

Luke 14:12-24 Investing: #3 in Series Disabilities Fit in Church. Falls Church
AM 12/5/21

Our church does very well in welcoming all people. It is my privilege to remind us of what we are doing and why we are doing it.

In our passage today, in Luke 14, Jesus was attending a banquet with a bad host, told a parable about a banquet with a good host. Jesus told the story of what His churches should be like!

Intentionally going out and finding people with disabilities and using the church's resources to bring them in is a risk. It can look like a black hole of effort and expense with no reasonable expectation of any return on investment. Financial return on investment, emotional, physical. Is it a good investment? Yes. When we look at it the way Jesus taught us to look at it.

We don't minister to people with disabilities, because they have disabilities.

Rather, we minister to people with disabilities because they are people.

Jesus changes our thinking about church. Rather than an earthly-strategy of invitations based on return-on-investment, Jesus asks us to apply heavenly wisdom based on resurrection-mindedness, and strategically invest in ministry to people with disabilities.

1. Our ministry to people with disabilities will be repaid in heaven. This is not the same greed with a smarter, more spiritual formula, but rather this is doing ministry as Jesus asked us to do it, and enjoying the fact that He rewards it. (v.12-14)

When in verse 12, Jesus said "*do not invite your friends...*" it does not mean that Christians are to never host a dinner or never have a gathering with our friends and relatives. Jesus Himself gathered with friends and others. But rather, when Jesus said, "*do not invite your friends....*" in verse 12, and then in verse 13, "*when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind*" it is a matter of emphasis. Not so much of X, but rather Y. Emphasis not on X, but rather emphasis on Y. Church life for a Christian is not all about feasting and banquets and dinners with friends, but rather, the church life is more about inviting the poor and the crippled to share life with us. Being in a church family is not so much about finding a nice group of people that meets our needs, but rather is more about finding a group of people who are constantly inviting into our group, other people who are hurting. Why?

Because in the first kind of banquet, we are gaining something, and in the second kind of banquet, we are giving something. But things are upside down in

God's economy, whenever we try to gain something, we are losing, and whenever we give something, we never lose out. In fact, we leave to God the whole question of reimbursement and recompense.

Our thinking is influenced by something beyond this earth. If we do as Jesus asked us to do, and live lives where we emphasize inviting and welcoming and helping and ministering to people with needs, then in verse 14, Jesus promised us something that is central to our thinking. Verse 13, "*invite the crippled...*" verse 14, "*and you will be blessed...*" Why? Verse 14, "*...because they cannot repay...*" How does that work? If we are brutally honest, isn't it just a loss? Isn't just plain costly? It is the right thing to do, but let's be honest and call it a loss, right? Wrong! 'You will be blessed' is real. 'They cannot repay you' is real. So, something is missing. How does it add up? The last sentence of verse 14 makes it all come together like a tally sheet for accountant's debit and credit ledger - for our understanding. "*For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*"

Our future-oriented, resurrection-minded outlook is what guides our thoughts toward people with disabilities. When our earthly focus point of our ministry is people who cannot reimburse us, cannot provide us with earthly gain or earthly satisfaction, we are still glad to invest in such guests. Why? Because the time to calculate the gains and losses is not over yet. One day, God, who sees everything, will provide a hidden factor of a reward. That factor of that reward is not hidden any longer, because here Jesus revealed it to us. It is known now to all of us. A reimbursement awaits. That seals the fact that ministry to broken people is a strategic and wise investment.

2. Persistent ministry to those with able bodies but heart-excuses is not a good investment, since they are exposed as not truly seeking God. (v.15-20)

After Jesus said these things, we have a statement in verse 15 from a man sitting near Jesus. That man heard what Jesus said, and gave a reply, "*Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!*" It is a typical presumptive expectation of any Jewish person in those days that merely because they were Jewish, that they would automatically participate in the heavenly banquet. That man had not been listening to Jesus, and that man did not understand. So, Jesus being the Greatest Teacher, decided to use a parable to make it so clear that the man would understand. Jesus gave a parable

Verse 16 – in the parable, the host of the banquet invited many people.

Verse 17 – the host summoned the guests to arrive for the feast was ready.

Verse 18 – the guests made excuses for why they would not attend the banquet. Excuse #1 bought a field

Verse 19 – excuse # 2 bought oxen

Verse 20 – excuse #3 just got married

The excuses are not valid, and refusal to respond to the invitation by attending is an act of great discourtesy to the host.

We get the impression that many guests gave such excuses. All three of the sample excuses listed are concerned with life details – business interests and family life. These are areas that fit in with the teaching of Jesus about the danger of letting love of possessions and love of success in the workplace or even love of family interfere with the total commitment to Christ in the call to discipleship.

In other words, there is no good excuse to turn down the gospel invitation.

Even the list of acceptable excuses in Deuteronomy 20, such as just getting married, that were acceptable excuses not to go to war are improper excuses for refusal to accept the gospel invitation of Christ.

The emphasis of the parable of Jesus is not on the refusal of guests to come, but rather the emphasis of the parable is on the readiness and eagerness of the host to fill the table with guests.

Everyone in the banquet must take on the attitude of the Host of the Banquet, who is Christ Jesus. Everyone in the kingdom takes on the attitude of King Jesus. Getting people to embrace Christ is an investment.

3. God is so committed to His house of worship being filled, that those with disabilities, who may assume that they are not invited, are to be not merely invited, but a special effort is to be made to pursue them and convince them that both God and His church genuine desire them to come. (v.21-24)

Verse 21 – the servant reported the excuses to the host. Although each guest had answered individually, their combined refusal to attend was surprising, and went beyond normal events. The host was angry at the guests with their excuses. A banquet was set, the feast was ready, and now the guests were lacking. The host took action to bring in other guests.

When the host told the servants to find other guests, he named locations to search, such as “*streets and lanes of the city.*” These are the places where one would find people who were hungry for a feast – people who were beggars, or what today we call the homeless. Then, Jesus repeated the same descriptions here in verse 21, that Jesus had given back in verse 13, “*the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.*” These are the people who assume they are not invited.

Verse 22 – the servant reported to the host to say, “*and there is still more room..*” The seats of the banquet are not yet filled.

Verse 23 – the host of the banquet then said to “...*go out to the highways and hedges (or fences or along the walls)*” What should be said to the people in those locations, with relationship to this banquet? “*Compel people to come in*” to the banquet! Why? The goal is clearly stated “*that My house may be filled.*” The task of inviting is not yet complete. The call to people to attend must be widened beyond the initial guest list.

How do we interpret this? It points to the fact that the Jews were the first to be invited to follow God. Paul wrote in Romans 1:6, that the gospel invitation “*is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek...*”

And when many Jews rejected Jesus, then He expanded His preaching beyond synagogues to the cities and towns. The meaning of the parable was an indication that even after Jesus returned to heaven, that the task of inviting an even wider group of people would need to be carried on by His disciples, until the gospel invitation had reached every nation on earth. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 28:19, “*Go and make disciples of all nations...*”

That brings us to the final statement in verse 24. Sometimes in ancient banquets, a type of doggie bag would be sent out. A sampler platter for each guest who missed the banquet, or maybe just for certain distinguished guests who missed the banquet. But that tradition would not happen for this banquet. None of the guests who missed the banquet would get a sample or a taste of the food enjoyed at the feast by those sitting in the banquet. No take-out. No deliveries. No door dash.

The interpretation is clear -- there is no way to participate in the feast of God except by responding to the gospel invitation given by Christ, through His Word and Spirit.

Conclusion:

Whenever we reach out to people with disabilities, we gain a constant reminder of our own true spiritual condition before God.

We are the point of the parable. We are the broken. We are the needy. We are a risk. We are a black hole of effort. In our weakness, we do not contribute anything to the gospel.

In American culture, we spend so much energy and effort to overcome our deficiencies, to earn whatever we receive, to avoid becoming a drain on others, and to contribute something. But American culture is not the culture of the church. In the church, we keep looking up to Christ, and realize that He paid it all at the cross. He rose again securing our salvation. He is the host as we come and feast on His

Word. We are here by grace alone. We cannot overcome our own deficiencies. We cannot earn what we receive from God.

The church runs on grace. Jesus says so. Ministry to people with disabilities is a strategic investment. Jesus says so. The head of the church is Jesus Christ.

In the books of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John, we find a striking focus upon a ministry among the deaf, mute, lame, and blind, and their caregivers and the communities that they represent.

Christ is constantly inviting us to feast on His Word, whenever we revert back to spiritual deafness and spiritual blindness. When we become established on the guest list and members in the church, and the circumstances of our lives settle down and become more comfortable, we are more likely to drift away from God. As faithful church members, we face the danger of believing that we can be self-sufficient, and faith in God becomes an intellectual exercise.

And whenever we see a person with a disability, whether it is a social flaw, a mental disorder, a physical disability, a trainwreck of a life from self-inflicted bad decisions, or family problems that have them hurting so much they can hardly function – whenever we see a person with a disability – we just remember, with thankfulness – Lord, that is a picture of us, and You took us in. And we welcome that person to the feast where Christ is the host. We welcome that person to the church where Christ is the head. And we keep doing that until the churches are full, and then together, we feast on Christ Himself, until we are truly satisfied. And together with joy, we render our praises to Christ Jesus alone. And the story never ends.

In our last hymn today, we will sing together, “Bless the One whose grace unbounded this amazing banquet founded; He though heav’nly, high, and holy, deigns to dwell with you most lowly....”

There is another banquet. A future banquet. Listen to Revelation 19:7-9, , “...*the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready....and the angel said, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’*”