

March Madness: crib to college... Expectations did not match experience. Priority & Paradox. Many people view Christianity, the Bible, Jesus as a dry religious experience that is really quite boring and predictable, but as we will see today, Jesus and his kingdom is anything but predictable. Predictable? No. Paradoxical? Yes.

We have been studying the Gospel of Luke at Redemption Hill, and what we have seen that Jesus lived his life with a great sense of mission. [The priority of his life was to live, die, be raised in order to seek and save the lost.]

This morning we are going to continue in the gospel of Luke....

“The Priority & Paradox of Easter”
Luke 14:7-34

In Luke 14:7-34, we are going to see Jesus begin to press in on the matter of what it means to truly follow him.

The Point: Jesus died and rose again that we might respond to his invitation to follow him.

Luke 14 will give us four paradoxes that teach us where our priorities should be as we consider the invitation to follow Christ.
Paradox #1

I. Humble yourself to be exalted or exalt yourself to be humbled (14:7-11).

Story: 7-11

- Context: 14:1-6, Jesus was at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, and verse 7 tells us that he was making careful observations as each person grabbed their seat at this dinner party. This provoked him to teach a parable, which is a story that teaches a spiritual truth by way of analogy or comparison. This parable addresses our desire for status and recognition, and consequently, how we should approach God and his kingdom.
- Jesus understood the customary places of honor were next to the host. While most of us would say, “Hey, I’m going to sit there in the VIP section.” (strut) Jesus says, “Don’t do that. Do not exalt yourself to the place of honor, because someone a little more special and distinguished may arrive, and then you will be asked to downgrade your seat.”
- Now, I realize that you cannot even imagine someone more distinguished than you would ever arrive because you are so cool, so suave, so popular, so great looking, but if that were to happen it would be an absolute “embarrassing reversal.”
- To have to get up in front of all the other guests would have been horrific in their honor and shame culture. One scholar says this humiliation would have been “almost worse than death.” (Strauss) Therefore, Jesus says, take the last seat and perhaps, you will be invited to a more prominent seat. Then you will be honored not ashamed.
- Can you say: “I don’t have to have the nicest seat. I don’t have to be recognized. In fact, I would rather other people receive the recognition and praise.”? The world teaches us to exalt ourselves! Look at me. Look at what I bring to the table. Look at how I handle my business. But humility *prioritizes* the place of others over self. “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)
- Verse 11 is the key verse. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”
- What should help us become more humble? 1) A proper view of God, which is a HUGE vision of God. 2) A proper view of self, we do not have it all together. 3) A proper view of God’s gifts; everything we have is a gift.
- Gospel hook: This should not surprise us. The hero of our story is the God who became man. Even more than that, he humbled himself so far that he willingly died for the people who despised and sinned against him. That’s why Paul writes:
- **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)** Humility is prerequisite to experiencing the blessings of the kingdom of God.
- In verse 12, Jesus turns his attention from the guests to the host himself. *Read 12-14*

Trans: Here’s our second paradox...

II. Paradox #2: Extend mercy to the poor and you will become rich (14:12-14)

- This cuts against our every inclination. We like to have people over who are like us. We tend to host people with whom we are perfectly comfortable. Sometimes, we give because we know it might be reciprocated, perhaps with an even greater return.
- It is easy to be so focused on the profit & loss that we set aside what it means to sacrifice and truly serve others.
- *The world tells us to get rich and spend everything on yourself, and when you do spend, spend in such a way that will enable you to receive more.* This parable highlights the danger of “calculating possible rewards.”
- But Jesus says, spend your resources on those who cannot further your agenda or pay you back. In particular, he teaches that generosity and hospitality should not have social limitations.
- When we do this we picture forth God and display the gospel in radical ways. How? Because this is what God has done for us. He has extended radical generosity to those who could never repay him!

- As Romans 11:35-36 say, “who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” (Romans 11:33-36 ESV)
- This is why God rewards those who live like this so richly. And make no mistake, God will reward those who live this way.
- *Verse 14.* Jesus refers to “the resurrection of the just” The Bible tells us that when all is said and done, we will be raised to an eternal afterlife and we will give an account of our lives to God. We will receive the rewards of our actions done to God’s glory.
- And our resurrection is guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ. Jesus proved in his death and resurrection that he had the victory over sin, Satan, and death. The central confession of our faith are found in the words of the 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: **“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”**
- The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Not only does the resurrection of Christ guarantee our resurrection and give us confidence in the hope that God will restore all things (which is why even if you doubt the resurrection this morning, you should desperately want it to be true.), the resurrection also gives us power for everything we need in this life and guarantees that everything we do in this life matters to God. **“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)**
- Have you trusted in the work of Christ in his life, death, and resurrection?

Trans: This comment provokes the statement in v. 15... Jesus is on a teaching “spree.” He just told them that the humble will be exalted and to give to the poor is to find riches, and now he is going to instruct us. . .

III. Paradox #3: Come like a pauper and you will feast like a king (14:15-24)

- The banquet imagery and mention of the resurrection of the just provoke the statement about the feast of all feasts, the party of all parties, in the coming kingdom of God. Make no mistake: for those who enter the kingdom of God, it will be an experience like beyond all earthly comparison. It is appropriate to remember on the day we celebrate the resurrection of that the Christian life is a feast not a funeral. To truly know Christ is to experience life in the fullest possible sense. Jesus is alive!
- Jesus begins in v. 16- by saying... This is a picture of how God invites all people into his kingdom. As we work through this, I want to encourage you to consider God’s personal invitation to you.
- *Verse 17* says. The food was almost ready, the tables were set, the decorations were in place, the master was looking “fly.” So he sends out the customary reminder to let the expected guests know it was time for the feast.
- But narrative is about to take a major turn as excuses began to pile in. We all make excuses but it’s never fun when you’re on the receiving end of someone else’s excuse. When I was a sophomore in high school, I remember calling up a young lady who I thought, you know, was a cool girl and kind of cute, and of course, I had no reason to believe that feeling was not perfectly mutual until she told me that she could not come and hang out with me because she had to clean her room. Excuses. Don’t play, we’ve all been rejected. ☺ Keep your head up. It’s one thing if we are talking about human rejection; it’s a whole different conversation when we are talking about rejecting God.
- *Verse 18-20.* Luke tells us of three people, who had originally accepted the invitation, but no gave different excuses with a common thread. These all were matters that should have been taken care of or could be temporarily set aside.
- The common thread in all of these excuses is that they viewed something else as more valuable and important than attending the celebration, and Jesus says, this is how we are tempted to approach God. The problem was one of priority.
- If Paul Pierce direct messages me on Twitter with some courtside seats and invites me to hang with his crew after the game, I’ll find excuses to excuse my excuses!
- God is inviting you to his feast, so let me say very lovingly and directly: if you miss out on the kingdom of God, you only have yourself and your excuses to blame and you will miss life’s greatest gift.
- BUT the next verse tells the resolve of the master is unflappable. *Read 21.* The master invites those no one would expect to be invited, and his invitation serves as a strong rebuke to those *too busy* and *too “good” to come to the feast.*
- It also would have been scandalous to those who heard, but this is just like God. The spiritually rich & proud who reject his generosity will find themselves on the outside looking in to the kingdom of God while the humble and spiritually poor will come rushing in. “Bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.” This is the heart of God!
- Do you see the paradox of the feast? Those who appear to be the first in line will miss out, while those who do not appear to be in the stratosphere of invitation are eating, drinking, and enjoying the benefits of the master’s invitation.
- *Verse 22.* There’s more room. So a third invitation goes out in verse 23.
- *Verse 23-24.* Go everywhere and “compel them to come in.”
- I want to compel you to come to the feast and the primary word to do so is love. Love is behind this feast. You have never experienced love like this. Love is what moves the heart of God. Love is why he sent Christ to be our Savior.
- **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16)**
- **“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)**
- There is nothing more powerful than the love of God, and here’s the great news: to enjoy the feast, *all you have to do is come.* These people came just as they were: poor, crippled, blind, lame. [“Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.”] Salvation is a free gift.
- The question is not whether or not the feast will take place. The question is whether or not you be there.
- This is exactly where Luke takes us in the next passage: In effect, he places the words of Jesus here to call every person reading or hearing his gospel to make a decision. In verses 25-34 we find the strongest paradox of them all.

IV. Hate in order to love and die in order to live (14:25-34).

Read 25-34

- Jesus often had a huge and enthusiastic following among ordinary people. Many of these were simply curious. Others followed for purely selfish reasons. But called people not to a casual “religious” experiment, but to an absolute commitment that shows our relationship with him takes precedence over every other commitment in life.
- Jesus details what it looks like to be his disciple, one who follows him with reckless abandon in everything.
- He lays out three costly commitments of a disciple, which form this call to complete allegiance.

Commitment #1: Hate in order to love.

- Our love for anything else in this life is to be “so far surpassed by love for him that it will seem [like hatred in comparison.]”
- Hate = love less.
- Love God supremely... What stands in your way of true discipleship? This is a question for considering Christ and those in with Christ. Relationship, Work, Possessions, Agenda/Plans/Dreams, Self.. Yes, even your own life...

Commitment #2: Die in order to live.

- This is a call to die.
- To not consider this is to get stuck in a bad situation... you think you’re in when you’re not really in.

Commitment #3: Give up everything to gain it all.

- Jesus is to have no competitors...
- Discipleship is a matter of priority. If Jesus is not at the top of our list, then we don’t understand what it truly means to follow him. All earthly attachments must take the backseat to Jesus. If you want to follow Jesus, you must set aside all excuses, all other preferences, all other relationships, all other allegiances and follow him.
- Here’s the amazing part of the deal. The cost is infinitely small in comparison to the enormity of the reward. My marriage, my work, my kids, my friendships, my hobbies, my basketball, my music, my ____, my ____ thrive because of my identification with Christ (reword)
- But it is *always* worth it: **“He is no fool who gives that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” (Jim Elliot)**
- “This is what it means to be a disciple.” Verse 34. When we move away from this, we lose our effectiveness as Christ’s disciples.
- “That is the distinctive saltiness of the salt, the thing that makes it what it is, the discipleship which characterizes the disciples of Jesus.” (Wilcock, 148).

Conclusion:

Have you responded to the invitation of Christ? Is he the great priority of your life? I want to invite you to embrace the paradoxical nature of what it means to follow Christ: Humble yourself before God, and he will exalt you. Know that whatever you give, God will repay you abundantly. Hate everything in order to love him supremely and die to all of your desires including yourself, that you might find life. Jesus was raised to life, that we have might experience the full and forever life he gives!