

The Ambitious Host

Luke 14:12-14

With Study Questions

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Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.* ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:12-14).

Introduction

I had a relative whose company I enjoyed very much. A number of years ago he unexpectedly died of a heart attack. Over the years he and I had numerous conversations about the gospel. He was very wealthy and had some social proclivities that stood as a barrier between him and Christ. There were times when he seemed to see and embrace the faith.

I remember being very encouraged one time while at a family gathering he blurted out in the midst of a conversation that he couldn't explain why, but he just believed in God. But that little ember seemed to fade in time.

To this day I am not quite sure specifically what drew him away from that proclamation but I do recollect a conversation where he reflected on something that caused him great consternation. To the best of my understanding he had another Christian friend whose life was laden with difficulty. I don't know what the difficulty was. My relative found this very disturbing. He began to ask me when the payoff came. At what point can a Christian expect a return for their investment – and by investment I mean faithful living?

What is a realistic expectation for us to have regarding what our lives can and should look like as a Christians?

This parable follows the ‘Parable of the Ambitious Guest.’ In that parable Jesus was speaking to those who had been invited to a particular event. His message, in short, was not to seek the seat of honor but the lowest place. It was a parable addressing men's inclination toward self-

exaltation. What we have here is the ‘Parable of the Ambitious Host.’ Jesus begins this portion of the parable with instruction on who *not to invite*.

Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors (Luke 14:12a).

Do Not Invite

The event in mind can be either a feast or a simple lunch. All kinds of meals are in view since ἄριστον (*ariston*) indicates a late morning meal, while δεῖπνον (*deipnon*) is the main late afternoon meal.¹ So what we’re talking about here is not necessarily a big event like a wedding or party. It can be something very casual.

And when Jesus says we shouldn’t invite certain people (friends, brothers, relatives or rich neighbors), He is not suggesting we neglect people who are close to us or related to us or exclude people because of their wealth. People will often sacrifice family for ministry. That is a mistake.

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

An orderly family that is well provided for (in every respect) is a requirement for those who would minister (1 Timothy 3:4). And to show partiality to the poor can (at least in certain contexts) be just as wrong as showing partiality to the rich.

You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor (Leviticus 19:15).

¹ Bock, D. L. (1996). *Luke Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*. Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (1265). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books.

No, Jesus is not teaching that we should neglect anyone because of their station in life. His language here is similar to the language used later in this chapter where He calls His followers to “hate” their fathers, mothers, wife, children, brothers, sisters and their own lives. The language is idiomatic. When Jesus teaches “do not invite” the present tense of the verb *mē phōnei* can be translated “Stop continually inviting or exclusively inviting” certain people.

And it’s not just certain people (the list isn’t necessarily exhaustive); it’s certain people for a certain reason. Let’s finish the verse:

Then He also said to him who invited Him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid (italics mine).

Reciprocation

In order for us to appreciate the impact of this parable we need to recognize this (thought perhaps casual) as a ministerial event. Imagine, if you will, various clergymen filing into the room, seeking places of honor (which became the impetus for the first portion of the parable). Now consider the host (the ambitious host) thrilled with the caliber of guest in his house. Perhaps some of these high-ranking clergymen will return the favor and invite him to their homes!

The social and financial benefits of this type of religious networking would be numerous. One might even be able to justify this in the name of having a more effective ministry. If we focused our ministry on the rich and famous we could finally get that church building, van or church jet! This ministerial event has now been reduced to a commercial exchange. Jesus is exposing their/our hearts and is about to blow this mentality reciprocation to smithereens.

Jesus is teaching against inviting people with the idea of getting something in return. It was this mentality of reciprocation that appeared to be the undoing of my relative. When I have an opportunity to speak to those seeking to go into the ministry, or those young in the ministry, I will often address the danger of seeking reciprocation – whether it’s financial, emotional, psychological or any other form.

When I was going into education, one of my instructors taught about a thing called 'psychic income.' Since teachers didn't make a lot of money, he encouraged us that we would receive psychic income. In other words, we would get accolades from our superiors and apples from our students. It took me all of about a year to find out that the psychic income (and there was some) was dominated by psychic distress and discouragement.

I recall speaking with people who were seeking to serve Christ in the ministry struggling with the people in their church. Before they walked away from their ministerial efforts they explained that their church had robbed them of their joy. It was very likely due to the church's habit of making life difficult for its ministers that the author of Hebrews writes:

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you (Hebrews 13:17).

So even though it is the responsibility of the church to make the ministerial efforts of the leaders a joyful task, it doesn't always seem to work out that way. Reading 2 Corinthians 11, one gets the impression that that church did not make the Apostle Paul's ministerial efforts a joyful undertaking. The same, I think, can be said about Moses and his relationship with the Israelites (Hebrews 3:16; Numbers 20:10-13).

They angered him at the waters of Meribah, and it went ill with Moses on their account, ³³ for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips (Psalm 106:32, 33).

I don't want to go too far afield here, but I think it is safe to say that reciprocation in any form is a dangerous quest for those who seek to serve Christ.

Jesus had mentioned four categories of guests not to invite; now He will mention four categories to invite.

But when you give a feast, invite *the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind* (Luke 14:13)

Do Invite

It is difficult for us to appreciate the shock of this command (and it is a command). This is not a culture disposed toward ramps and handicapped parking. By poor we're not talking about inner city poor but Angola poor – the utterly destitute. The maimed or mutilated, the lame (the inability for the lower limbs to function) and the blind were, for the most part begging to survive.

But the shock of the command goes even further than inviting societal downcasts to an event. Jesus mentions the very people who, according to the Law of Moses, are not to go through the veil and approach the altar of the Lord.

Speak to Aaron, saying, None of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. ¹⁸ For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long... ²¹ No man of the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a blemish shall come near to offer the Lord's food offerings; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. ²² He may eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy things, ²³ but he shall not go through the veil or approach the altar, because he has a blemish, that he may not profane my sanctuaries, for I am the Lord who sanctifies them (Leviticus 21:17, 18, 21-23).

The inclusion of blemished humanity into a place of religious prominence was a sign that the Messiah had come.

In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. ¹⁹ The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord, and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 29:18, 19).

Jesus cleared up the confusion experienced by John the Baptist regarding this matter the eleventh chapter of Matthew.

Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (Matthew 11:2-6).

Later in this chapter Jesus will tell another parable anticipating Israel's rejection of Him followed by the invitation of the **"poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind"** (Luke 14:21). What the New Covenant re-emphasizes is human inability.

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Let us not lose in all of this that there is only one source for true blessings. Jesus finishes this parable with the words:

And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:14).

Removing the Distraction

It is precisely their inability to pay that makes this a valuable enterprise in the mind of God. Why? Because when you get right down to it, those first four (from verse 12) have nothing to offer (in the context of heavenly riches) either. They, and their riches will **“be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” (Psalm 37:2)**. The first four become a distraction of reciprocation.

The value of recognizing the limitations of human repayment places our minds and hearts where they ought to be – and that is the heavenly reward which will be fully known at the resurrection of the just. This does not, by the way, mean we have earned the heavenly reward; as if God has now become our debtor. No, the payment is made by Christ, the reward is ours through faith and our response is one of love and obedience in gratitude for the gift given. In all of this Jesus is teaching that we should not be so obsessed with the rewards of men but the final gift of eternal life.

Works of charity perhaps may not be rewarded *in this world*, for the things of this world are not the *best things*, and therefore God does not pay the best men in *those things*; but they shall *in no wise* lose their reward; they shall be recompensed in the *resurrection*. It will be found that the longest voyages make the richest returns, and that the charitable will be no losers, but unspeakable gainers, by having their recompense adjourned *till the resurrection*.²

² Henry, M. (1996). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Lk 14:7–14). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Questions for Study

1. How is it possible to neglect family for the sake of ministry (pages 2, 3)?
2. Is Jesus teaching that we should not ever invite our family members to dinner (pages 2, 3)?
3. How is desiring reciprocation dangerous (pages 4, 5)?
4. Why would the list of who we should invite be shocking to Jesus' listeners (pages 6, 7)?
5. Why is the inability of certain guests to repay make this a valuable enterprise (page 8)?