

Luke 14

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 01 May 2017 12:14

The closer Jesus comes to Jerusalem to face His own death, the harder and tougher become His words. There is an urgency in what He says, as wave after wave of Pharisaical hostility comes His way. Even so, He continues to speak with concern to them (for they are blind), and of His chosen people. Jesus speaks to their pitiful state, but they refuse to listen. Yes, His end on earth was fast approaching, but so was *their* end as a nation.

In our own lives we must take stock of our spiritual state. Have we lost our savour, or is our heart and mind quivering with godly zeal? Is our spirit drinking deeply of truth? Or, do we water it down with poison, leaving us weak and useless?

Verses 1-6

1.

And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him.

2.

And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy.

3.

And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?

4.

And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go;

5.

And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?

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And they could not answer him again to these things.

In my last full-time job I was watched continuously by enemies, to see if I made any mistakes. Because I did not make any, those who watched invented countless charges against me, all of which I easily proved to be false. But, they used a coming new law against me and brought in people to lie about me. So, I can only imagine how Jesus felt, knowing that the Pharisees and the Great Sanhedrin were deliberately inventing lies against Him that would lead to His death. Whereas at points I entered into misery and woe, Jesus just kept on going! He did not slacken His pace or get off His chosen path. My own demise was brought about wickedly, but it only affected myself and my immediate family. With Jesus, the effects were on the whole of humanity and on the elect in particular. There is, then, no real comparison!

On the Sabbath day, Jesus was invited into the house of a chief Pharisee, to eat, along with other Pharisees. All the while the wicked Pharisees kept watch, to see if Jesus would trip Himself up. Jesus knew this was going on, but attended anyway. And, because He never tripped Himself up, they eventually had to quickly invent charges against Him, such was their evil. All along, none of them realised they were being used by Satan... or that Satan was the person used by God to bring about His momentous plan of salvation.

Then came a moment when Jesus turned the Pharisees own previous query back on themselves. A man with dropsy* came before Him and He asked the assembled Pharisees and lawyers if it was lawful to heal a man on the Sabbath. There is a grim humour in the fact that no-one in the room uttered a single word of objection! They had been trounced on at least two other occasions recently over this issue, and they did not wish to appear foolish again! So, Jesus healed the man and sent him away.

*(*Dropsy is today called Edema or Oedema. It is a swelling of the body caused by fluid collection in spaces under the skin called interstitium. This can often be found in heart disease, for example, where water is retained in the legs, causing them to swell and seep. A wide range of other conditions can cause Edema. Thus, we know that the man had a collection or syndrome of serious problems underlying the swelling of his legs, and maybe of the area below his eyes).*

Though they kept silent, Jesus knew the Pharisees demanded an explanation. So, He gave

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them one. If a Pharisee had an ox or ass that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, would he not rescue it promptly? Again, the people present dared not open their mouths, for they knew Jesus was right. Of course, behind the question was the implicit claim that a man is far more important than an animal, so if the Pharisees would save a mere animal, then what of a man, made just a little lower than the angels? He is more important.

As an aside, this should remind animal lovers that mankind is more important than pets. I am often appalled by Christians who leave large amounts in their wills to animal sanctuaries and charities, when all around are Christians in dire need.

Verses 7-11

1.

And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them,

2.

When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him;

3.

And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

4.

But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.

5.

For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

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As a further explanation Jesus extended His words to what Pharisees thought of as 'important'. Jesus looked around and saw how the various Pharisees and lawyers took up reclining places at the table, carefully taking the seat they thought best reflected their own importance. In modern weddings, the chief table is for the bride, groom and parents. Other tables closest to the chief table are for immediate family, while friends and distant family are on tables on the periphery.

But, sadly, the idea of inequality is also found in churches. The pastor is in his lectern on a podium, to be seen by everyone. Below are the 'big seats' occupied by elders (so-called); then come deacons. In the pews front seats are usually snatched by people who think they own them and are self-important. The much less important are found way back! Woe betide if you take one of these coveted seats!

In the dining room of the chief Pharisee, the guests were arranged in places of perceived importance. The 'most important' people were sat around the chief Pharisee. In this kind of seating it was considered vital to observe the social norms of status! Jesus saw this jostling for importance, and spoke about it.

Referring instead to a wedding, Jesus advised people not to assume self-importance but to take a seat or cushion farthest away from the groom, as an act of humility. Otherwise a man of even higher notions of importance might come along and demand his place. The groom would then humiliate the man by telling him to move lower down the table.

But, if the man sat lower down, the groom could then, if he wishes, call him up to a higher position. *"Then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee."* In this verse 'worship' is

doxa

, which can have one of dozens of meanings. In this text it refers to the opinion or view of someone, or a sense of highness. In this case, the man placed in a higher part of the table will be considered by other guests to be important, so the man himself does not enforce his self-importance by automatically taking a higher seat.

We see this higher honour being taken by many Christians who think they are greater than others, whom they see as 'lower'. This is usually assumed when a church contains wealthy and poor folks. Or, those who have higher learning and the rest have none. It is all wrong! There is no higher or lower in God's economy!

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Therefore, Jesus advised the people not to assume their own importance, just in case the groom thinks differently and replaces a man with someone else. Better to assume humility and let the groom decide. Otherwise, the man who thinks he is something will be abased. Let others decide a man is great. If he assumes he is great, then he is arrogant and deserves to be abased. The very hierarchy in most churches proves that pastors think of themselves as greater. The climbing up to a podium and pulpit tend to reinforce this falsity. The language used does the same job: "the people in the pews". Let readers remember – in Christ there are no higher or lower levels, only one. We are all equal.

Verses 12-14

1.

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee.

2.

But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:

3.

And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

What Jesus said next to his host might appear at first glance to be surly. But, it was correct. Blunt, yes, but correct. Jesus did not mince His words: if you gather people together for a meal, do not call your friends, family, tribe members, or those who are rich. All that will happen is that they will feel obliged to return the favour and invite you to a meal. (Does this not happen with sending greeting cards or presents? Do not people feel obliged to send cards or presents in return?).

Instead, said Jesus, invite those who are poor, maimed, lame and blind. They cannot repay or invite you in return, so your act of generosity and kindness will be blessed when God judges the lowly and the mighty at the end of time. Jesus tailored the advice to the notions of the

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Pharisees, who loved to be treated with utter respect and honour. His words were aimed like a dart at their arrogant, proud hearts.

Does this mean we must, in our day, do the same? No, not in this particular detail, though the principle certainly applies. What is the principle? It is not to be full of pride and arrogance, and not to treat others with disdain, or make yourself to be something you are not... humility is the watchword.

Verses 15-24

1.

And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

2.

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

3.

And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

4.

And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

5.

And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

6.

And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

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7.

So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

8.

And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

9.

And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

10.

For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

A fellow guest listened to what the Lord said and made a comment: *"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."*

Many today believe that everyone can enter Heaven. This is probably behind the answer given by Jesus to the man.

Too often, today, Christians remain silent when another person speaks in error, rather than enter the fray and declare the truth, or to clarify a point that is inadvertently or deliberately made vague, or wrong. Is this why Jesus answered as He did? It is true that those who enter Heaven will be greatly blessed – but Jesus felt it was right to define the statement even farther.

The statement by the guest was one that was commonplace amongst rabbis at that time. So, we cannot be sure of the motive behind the statement; whether it was genuine or just a superficial one. It is likely that the man was quoting the popular belief that all Jews would enter Heaven because they belonged to the chosen nation. This is not unlike the universalist belief today, which is Arminian. But, Jesus was about to disabuse him of this fallacy...

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A man planned and made a great feast for a number of invited guests. When the time for eating came, he sent his servants to advise the guests. Every one of them declined to attend, with a variety of excuses (verses 18-20). The servant conveyed their answers to the master, and the master was angry. He told his servant to immediately go out into the packed streets to bring in the poor, maimed, lame and blind. The servant complied but had to tell the master that there were still places available at the tables.

This time the master told the servant to go farther afield, to the larger roads ('highways') outside the city, to find travellers, and the 'hedges', where tramps or Gentiles may be sleeping. This latter command seems to be a precursor to the coming removal of the hedge or wall that had previously separated Jew and Gentile. The master was determined to fill his house with guests and told his servant that none of those who were originally invited would taste of the supper.

(Historical note: The Temple in Jerusalem allowed Gentiles to visit, but there were notices on the walls that forbid them from entering the holy ground of the inner court. If they entered they could be put to death).

What is this but a tacit warning by Jesus, that simply being a Jew did not give any man the right to enter Heaven. They were on the 'original list', because they were chosen to be God's people, but they slowly turned to other gods and God gave them over, regularly, to their sins, allowing or sending enemies to destroy them. When the Jews turned back to God in repentance, the bond was again secured. In this parable the original people of God were not allowed into Heaven, and those who were once barred from God were accepted (Gentiles).

For the past 2000 years the Jews have experienced the judgment of God for their rejection of Him and the Messiah. They will once again have His favour when they are saved in large numbers and take the mantle of Gospel preaching, but not yet. For now they will not taste of God's supper. Jesus warned the Pharisees of this, but they did not listen.

Verses 25-33

1.

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

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2.

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

3.

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

4.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

5.

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

6.

Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

7.

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

8.

Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.

9.

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

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Jesus left the meal and again walked the streets, surrounded by a massive crowd. He stopped and turned to them saying that unless they hated their family and friends and even their own life, they could not be His disciples. Some modern teachers try to water-down this statement, but the word 'hate' used by Jesus is correct, and means what it says. In Romans the same word means to 'love less'.

This hatred is not the same as one we would show today. Rather, in this text, *miseō* means an aversion to evil (committed by family or friends) and therefore a love for the opposite, exemplified by Jesus. It is to show preference for God rather than for sinful man, even if they are close to us. It cannot mean anything malicious, because we are told that the thought of hating someone is the same as murdering him. There is no way that Jesus meant that. Thus, it means to prefer Christ to man, and to shun sin in favour of holiness. The teaching is very clear: leave sin aside and follow me, even if the sin is found in your nearest and dearest, or you cannot be my disciple.

Jesus underlines this by saying that a person who does not take up his cross, *stauros*, cannot be His disciple, either. This is not a separate command, but linked to the previous one. No man can share Christ's crucifixion*, and, the crowd did not know Christ would be crucified anyway. Thus, Christ was giving a different meaning, which we find in the base of the root verb,

hist

ēmi

. This means to make a stand (with Jesus), in the presence of the Sanhedrin and others, to shun the world, and to stay firm without flinching, even if it led to death.

(Historical note: Jesus was crucified on a simple single stake, like a large fence post. He did not die on a two-beamed cross. The two-beamed variety was used in ancient Chaldea to represent the false god, Tammuz, the cross-shape being a symbol for the initial of his name. The cross-beams were adopted by the apostate Romanist church in the third century AD, because many of its priests came into office without being saved, and wanted to retain their former ties to paganism).*

After all, said Jesus, a man who decides to build a tower firstly sits down, drawing up a plan and costs, to see if he can carry on with it. Otherwise, he would start with fervour and then peter out, unable to pay for the whole job, causing his neighbours to mock him. How many claim to have

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been Christian, but then turn away to Romanism or some other religion? They could not take the pace or the reality, so they give up. In reality, they were never saved in the first place. So, Jesus is presenting a picture of hardship and woe, to enable the false followers to come to a rapid decision.

Jesus made sure the message was clear – a king would meet with his counsellors to see if going to war would be successful: did he have enough soldiers to accomplish the task? Or, would he just be headstrong, ignore planning, and go ahead with the war, only to see the enemy army was far greater, and thus send an ambassador to stop the coming carnage by seeking peace. What humiliation!

In the same way, Jesus advised followers to consider the cost of following and to be rooted in reality. Those who wished to remain His disciple had to renounce the whole world in favour of the Lord. This is mainly a command to have a solid spiritual base in one's heart and mind, rather than giving everything away – though it could come to that at some time in the future.

Verses 34&35

1.

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?

2.

It is neither fit for the land , nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Everyone knew how valuable salt was. It is not just something we add to food to bring out the taste. It is a matter of life and death, and this is why great caravans traversed the deserts carrying huge blocks of salt, which could be worth more than gold. But, if the salt lost its flavour and use, it was worthless. It could neither save life or cause food to taste better. It is useless for agricultural use and even when thrown onto a dung heap it had no use. Thus, salt without its flavour was thrown away. Let those who listen to Jesus take heed!

It means that if the Jews were once full of use, because they loved God and showed the world

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His power, and now had lost their love, God would cast them away, as useless salt. The principle for us today is that we must make very sure that we do not lose our love for the Lord, or He might judge us on this earth. Our zeal as believers is not founded on excitement or emotion, but on a solid belief and knowledge of His word. Without both, we will quickly lose our savour.

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