it is to be found especially in those who have been saved and who have submitted totally to the God who has saved them.

I have unfortunately observed Christians who know about salvation and have been baptised, but who have not yielded their souls to God; their desires remain primarily self-centred because they have allowed the world or the devil to remain in some corner of their lives. I have known church leaders who are addicted to the status of their positions, just like the Pharisees, and they cannot live without it, despite their good works. I have known Christians who will simply not accept that teaching such as this affects them and their home life; they treat the Bible as offering religious options, not firm guidance for the human soul.

Only in total surrender to God do we find humility of service and attitude towards others; it is a treasure when it is to be found, but it ought to mark out the Christian church in the eyes of the world.

Opening up our meal tables

It can be very hard to accept Jesus' challenge in this passage. What are we to do? We can all agree that we should not barge into inappropriate positions of status, and though some patently do this because of their character, most people dislike those who act so presumptuously. What is not so easy is to open up our meal tables. Personally, I do not think that Jesus is talking here about doing this at each meal we have, or even just about meals.

I reckon Jesus is challenging us to have an open heart to the poor, the ill and the disadvantaged, and this can certainly be measured by whether we are willing to have them at our meal table. So I must firstly ask myself whether I am willing to invite people to my table who are at the bottom of the social 'pile' as people say today; I must answer 'yes' or 'no'. Secondly, this saying of Jesus challenges me about whether I have any contact with such

people and whether my church fellowship is as open as this. This is a wider question but it is still relevant, and the question must be answered, for I am (and every Christian is) surely a part of the church, or else the church of God simply does not exist.

Ideas for what to do

- Ask yourself whether you are dependent on status, at church, in your work or job, at home, or anywhere else. What does this mean for you? Pray about this and submit your feelings to the Lord.
- Make plans to have a meal and invite people you would not normally invite to your table. Afterwards, discuss with a fellow Christian what this meant to you and your pathway of discipleship.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Have you or anyone in your group experienced being humiliated by sitting at the wrong table place? What did this make you feel, and how does this help you interpret this passage of Scripture?
2. Is it possible for anyone to claim to be truly humble, and if not, why not?
3. How can the average Christian keep an open table for the poor and disadvantaged? Is Jesus' teaching here directly practicable, or does it mean something else?

Final Prayer

Father God, come to my side and bless me. Lift up my eyes to see You, lift up my heart to praise You, lift up my hands to do Your will, and lift up my spirit to live and breathe the fruit of the Spirit. Come, Lord Jesus, come; come to me now, and come again when You are ready to complete this world and everything in it! **AMEN**
