

**Joke:** “Dad, I want to ask you a question,” said little Josh after his first day of Sunday School.

“Of course,” said his Dad.

“The teacher was reading the Bible, about the Children of Israel building the Temple, the Children of Israel crossing the Red Sea, the Children of Israel making the sacrifices,” said Josh.

“So what’s your question?” his Dad asked.

“Well, didn’t the grown-ups do anything?”

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## **Week 1**

### **What’s My Purpose?**

Luke 14:1–24

I want to talk to you for these next several weeks about three chapters in the Bible that I believe if we will heed their message they can transform our life. So beginning today, I want to talk you through Luke 14, and then for the week or two after this we’ll take apart Luke 15, and then we will finish up this series looking at Luke 16.

My prayer for you during these next few weeks is to help you better understand the heart of this church, and God’s intentions for your life as well.

Let’s get started.

Luke 14:1–6 (NIV): One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. 5 Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” 6 And they had nothing to say.

I love this, Jesus looks at all the fellows, looks down at this guy in need, and says, “Okay, I get it. You brought me here as a test. You all believe that it’s wrong to do any kind of work on the Sabbath, including if I was to heal this one among us.”

I think Jesus is a little frustrated with these people, because these guys obviously don’t care one bit about this guy or his condition.

They don’t care that he might be dying, or that his family could soon be without a father. They don’t care about the pain he’s in or the embarrassment he’s now suffering as he stands in front of them.

He’s just an object to be used to get at Jesus.

So Jesus says, “Listen, I know what you’re thinking. You all believe that it’s a sin to do good on the Sabbath.”

Jesus goes on to say, If your son falls in a well, you don’t say, ‘Oh, sorry, son, hope you can tread water down there until tomorrow! I can’t pull you out today because well, you know kid it’s the Sabbath!’

He keeps telling them, Come on, guys, if your ox stumbles into a hole on a Sabbath day, you go get your pulleys and you call all the

neighbors to come lift him out because your economic prosperity is at stake if you don't.

I can almost hear Jesus say, you do good on the Sabbath if it suits your purposes, but if someone else does it. . .

So, I can imagine Jesus thinking, fellows don't tell me that I should keep from healing this guy on a day like today. Just because it's the Sabbath, he has a need and will, no I must be about my Father's business.

See, truth is church, God is far more interested in loving people than keeping rules.

I love that, I have to be careful because I sometimes find myself thinking with these kind of Scriptures, "Go get 'em Jesus,"

But let me pose this question to each one of us today myself included, "Do you find yourself in this story."

Imagine the scene for moment: one Sabbath day, Jesus gets invited to a party. As he walks up the front door, he notices that all the other guests have arrived early, kind of like at that surprise party when all the guests are told to arrive at 5, and the guest of honor is told to arrive at 6, so they can all be there and get everything ready before he or she gets there and jump out from behind everything and yell surprise.

Only instead of everybody being huddled inside the house to surprise him, all these guests are waiting for him out on the front lawn.

Maybe they're all in a semicircle. And in the middle of that is this guy who is totally out of place. He's not dressed as nice, probably

not from the same social class as they are. Certainly not as important as them or successful as them by societies standards.

Then up comes Jesus and he notices that this guys legs, arms, neck, and cheeks are all swollen. The man has dropsy, that's how some translations mention it.

His body's tissue has been absorbing excess fluids, maybe because of some kidney damage, so he's all puffy. He's obviously in pain, and he's probably going to die if he doesn't get some help.

Picture the scene? It's like a football huddle. All the religious leaders are arranged in a half circle, with one sick guy out front, and way out front of all that is Jesus.

Let me go back to the question "Do you find yourself in this picture."

And if I'm answering that I'm thinking, "I'm certainly not Jesus." He was perfect, and I am far from that.

So maybe I'm the sick guy. But I can't be him I'm in pretty good health, and looking back a few years I was even better-looking than I am today.

And since there were only three kinds of people in the picture I have to look closely at the other one.

These guys were Pharisees. Highly educated, ok that's not me, devoutly spiritual types who held positions of responsibility within the religious community. They had each spent years reading the Old Testament, the Bible of their day, and knew all of its rules and regulations, all 613 of them mostly by heart.

They tried their best to live their lives by those laws. And they thought little of people who didn't do the same.

Surely I'm not a Pharisee, am I?

But, I have studied the book, know the rules, try my best to abide by them. And there was a time I even knew the rules that weren't in the book, don't grow facial hair, don't smoke, don't drink, or dance, or hang out with anyone that does those things.

Maybe I am, or at least was.

Now maybe you find yourself in the same place I for sure at one time found myself. Let's pick up the story in verses 7-11. . .

Luke 14:7–11 (NIV): When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. 11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

It's interesting to me, we sometimes think Scriptures can't be relevant for us today because of how old they are. After all we have heard that line, you know times have changed. Or whatever other reason we might have for believing that lie.

I'm glad Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Aren't you?

I'm thankful that the Word of God changes not. Maybe times have changed, but God certainly hasn't.

And so as you read this story it's quite easy to relate to what the Pharisees typically did at public gatherings.

I don't care what you do, in every line of work, there is a social posturing that takes place. They call it the pecking order. Ever heard that phrase?

And as your pastor do you know the number one question I get asked at almost every conference I attend? "How big is your church?"

And honestly I can if I'm not careful walk away feeling like the sick one in our story that no one cares about. Because I haven't written a bunch of books or don't preach for thousands every week.

I think in Jesus' day, the pecking order was probably even more blatant. The more important you were, the closer you sat to the host.

I remember fellowshiping with different churches. Now these churches were mostly my brothers and sisters of darker skin. Bishop Tate, Pastor Lillie. I loved that time together. But every time I went I never just climbed up and sat on the pulpit chairs. Even when I had been asked ahead of time to speak that day. I always sat on a pew and waited on the invitation to come up front.

And Jesus, probably still a little worked up from what he'd just witnessed outside, decides that, while he's giving lessons, he might as well teach them how to act at a party, as well.

So he says, "Don't seek out the best seat, stay in the place of humility, let God exalt you, let others honor you when it's appropriate to do so."

Church I don't care how big we become I believe God will always be asking us, "What's really important? What really matters?"

Is it a name, your claim to fame, or who it is you proclaim?

And I hope you realize that it's who it is we proclaim. Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

Let's continue reading.

Luke 14:12–14 (NIV): Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Jesus is thinking to himself, "While I'm on a roll, I might as well tell them, not just where to sit at a party, but how to throw a party."

So he says, "When you throw a party, don't just invite all the nice, safe, beautiful, cleaned-up people who are already part of your social circle.

Instead, whenever you throw a party, use the opportunity to invite some not-so-cleaned-up people who probably are never asked to a party.

If you do that, God will be pleased, because that's the kind of party he throws.

Do you know why I encourage you to invite people to our church?

It's not just so the church can grow, oh sure we want to see it grow, I don't think we would be in the will of God if we did not want that.

After all, God wants His kingdom to advance, grow that's why he came. To see messed up, broken people, who realize they need a Savior come into right relationship with Him.

So I encourage you to invite not so we can have only nice, safe, cleaned-up people, but also those who may feel like the one in the middle of that huddle that no one wanted to acknowledge.

I never want my purpose in life to get out of alignment from what God's will is.

I want this church to remember who the party's for.

Those who are whole have no need for a physician. Amen?

Whatever happens to us, let us never become like Pharisees; let us never be willing to be part of a church that only invites the already-convinced to the party.

That's why, I have allowed people to introduce art, and worship in other ways than the normal, always been that way, always will be that way mentally. I would love to see others incorporate drama, and dance as well. Because there are people that will be attracted to the diversity.

Instead of asking every person to know where each passage is in the Bible, we paste it across a screen, so that there would be no. . . I know more than you know of spirituality in our midst.

So, here's a few things we can learn from Luke 14:



1. *God's Word is powerful.* He speaks to us through it, if we are willing to listen and consider the truth about ourselves it can change us.
2. *It's easy to become a Pharisee;* to get to the place in your life where you think you know what the rules are and then start living as if the rules matter more than people do. They call that legalism.
3. *It's easy to get fuzzy on the purpose of life.*
4. *God always wants outsiders invited to his party.*

Will you let God's Word come into and impact your life as it was meant to do? Will you set aside a time each day to read it and listen for what God might be saying to you through it?

Will you pray? If in some way you find yourself not sure of your purpose, not sure if you are in complete alignment with what God wants to do in and through you. Pray.

Will you invite outsiders to the party here, to hear and see what God is doing?

What a way to kick off 2020.

The rest of Jesus' experience at the Sabbath dinner is contained in a story he told just before the meal was over.

Luke 14:15 (NIV): When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

For first century Jews, just the mention of a banquet brought on thoughts of heaven.

Because in a prophecy in the Old Testament, the Bible describes a banquet that will take place in heaven, and all Jewish people anticipated this. It's found in the book of Isaiah,

Isaiah 25:6–8 (NIV): On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. 7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

So when Jesus talks about who to invite to a banquet, one of the guys at the table thinks about this prophecy and blurts out, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God!”

Translated, “I want to be at that banquet. I want to be at that party!”

Well, again, Jesus is a little agitated at these guys, so he tells this story.

Luke 14:16–24 (NIV): 16 Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ 18 “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ 19 “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ 20 “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ 21 “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

22 “ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ 23 “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’ ”

It’s really an interesting story. But it takes on a whole lot more meaning if you know just a few things about first century banquets.

First is this, only great people put on great banquets.

Commoners might have a friend over now and then, but only important people, only noblemen invited large groups of people. So the person who put this banquet on must have been a great or important person. Everyone around that table who heard Jesus tell this story would think so, at least.

The second thing to know is that RSVP’s were very important in that day. Because the process of butchering and then roasting meat was so time-consuming, and because there was no refrigeration, a party-giver would only cook as much meat as could be eaten by his guests or party-goers that evening. So the type of meat served at a banquet was actually chosen after the number of guests were known.

Here’s a formula, according to the ancient version of Julia Childs:

Number of guests:

2–4 = you were having chicken

5–8 = it’s time for some duck

10–15 = goat. (Tell story of our goat experience)

15–35 = lamb

35–75 = beef

So, you can see from this formula how important the invitation was. If you accepted the invitation, you were coming. You'd given your word.

I'm sure you have heard the phrase. . .my word is my bond.

So that invitation would come several days before the banquet, the host would total up the number of those who said they would be there and order up the appropriate meat.

And then, just before the meal was actually served, the host would send out a second invitation. As the meat was being cooked, he'd send his servant around to your home to say, "Dinner's almost ready. Time to come."

Jesus is very careful in the words he chooses in this story. The servant says, "Come, for everything is *now* ready." Every person around the table the day Jesus told this story knew that what he was describing was the second invitation. And that everyone who was invited had already given their word that they would be there.

So then Jesus described the people who renege on the invitation.

The first is a guy who says, "I have just bought a field and I must to go and see it. Please excuse me" (Luke 14:18).

One scholar commenting on this text says this,

The statement is a bold-faced lie and everyone knows it. No one buys a field in the Middle East without knowing every square foot of it like the palm of his hand. The springs, wells, stone walls, trees, paths, and anticipated rainfall are all well-known before a discussion of the purchase is even begun. The purchaser will also know the human history of the field. He will be able to tell you who has owned it for generations and to recite the profits of that field for

an amazing number of past years. The few plots of agricultural land are so crucial to life that in Arab Palestine these plots had proper names.

They named the fields like we name our pets.

So what Jesus is describing in this story is that when the servant comes to say, "Supper's on!" instead of saying, "We'll be right there!" the land owner sends back an insult by saying, "What? Are you kidding? I have some dirt that is more important to me than you are!"

The servant goes to a second home. And at this home, the guy says, "Oh! I can't come, either." His response is, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me" (Luke 14:19).

Again, a lie.

A *yoke* of oxen refers to two oxen, who were matched up and trained to work together. So the guy is saying that he's just bought ten oxen and he needs to go check them out to see how well they work together.

But here's the thing, teams of oxen were sold two ways in the Middle East.

In some places, the team was taken to the marketplace. In that case, at the edge of the marketplace, there would be a small field where prospective buyers could test the oxen. If they couldn't pull together, they were a worthless team.

The other method of sale was to announce to your friends that you had a team of oxen to sell and that you would be out plowing your

field at such and such a time if they wanted to stop over for a test drive.

In either case, a prospective buyer would always try out the oxen before bargaining on a price ever started.

In effect, this guy was saying to the party thrower, “I know I said I’d come, but I just bought five used cars, sight unseen, and I have to take them all for test drives.”

This insult is even worse than the first because land was considered precious, whereas oxen were unclean animals. The guy is saying, “Unclean animals are more important to me than you are!”

The third excuse giver says this, “I just got married, so I can’t come” (Luke 14:20).

Whereas the first two pretend to be gracious by saying, “Please excuse me,” this one doesn’t even offer an apology. He just says, “I can’t come.”

Again, everyone at the dinner table with Jesus would know that this is a lie. Marriages were announced a year in advance, and no one would schedule a party for the same time as a wedding because weddings involved the whole village or community. If you scheduled a party during a wedding, no one would come.

In Jesus’ story, the great man who is in charge of the party says, “Fine, insult me if you want to, but I’m still holding my party.” And he sends his servant to find hurting and needy people to come to eat what he’s prepared.

So the servant rounds up all the street people and still there’s room for more.

Luke 14:22 (NIV): 22 “ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

So the master opens up the party to people outside the city, on country roads and the like.

When Jesus describes this part of the story, what his hearers heard was, “God rounded up the riffraff of Israel to invite to his party and there was still more room.

So, he also invited people outside of Israel, gentiles even, you and I, into his party.”

What Jesus was saying to those religious leaders was, “Some of you are going to reject God’s offer of a banquet in heaven. You can do that if you want to. But know that the feast will go on without you anyway.

And God will fill heaven with or without you. He is on mission to fill heaven and he is going to do it.

So, here’s the final lesson we can from Luke 14:

*5. God’s purpose is to fill heaven with people from all walks of life.*

I believe that God has and wants more for all of His children. In their commitment to him, the effort they put into knowing Him, following Him, pursuing Him, and advancing His kingdom. He desires us to seek first His Kingdom. To love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind.

So with what I have of the rest of my life, I want to live it in pursuit of God’s will.

I want to invite you to join me in doing that as well. Over the years, in this church we have seen lives changed, marriages saved, children helped, people fed, gas tanks full, and an eternity with Christ in heaven has been written into the books.

And I am thankful for those opportunities.

And what we need in 2022 is to start with people who will pray some bold prayers and live some bold lives.

Church, you were created for significance.

So let's all play our roles. Let's play them boldly, sincerely, and intensely. Not like Pharisees, and not for the purpose of winning the best seats. But for the purpose of honoring God and advancing His Kingdom together.

Prayer