

Luke 14:1-24 Meals That Heal

People of God,

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when he first preached in the synagogue in Nazareth, he read this passage from the prophet Isaiah:

*¹⁸ "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

The acceptable year of the Lord is a reference to the year of Jubilee. According to Leviticus 25, every 50th year was known as —the Jubilee. It was the Sabbath of Sabbaths. 7 x 7 is 49, and so on the 49th or 50th year, there was to be time of reversal in Israel. All slaves were liberated, debts were forgiven, people returned to their ancestral homes and all sowing and reaping ceased for the year.

The Jubilee was a prophecy in calendar form of the salvation which the Messiah would bring. This Jubilee now breaks into the world through the ministry of Christ. Jesus has come to bring the great reversal, he has come to set the captives free from their oppression, and to return the People of God back to their ancestral homeland with God, and to cancel the debts of the poor through the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus opens the eyes of the blind – both physically and spiritually. Jesus heals the brokenhearted, and sets at liberty those who are captive to sin, sickness, disease, and the demonic. All of Jesus' ministry then is set within the overarching theological time frame of the year of Jubilee, the Sabbath of Sabbaths. The weary world rejoices, for he has come to give it rest.

As the Christmas Hymn says –

*Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother.
And in His name all oppression shall cease.*

This is important for us to understand as we come to our passage today. Because although this great reversal was to take place on the Jubilee, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the work that Jesus does on this sabbath suggests that that is what every sabbath was also about, to a lesser degree. If the Jubilee was the great Sabbath, then the Sabbath was the lesser Jubilee. Let's see how this works out.

A ruler of the Pharisees invites Jesus to his house for a Sabbath dinner. But Luke tells us that the reason Jesus was invited was because the Pharisees were watching him. Watching him to see if he would break their sabbath laws. They invited him to set him up.

Ever since Luke 6, Jesus has been offending the Pharisee's Sabbath observances. While going through the grain fields on a sabbath, Jesus and his disciples were picking the heads of grain to eat. And the Pharisees told Jesus that what they were doing was not lawful. Jesus says that David ate the bread of the presence in the house of God, when he and his men were hungry and on the run. He is greater than David, for the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Then in the very next story, on another Sabbath, Jesus entered a synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse him.

Jesus questioned them. *"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life, or destroy it? They were silent. And so Jesus, after looking around at them, healed the man. And the Scribes and Pharisees were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."*

A similar thing happened in Luke 13, when on the Sabbath, Jesus was in a synagogue teaching, and a woman who had a disabling spirit for 18 years was there. She was bent over and could not straighten herself out. And when Jesus saw her, he said, *"Woman, you are freed from your disability." And he laid hands on her and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work*

ought to be done. Come on those days to be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.

Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and then all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.”

And now here we are in our story today in Luke 14, and the same thing happens again. It is the Sabbath. Jesus is invited to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. And when Jesus arrives, he notices that there was a man already there who had dropsy.

Dropsy is today known as edema. It is a condition of swelling in the body when the body retains water. Lev. 13:2 lists a condition of swelling under the broader category of leprosy. A person who had swelling was considered unclean. Now ironically, the law states that after the priest first examines a person who has such swelling disease, they were to come back on the seventh day to be examined again.

Now it is the seventh day, it is the sabbath, and the man with swelling is standing before the religious leaders looking for healing. But they do not provide any. They are content to leave the man in his affliction. Their Sabbath observances do not involve setting any one free from any burdens.

You see, the Sabbath was all about providing healing, and deliverance to God’s people. And Jesus’ application of the Sabbath can be found by necessary inference from the 10 commandments given in Deut. 5, where Moses says this – *“you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”*

In other words, Israel was to rest from their labors on the Sabbath, because God gave them rest from the oppression of Pharaoh and Egypt. Israel was to learn a principle from this. Not only were they to rest, Israel was to love their neighbors by likewise “setting the needy free from the afflictions that

oppressed them”¹ and thus give them rest as well. The sabbath therefore was not so much about taking your rest, but more so about giving rest.

“Liberation from bondage had the overriding purpose of setting the people free to serve the Lord their God according to His will. That was what motivated God to lead his people out of Egypt (Ex. 4:22-23; 5:1; 7:16; 8:1,20; 9:1, 13; 10:3) and was the ultimate motive for ensuring that no one in God’s holy nation was unnecessarily burdened by any affliction, poverty, or want. A person could function best in God’s service when unencumbered by affliction. Then he could truly do his calling joyfully and to the full, as God intended for his people.”²

But the Scribes and Pharisees aren’t doing any of that. They are doing the opposite. They are laying heavy burdens on the people, oppressing them like Pharaoh, and not giving them any relief, so that the people could serve the Lord with joy. The Pharisees had no compassion on those who were sick and infirm, and disabled, and afflicted by disease or demon.

Their regulations and rules for purity excluded people like this man with dropsy from ever really experiencing a true Sabbath rest. God wanted Israel to be a holy people. And the Pharisees considered that to mean that they had to cast out those who were afflicted. But to be a holy nation meant to be consumed with God’s heart for the afflicted and oppressed, just as God was for Israel when they were in Egypt.

And so when Jesus sees this man, he turns and asks the lawyers and the Pharisees, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent, because they were observing Jesus’ Sabbath practices of delivering people from oppression and affliction, and they knew this was against the Pharisees practice. Jesus heals the man. And then sends him away. And then Jesus calls them out on their hypocrisy, saying, “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?” And they could not answer him regarding these things.

¹ The Deacon. Van Dam. 16.

² Ibid. 17.

Jesus uses here a form of argumentation and application of the Scriptures known as *a fortiori* – meaning, from the stronger. The term is used when drawing a conclusion that's even more obvious or convincing than the one just drawn. If the Pharisees would pull their donkey, or ox out of a ditch on the sabbath, in order to free the beast from its burden and affliction, how much more should they deliver this man from his burden and affliction on the Sabbath, especially since the sabbath is all about delivering people from their burdens and giving them rest?

This is the same argument he used in the previous chapter about the woman who was afflicted for 18 years. If the Pharisees would untie the ox or donkey to give it water on the sabbath day, to give it relief, how much more ought this woman, a daughter of Abraham, be given relief on the sabbath day?

Although created on the 6th day together, both beasts and humans, humans are more valuable to God than animals. And when our hearts become increasingly hardened to the ways of God, we tend to show more compassion and mercy to animals, then we do to humans. It's actually quite weird to me that it is called the humane society which seeks to help animals.

Jesus then tells them two parables – the first is directed to those people who were invited to this sabbath feast. And the second is directed to the host of the feast.

Jesus noticed how the people who were invited to the feast all chose the best seat. The Pharisees possessed great social power in their day, and these people were all jockeying with each other for greater position, trying to get the seat closest to the host.

In that day, the dinner table was in the shape of a U, and the seat of honor was in the center of the U. The seats would decrease in status as they moved outward away from the center. And so, as people arrived, they chose the place closest to the center seat. Seeking the greater status. Jesus notices that these people are doing that, trying to curry favor with the most important people, and they are all exalting themselves.

But Jesus tells them that when they are invited to a wedding feast they should not sit in the best place, lest one more honorable than they be invited by the host and the host tells you to get up and go sit over there. This will bring you shame if you have to leave the more honored seat to sit at a less honored seat. But if, when you are invited, you sit in the lower place, then if the host calls you up, you will be honored. And so the principle is – that everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Notice. Jesus is here at a Sabbath dinner, observing the people trying to take the best seats, but Jesus gives his instructions about choosing the lower seats “when you are invited to a wedding feast...” What gives? Why is Jesus concerned about table manners at wedding feasts, when he is here at a Sabbath dinner?

The reference to the wedding feast is a reference to the Messianic Kingdom, and the eschatological Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Jesus injects this sabbath feast, the feast on the last day of the week, with appropriate eschatological meaning. In other words, he is teaching that this sabbath day feast is a type of the great feast to come on the last day. And not just a type of that great end times banquet, but the sabbath dinner feast really participates in some mystical way with that end times feast. Somehow, they are the same feast.

And the Lord’s point here then is this: if you are not humble, but you exalt yourself now at this feast, then you will be humbled and shamed on the last day, at that feast. Honor is not something that is grasped. Honor is given to those who humble themselves, Jesus teaches.

Jesus embodies this very truth. And Phil. 2 speaks of this. Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped and held on to, but he emptied himself of such glory, and became a man, and even a servant, and died on the cross. For this act of tremendous humility, God glorified Jesus and seated him at His right hand, the greatest position of honor and glory in the universe. So honorable in fact that everyone in heaven, on earth, and under the earth will proclaim Jesus to be the Lord. That glorification happened because Jesus was humble enough to serve other people and seek their greater good, and to free them from oppression and sin.

The people at this sabbath day feast didn't care about freeing anyone but themselves. They only consider how they can get more social influence. And so they exalt themselves. But on that last great day, they will be humbled. Thus Jesus is warning them again about the great reversal that is to come.

The second thing Jesus says, is to the host. And he talks to him about who are the appropriate people to invite to a meal. He says, *"When you give a dinner or a supper, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

Just as the guests were seeking to exalt themselves by choosing the best seats, so too was the host trying to reward himself by inviting the right kind of guests. If they invite the guy who has all the money, and seats him at his right hand, then that man will invite the host to his house and bless him in return. It is a game of constantly seeking to acquire honor and glory and blessing, but in the wrong way.

Now don't get me wrong. Seeking honor, and glory, and blessing, and immortality are not wrong. Paul commends it in Romans 2. There, Paul speaks well of those *"who by patience in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, God will give eternal life; but those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first, and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first, and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."*

Now what does Paul mean by seeking for glory and honor and immortality, and doing good? He means having the appropriate response of a sinner to the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ. He means it is of utmost importance to confess your sins, and humbling yourself before God in contrition over your sins, and to believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. This is how one attains glory, honor, and immortality.

Hence Isa. 66:2 says,

*“But this is the one to whom I will look:
He who is humble, and contrite of spirit
And trembles at my word.”*

But the Pharisees think they can get God to look toward them by accumulating the favor of other men at the expense of those who are already humbled by their afflictions. And they get the Lord’s attention all right. But not the attention they want.

Now, what Jesus has done in calling the man with dropsy and healing him, is he assumed the role of Host of the feast. Because He is the Host of the Great Feast on the Last Day, He is acting and teaching about that Feast here in this feast.

Jesus assumes the role of host by 1. calling the man with dropsy up to be healed. The role of calling people up to better seats was reserved for the host, as Jesus taught in his first parable. The man with dropsy had the lower position, and Jesus honored him above all the rest by calling him up to be healed. Thus exalting him. And in the process, shamed the others. And if these people do not repent, they will be shamed on the last day.

2. Jesus puts himself in the place of the host by inviting the man with dropsy to be healed, thus making him his honored guest, and the man has no way to pay Jesus back. Technically the Pharisees invited the man with dropsy to the feast, but they invited him only for the purpose of trying to trap Jesus. Jesus is seen as the true host, who invited the man for the purpose of delivering him from his oppression on the Sabbath day.

And thus, Jesus turned the sabbath meal into a miniature Eschatological Feast at the end of history, and demonstrated the theology of the year of Jubilee, by reversing the established order.

All of this was prophesied by his mother Mary, as she said in the Magnificat –

*And His mercy is on those who fear Him
From generation to generation.*

*⁵¹ He has shown strength with His arm;
He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
⁵² He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
And exalted the lowly.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich He has sent away empty.*

Here is the point, People of God. All sabbath meals are meant to be meals that heal. This meal that we are about to have this morning is a meal which brings restoration and wholeness, and deliverance for the afflicted and oppressed. Jesus exalts the humble who confess their sins and who listen to his word, and he seats us with him in the heavenly places to have table fellowship with him and with the saints and angels in Heaven, and with God. This meal is a foretaste and participation in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in eternity.

We may not have the custom of having honored seats at our dinner tables, at least not in the way in which it was practiced during the times of Jesus. But you can still pay attention to how you can show honor to your guests by giving rest to the weary, and deliverance to the oppressed, and comfort to the afflicted. You can participate in the acceptable year of the Lord, the great Jubilee that Christ inaugurated, by making your homes and tables places where people would love to receive rest for their souls. As you go out from here and invite people over to your house for a meal, consider how you can help release the burden of sins' affliction in the lives of your guests.

So don't only invite people to your house that you know you will have a good time with. And don't consider NOT having over a family or couple or a person over because you know they have problems and you can't be bothered with that whole mess on the Lord's Day. I mean, there are six other days of the week you can help them with their problems, but not the Lord's Day. The Lord's Day is Me Time.

That is wrong. It is the Lord's Day, the Day in which Christ delivered us from our oppression to sin, death, and Satan, and this day is better than any other day to help apply the balm of Christ's salvation to those humble saints who need to be refreshed.

And if you are a person who needs refreshing, don't worry about being a burden on someone else. Reach out to one of these saints and ask them if they are having anyone over for lunch or dinner. And ask if you can come. I know there is some unspoken taboo that says that you should not invite yourself over to people's houses. But we need to get over that. If you need help and comfort and rest from the people of God, then we all should be ready and willing and able to host a family and or individual who is in need.

And so I encourage you to invite those who need encouragement, help, rest, and healing to your house for Sabbath dinner or Lord's Day Lunch. Search them out even. And if you need encouragement, help, rest, and healing, seek out someone else's help, for this keeps you humble. And in this way, all our lesser tables become extensions of Christ's greater table, and we all will taste of Christ's banquet. Amen.