

## Discipleship at a Dinner Party

June 30th, 2013

Luke 14:1-14

*"<sup>7</sup>Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, <sup>8</sup>“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, <sup>9</sup>and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup>But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. <sup>11</sup>For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

As I was studying this passage I was reminded of a video clip I saw awhile back of Francis Chan, and he was talking about the game Simon Says. You all know the point of the game ("Simon says pat your head..."), but Chan was making the observation that when it comes to what Jesus says, in the church it's like a different game. If Jesus says, you don't have to do it, you just have to memorize it, or study it, or translate it into Greek. And he said, "If I tell my daughter to go clean her room," I'm not expecting her to come back in two hours and say, 'I memorized what you said! My friends are coming over and we're going to do a study on what it would look like to clean my room!'

The Bible is much more than simply a book giving us things to do, but I think he's right that sometimes people want to hear or talk or study or analyze what Jesus says, as opposed to actually doing it, though doing what Jesus commands seems to be a pretty important thing to Him (Matthew 28:18-20). This is a text that presses me to consider: are we just playing games with Jesus, or are we truly committed to doing what He says out of a Spirit-birthed love for Him?

There is a big lesson in these verses that informs us about what it means to be Jesus' follower, about what He values and desires from us. But before we get to that key lesson, I want to draw your attention to something very important that we see here, though it's a bit indirect and

under the surface of this text. It's something we have seen before and something we'll see again, but it's so crucial I couldn't pass over it.

## **Discipleship Encompasses All of Life**

The indirect lesson that Jesus teaches here is that being His disciple encompasses the totality of our lives. I say it's indirect, because it's not like Jesus says here (as He will in 14:33), "Being My disciple means submitting to Me as Lord and King and Ruler of every single aspect of your life." It's not directly said like that, but it's indirectly asserted, isn't it, by considering what Jesus is commanding here: "<sup>8</sup>When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor...<sup>10</sup>But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place...<sup>12</sup>He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors...But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,"

We'll look dig into this more when we get to the direct lesson Jesus is teaching, but for now, we need to note simply that choosing where you sit at a dinner party (or presumably a worship gathering, or a church picnic, or a birthday party) is a discipleship issue, a matter of submission to the lordship of Jesus. Who you invite over for your fourth of July barbecue is a discipleship issue. There is a way to set the guest list that accords with your allegiance to Jesus as King, and a way that is out of step with Jesus' lordship.

So see this basic, massive truth from Jesus' commands here, that there is nothing too basic, too mundane, too ordinary to fall outside the sphere of Jesus' rule and reign. If even how you choose your seat at a party, or who is on the guest-list, are discipleship issues, what is not a discipleship issue?

Jesus' teaching here warns us to not compartmentalize our lives, segmenting off certain parts of it and saying, "No Jesus, this (money,

clothing, food, leisure, sexuality, etc.) is mine." A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning how to bring absolutely every sphere of life under the Lordship of Jesus. Either Jesus is Lord of everything for you, or He is Lord of nothing. Don't delude yourself into thinking there is some middle road.

## **Disciples Value Lowliness**

So that's a pretty key lesson to learn by reflecting on Jesus' words here, but what is the main, direct lesson here? In what He does and says here, what is Jesus driving at? What does He want and value, and want His disciples to want and value? There are three things going on in this passage (the healing of the man, the instructions to the guests, and the instructions to the host), and in all three, the value that seems to run right through is Jesus' love for the place of lowliness, and said negatively, His disdain for pride (self-absorption, self-importance). Let's see that in all three settings:

### **1. Jesus heals a lowly man**

That's what we see in verses 1-6. Dropsy was a disorder where you retain fluid and your body swells until you're disfigured. He's one of those Jesus calls us to invite in (v.13), but his presence in the Pharisee's home is questionable (11:54, their silence, and His sending the healed man away all indicate that this was a set-up). They have no love for this lowly man; they are using him as a means to their own selfish end.

But Jesus, the Lover of the lowly, heals him and sends him away. And then He exposes Pharisees hypocrisy: "<sup>5</sup>Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" These law-experts had a keen interest in their own welfare. When the law seems to stand between you and the safety of your valuable ox, you have no difficulty doing away with the law. The pursuit of your own comfort is clearly a higher commitment than rigorous adherence to the Sabbath. But when it comes to another

person's need, whose illness is no skin off your nose, then the law becomes conveniently rigid to protect you from involvement. The self-important are condemned, and the lowly one is cared for.

## **2. Jesus commands that we take the lowly position**

Picture a table shaped like a U, with the host seated at the bottom of the U, and the place of honor being the place next to the host, so the closer to the host you were, the higher up the social ladder you were. It might be a little different today, but you still have the same sort of thing going on, "saving seats", and, kids, you want to make sure you're sitting next to so-and-so in Promiseland or at a party. I went to the US Open a couple of weeks ago and we walked by the grandstand at the 17th green, and nobody was going to be hitting at that hole for four hours, but there were programs and hats on certain seats.

In all this jockeying for position, who is at the center of that? Is that a deep love for Jesus expressing itself in the compassionate pursuit of the good of others over and above what you want? Or is it you being all about you? Kids, do you like feeling sick? Nobody likes being sick. But the Bible says that apart from the working of God's Spirit and His grace in Jesus, you are sick, all of us are sick. And the name of our sickness is "individualitis". It's far worse than having a cold, or throwing up in the middle of the night. It's the sickness of wanting to put myself, rather than God, at the center of my life, and living my life basically for me, instead for serving and worshiping God.

Jesus isn't ultimately concerned about seating assignments. The way they were picking their seats showed a self-centered heart that only cared about itself, and looking good in front of others. It's about an attitude of the heart that walks into a room and says, "I'm the most important person here, everyone else exists to serve me, look at me, be impressed with me. It's about me. I'm the one here who should be made much of." And Jesus is against that attitude: "<sup>11</sup>For everyone

who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'" He's not talking about dinner, but salvation.

### **3. Jesus tells us to fold the lowly into our lives**

The Pharisee's dinner guests are lawyers and Pharisees (v.3). They wanted to be around people like themselves. They want to have people over who will do something for *them* (there's that emphasis on self-importance again). In that day it would be an invite back to their party, but for us maybe it's something else. We want to be with people, we want to invite people into our lives, who can give us something too: comfort, importance, safety, affirmation, entertainment. The idea of having people over, folding people into our lives, that are hard and messy and ungrateful and can't "do anything" for you, we're not very interested in that. And I don't just mean to deliver a box of food or give them a handout, but to invite them to your barbecue! Those are the people, the lowly, who Jesus values.

### **Jesus' Love for the Lowly**

That's the love He has shown us. We were the spiritually poor, with nothing to offer for our salvation. We were the crippled, made helpless and broken and needy because of our sin. We were the blind, unable, and unwilling to see and submit to His rule and reign. We were the lame, unable to come to God on our own. And when we were in that miserable, weak, lowly, condition, He loved us! He came down from heaven -- the high and holy One, the One of infinite splendor and wealth and greatness -- and He laid down His life to cleanse us from sin and seat us rebels at His table. What a Savior, what a salvation! There was nothing lovable about us, but in Jesus, we are loved, and He is making us into something lovely, into His own image and glory.

And part of that transformation is the power to increasingly say "No!" to the Kingdom of self, and give ourselves to the lowly as a demonstration of His amazing grace. Our parties (but more than our

parties, our lives) now are meant to be an enactment of the heavenly feast to come, when the lowly are lifted up and seated at Jesus' table and we hear those breathtaking words, "<sup>21</sup>Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

Are you pouring your life into people of whom that investment makes absolutely no sense unless God is going to raise you from the dead? So you see how this text presses: are we really serious about following Him? It isn't ultimately about what we do, but who we are because of God's work for us in Jesus. But if you -- through eyes that have beheld the lavish grace of God to you in your lowliness -- have truly embraced the low position, it will change everything. Who you seek out on Sunday morning, who you have over for the fourth, who you seek out in the lunchroom at school, who you invite to your birthday party. It changes everything, because Jesus is Lord of all. And He loves the lowly, even hell-deserving sinners like you and me.