

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT BANQUET

Luke 14:12-24

In the spiritual realm, certain things are turned up side down. We saw in our last lesson that the proud are humbled and the humble are exalted. This is mentioned in Luke 14:11 in the parable of the guests. Today we will study another parable, the parable of the great banquet, where we see a similar reversal. Many who attended the banquet were among those who were least expected to attend and those most expected to be there were among those who were excluded. This passage is found in Luke 14:16-24. We will read from v. 12.

Luke 14:12. And He also went on to say 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, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you.

13 But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,

14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. "

15 And when one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

16 But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many;

17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.'

18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.'

19 And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.'

20 "And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'

21 "And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'

22 "And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'

23 "And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.'

24 'For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.' "

We mentioned in our previous lesson that the Lord Jesus told this parable in the house of a Pharisee who invited Him for a meal. This story is called the parable of the great banquet, of the Lord's banquet. Jesus speaks of it as 'My banquet' in v. 24.

What is this banquet? The imagery of a banquet expresses the sense of having something to celebrate. It refers to the feast of salvation, what is sometimes called the Messianic or eschatological feast. And what is celebrated at the Messianic feast is the salvation of those who have been redeemed. It is a beautiful picture of the celebration of salvation.

Selfless generosity

Before He gives this parable, Jesus says a few things to His host. He says in v. 12, ‘When you give a banquet, don’t go about simply inviting the kind of people whom you know will invite you back. Don’t just invite the people from whom you might gain some advantages later.’ In other words, you don’t give in order to harvest something in return. Why not? ‘Because when you behave in this way, it means that your eye is upon a selfish gain in some way. You seek an immediate reward in this life and in this world. What will happen is that you will not get a reward from God. You might receive the favor of those who can repay your favor but that is all that you will have. You will not get God’s favor.’

‘Instead,’ Jesus tells the man in vv. 13-14, ‘invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind because they do not have the means to repay you.’ In Israel, the crippled, the lame and the blind were obviously the poor of the society. These were the people who, because of their physical disabilities, could not work, and therefore they could not earn a salary. Most of them depended on charity to survive. Why should you invite them? Precisely because they can’t repay you. This is the exact opposite of the worldly way of thinking – you scratch my back and I will scratch yours.

Nobody gives in this way, in a spirit of unselfish love, unless this person is looking for a return that comes from God, not from man. We can say that this kind of giving is the concrete expression of faith. It takes faith to do good works for which we are not recompensed on earth. It takes faith to believe that our generosity will be recognized only at the resurrection of the just. Jesus says in the last part of v. 14, *For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous*. The resurrection of the righteous is the resurrection of those who have trusted Jesus for their salvation. They will be rewarded for their service for God’s kingdom.

Desires as motivators

Is the prospect of rewards a proper motivation for the disciple’s obedience? It is not rare to find Christians who consider incentives to be ‘secular’ or ‘unspiritual.’ If we say that it is wrong for the believer to be motivated by rewards, then we are contradicting Jesus’ teaching. ‘When you give a feast and you invite those who cannot pay you back,’ Jesus says, ‘you will be paid back at the resurrection of the righteous.’ Here the Lord appeals not only to our compassion but also to our eternal self-interests. If we do this compassionate act that goes unrewarded in this life, He will personally pay us back in the next life. Elsewhere He said, *But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great* (Luke 6:35)... Here also Jesus motivates us to do good works by the promise of rewards. So it is not wrong for us to be motivated by the prospect of rewards. In fact, I would say that something is wrong if we are not motivated by rewards.

You see, God created each human being with certain desires that correspond to and make possible certain motivations. The most obvious ones are the desires for pleasure, for possessions and for power.

At first, these things may sound unbiblical because as Christians we have come to think of them as temptations, not motivators. And it is certainly true that Satan tries to use them in order to tempt us. If we are not careful, the desires for pleasure, possessions and power can make us vulnerable to temptation. But we have to understand that they can only be appealed to in the first place because they are part of the way God made us and intends us to be. They are not rooted in our sin nature.

Remember that Satan appealed to these desires in Adam and Eve before they were sinful (Genesis 3:1-7). Remember also that Satan appealed to Jesus on the same ground even though He had no sin nature (Luke 4:1-13). Why? Because He was human and to be human is to have desires for these things. We desire pleasure, possessions, and power not because we are sinful but because we are human.

Looking for heaven's gratification

Our Creator has instilled in us desires by which He can motivate us to obedience. Now, the other side of the truth is that by these desires, also, the devil can motivate us to disobedience. The way of the world and the temptation of Satan is to try to gain our rewards in the present world. The way of Christ is to gain them in the future not by clinging to them in the present, but by forgoing them in the present. This is the point of the parable. 'Don't give in order to receive something back in this life. Rather give to those who are unable to return your favor. Your reward will be paid by God Himself at the time of the resurrection.' We do good without expecting repayment. We deny our reward in this world because we know that we will gain a reward from God in the world to come.

Take notice that we forgo rewards now not because we dislike them, but because we want them in another world. Therefore it is not a matter of no gratification. It is a matter of delayed gratification. It is forgoing present temporal gratification to achieve future eternal gratification.

The key to all this, as we mentioned, is faith. For it is faith that brings one to forgo something in this life out of belief that a higher form of it will be his in the next.

Think of Moses in Hebrews 11. Moses chose the path of life based on his belief in God and in the eternal rewards of following God. He could endure temporal mistreatment and forfeit temporal pleasure knowing that all would be different in eternity. He could forgo earthly pleasures and possessions because he anticipated heavenly pleasures and possessions that would never end. He turned his back on Egypt's treasures to pursue heaven's treasures (Hebrews 11:24-27).

Living for the world to come

'You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.' The reward is for the righteous. There is an aspect of righteousness that refers to the righteousness of Christ by which the Lord justifies the sinner through faith. This 'legal' righteousness is imputed to the believer by grace. There is also a 'practical' righteousness which flows from an appreciation of the mercy of God. It is a righteousness that Jesus defines in this parable as the giving to the poor and seeking nothing in return.

Here we come to a definition of the word 'righteous' in the Lord's teaching. A 'righteous' person is a person who, like Moses, has turned his back upon the world because his whole thinking has been transformed. He has a new set of values. And at the center of that new set of values is God. Because his values have changed, he does not live for this present world. He lives for the world to come, for the age to come.

The new man in Christ has come to see that this world is transitory and there is no use hanging onto that which is passing away. Trying to hang on to this world is like taking a handful of dry sand. The tighter you squeeze the sand in your hand, the faster it goes out between your fingers. As Paul says, 'We come into this world with nothing, and we will go out of this world with nothing (1 Timothy 6:7).' Whether it is your reputation, your money, your degrees, your possessions, nothing goes with you. Everything stays behind.

So this is one aspect of righteousness. A righteous man is a man who, having turned his back upon the world, has a totally different sense of values. His thinking becomes so revolutionary that he is prepared to give, not seeking anything in return in this world. In fact, he would not want a return now because if he got it now, he would lose the return that comes from God. When we read Matthew 6:1-18, we realize that almost every time we seek a short-term reward, we lose out on the long term reward. Jesus says there, 'When you do something to be noticed by men, you have your reward in full. You will have no reward from your heavenly Father. But when you do an act of piety secretly, not seeking the praise of men, God will repay you.'

Lame excuses

Another aspect of the word 'righteous' is found in the parable of the great banquet. Here the Lord Jesus describes a man who invited various people to a feast. But these people didn't want to come. They made all kinds of excuses. In the end, the man invites the poor, the blind, and the lame. In other words, this parable is simply applying what Jesus has just said. 'When you invite people, don't just invite the well-to-do people. Invite the poor.' And He goes on to say, 'That's exactly what God does. The Lord invites the poor to His banquet.'

When you examine the nature of the excuses, you realize that they simply do not stand the tests. They touch on business and family commitments which could easily have taken a second place to the invitation.

The first man's priority is a field that he has just bought. He says that it is necessary for him to see it. But why does he have to examine it when he already owns the field? No one would buy a field without prior inspection. And if by any chance a man did this, there was no hurry. The field would still be there the following day. This is clearly a reason given by a person who didn't want to go to the banquet.

The second excuse is like the first: a recent purchase – this time oxen – needs to be inspected. That again is a lame excuse. No one would buy oxen without first making sure that they would do the job. And even if he did, there was no hurry. The oxen could rest for a day and be put to work the day after.

The third excuse is also not a substantial reason to miss the feast. A man has just married and so cannot attend. In fact, he makes no effort to be excused. He simply declares that he will not attend, period.

Notice that there is nothing wrong with what any of the three men were involved with. They didn't stay away from the banquet because they were doing bad things. There is nothing wrong in owning a piece of land. There is nothing wrong in getting involved in some form of business. There is nothing wrong in getting married. The problem is that these things were their main concern. They were so preoccupied with family and business commitments that they rejected the invitation to join the kingdom. What is wrong is the judgment that some things are more valuable than the banquet of the kingdom of God. All pursuits, no matter how valid they seem, can rob a person of the great celebration with God.

Feeling unworthy of God's grace

The excuses given by these people show another point, namely that their own business is more important than the host who invited them. If they regarded the host as more important than what they were concerned with, of course they would come to his invitation. 'My field and my oxen can wait. I can leave my wife for the day. You invite me; I will come. I feel honored to attend your feast.' But instead, they regarded the host as worthy of them. 'I am the one who, by my presence, give honor to

the host.’ There are people who seem to think that God is honored because they are Christians, or that God is honored to have the likes of them in the church. This is a dangerous view of God’s glory.

When the master got angry at the excuses, he ordered his servant to ‘go out and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ The poor, the blind, the lame. These are the people who have no sense of their worthiness. They don’t think of themselves to be somebody. They think that they are not good enough to attend the feast of a rich man. Notice the language of invitation used in v. 21. They are not simply to be ‘invited,’ but must be ‘brought’ or ‘led in’ to the feast.

The other category of people feel themselves to be even more unworthy. It says in v. 23 that they need to be **compel** to come. *Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in...* This doesn’t mean to force them. It means that the servant will have to try hard to persuade them to attend the banquet. These people feel that they are so unworthy of God’s grace and mercy that if you say, ‘Come, God receives you,’ they will say, ‘No, I’m not good enough. I’m such a bad sinner that God would never receive me.’ And so you need to persuade them. You need to take them gently but firmly by the hand and lead them to God’s kingdom. ‘Please, you must come. You must believe that though you are not worthy, God will receive you.’

The more unworthy you see yourself to be, the more worthy you really are in God’s sight. The most unworthy person is a person who regards himself as worthy. And the most worthy person in God’s sight is the person who knows himself to be unworthy. This brings us back to the reversal of v. 11, *For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.*

Summary

Let us sum up. There is nothing more important than to be part of the feast of salvation. *Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,* we read in v. 15. ‘Happy is the man who has a place in God’s kingdom.’ But who is going to enjoy the Lord’s feast? It is those mentioned in v. 14, those who have a place in the resurrection of the righteous.

We described two practical aspects of righteousness. The righteous is a person who has turned his back upon the world because he has a very different view of reality than the people of the world. Like Moses who turned his back on the treasures of Egypt to pursue heaven’s treasures, the righteous has said good-bye to the world, and said yes to God. He lives his life on earth in light of his fixation on heaven. He lives with an acute awareness of eternal rewards, believing that he will get them in the life to come and not in this life. Therefore he doesn’t seek rewards from men. In everything, his eyes are set on eternity, on God.

And secondly, he is a person who has a deep sense of unworthiness. Because he knows his weaknesses, he feels unworthy of God’s mercy. The apostle Paul sets an example of this kind of attitude. He said, ‘If you think you are a sinner, let me tell you something. I am worse. I am the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). I am not fit to be an apostle because I have persecuted the church of God (1 Corinthians 15:9).’ Paul would not forgive himself, i.e., he would not forget about it, even though God had forgiven him. He would always let this painful thought keep him humble. The righteous is the one who enters the kingdom of God with all humility, assuming that he is worthy of nothing more than the lowly positions.

The parable ends with a somber verdict on those who made excuses. ‘They will not taste of my dinner,’ Jesus says. There would be no second chance for them. If they won’t be at God’s table it is not because Jesus excluded them, but because they excluded themselves. The religious leaders, though invited, opted out of the invitation. Such exclusion is not God’s desire. It is the result of their own deliberate choice. Man cannot save himself; he cannot invite himself to the banquet. But he can damn himself by refusing to attend it.