

Humility, Generosity and the Kingdom of God

Luke 14:1-24

Sometime the Lord uses circumstances to get our attention and speak to us. That is what he does with these Pharisees. They have set Jesus a trap, but after Jesus heals the sick man they are left with nothing to say, and in that silence Jesus speaks to them about how acts of compassion and mercy should characterize citizens of the kingdom.

Characteristic No. 1: Humility

Jesus watched as the guests positioned themselves, trying to get the advantage at the meal table. In that culture, where you sat mattered for your standing in the community and for your progress. While that may seem alien to us, there is still the temptation to use and manipulate people to advance ourselves. There is also the danger of your sense of worth being dependent on what circles you are mixing with. So he tells them a parable about taking the lowest seat at a wedding feast. The punch line is v11: 'everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.' The way to real honour in the sight of God and man, is humility. Humble yourself, Jesus says, and let God do the exalting.

Characteristic No. 2: Generosity

The temptation that runs alongside seeking honour, is to give where you hope to get back, and doing only that which benefits you. But Jesus says we shouldn't just bless where we hope to get blessed back, but where there is no hope of getting anything back.

Sacrificial generosity must mark the citizens of the kingdom. Many of us (me included) don't mind giving, provided it doesn't hurt. But Jesus is saying, this sacrificial kingdom generosity *will* influence your lifestyle, it *will* change how you live, it *will* cost you. And it's radical and costly because the ones you give to, Jesus says in v14, 'cannot repay you.' And that's grace. But whilst they cannot repay you, God can. Resurrection day is also going to be reward day, so sacrificial generosity makes perfect sense.

How the Gospel Makes it Possible

Jesus then told another parable about a man who invited people to a banquet. It's a picture of how God is inviting people to come and enter into the joy of His kingdom. But having been invited, people make excuses. Business, work, relationships, possessions are all more important to these people than the kingdom. So the master invites all those who could never pay him back, or earn a seat at the banquet, and they come.

And those people represent us. We're the ones who don't deserve to be there, who can't afford the meal, and yet out of his grace, he welcomes us in. And when we realize that God has been sacrificially generous to us, then we will be sacrificially generous to the poor and the needy in response.

But that should also deeply humble us. It is profoundly humbling when you realize that Christ humbled himself for you. The reason humility and serving others should characterize the citizens of the kingdom, is because the king humbled himself and served to the ultimate cost.

We have experienced grace for ourselves, now we must share it with others.