

Bible Study Guide: Week of 8-22-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Luke 14:1, 7-14

¹On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

⁷When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” ¹²He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

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Jesus has just healed a woman who was bent over and unable to stand up straight for 18 years. This healing, you may recall from last week’s gospel lesson, happened on the sabbath in a synagogue where Jesus was teaching, prompting a confrontation between Jesus and the leader of the synagogue. The issue there was whether it was lawful to heal a person with a chronic illness on the sabbath or not. Many rabbis and teachers held that one could heal on the sabbath only in the case of acute illness—an emergency situation, in other words. From the point of view of the synagogue leader, this woman had been ill for 18 years; one extra day would hardly make a difference. Jesus, however, insisted that it was lawful to release people and make them well on the sabbath. This encounter and others like it explains why Jesus was invited to this meal at a Pharisee’s house on the sabbath. They want to keep a close eye on Jesus. The portion of our passage that the lectionary skips contains another one of Jesus’ sabbath healings! He comes to this house on the sabbath knowing he is being closely watched because he healed on the sabbath, so he asks those around him if it is legal to heal on the sabbath or not. Since they did not answer him, he healed a man with dropsy (that is, edema; swelling or fluid retention). It is noteworthy that Jesus doubled down on his act of healing on the sabbath, knowing this would prompt confrontation between him and the Pharisees.

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It seems that not only were these leaders watching Jesus, but he was watching them! He noticed how guests jockeyed for position at the table. Remember in ancient Roman and Near Eastern culture, honor and shame were the primary motivating factors for people. To be in a position of honor would be highly coveted. Jesus notice this and told this parable. For rather than merely giving sage advice about how to behave at a wedding banquet, Jesus provides an illustration everyone in that day and age would be familiar with (a wedding banquet) and uses that image to explain something about the nature of the kingdom of God. Verse 11 is the most clear statement of the purpose of the parable. Jesus is warning those at the banquet that in God's kingdom there will be a reversal of roles. In trying to be the best and the most favored, one might find themselves knocked down a few pegs. On the contrary, those who assume a lowly status will find themselves on the receiving end of undeserved mercy and blessing. The story of Jesus' journey to the cross is a prime example of this. Jesus chose the lowest place and God exalted him.

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Again, Jesus tells a slightly different parable, this time to his host. Again, this utterance is not a how-to guide for hosting successful luncheons, but rather an illustration of the economy of the kingdom of God. In kingdoms of this world, people invite those who can provide a *quid pro quo*; in the kingdom of God, it is those who have nothing of earthly value who will be welcomed to the table. Jesus warns his host that in showing favor only to those who favor him, he might be left out of the ultimate celebration in God's kingdom.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. The gospels often portray the Pharisees as opponents of Jesus. Why do you think he went to dine at this Pharisee's home on the sabbath?**
- 2. What other images of a wedding banquet do you know from scripture? Why do you think Jesus chooses the image of a wedding banquet in this parable?**
- 3. What do you think Jesus means by saying "you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous?"**