

## November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 23”

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### Luke 15:1-2

**1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to [Jesus] to hear Him.**

**2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Jesus is in the home stretch of His preaching ministry and, as He brings His earthly life to a close, our entrance into Heaven becomes the major theme of Jesus’ teaching. In our last lesson, I tried to make the point that it is essential for us to recognize that we are all sinners, that none of us is worthy to enter heaven, and that we are saved, not by our own righteousness, but by the grace gift of the sacrifice of the death Jesus Christ on the cross, that pays the penalty that we owe for our sins and atones for the sins that we have committed.

The parable of the seats at the wedding feast, which was our text for last week, made the point clearly that it is a mistake for us to consider ourselves worthy to sit in heaven, in any position at all, but, if we are invited to come in, we should take the lowest place. Jesus taught, in **Luke 14:8-11:**

**8 “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him;**

**9 and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place.**

**10 But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you.**

**11 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

The wedding feast is analogous to heaven, and God is the one doing the inviting. The fact that we are not worthy to enter heaven is not just a theoretical religious construct developed to intellectually justify Christianity, but it is a true fact, just as is the physical death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are blessed to be invited by God to enter heaven at all, and we should be grateful for any seat, including the lowest seat, in which we are allowed to sit.

Success by the world's standards has the tendency to make us forget our unworthiness, the fact that we are sinners saved by grace, and that our invitation to the feast is validated by the blood that Jesus Christ shed on Calvary's cross, and not by our own goodness or accomplishments.

Jesus told this parable because He was ministering in the midst of religious leaders that were impressed with themselves, and who were convinced that it was their own godliness and righteousness that put them in their position as leaders in God's house. Rather than recognize that they were selected for leadership by the random accident of birth, they operated with a lack of humility in the face of the holiness of the Lord. They went so far in their assessment of their own righteousness that they thought themselves as more righteous than Jesus Christ, even as He was healing the sick and raising the dead among them, and they rejected Jesus' teaching and His the miracle ministry.

Christians of today are in peril of emulating this type of thinking if we begin thinking of ourselves as good people rather than sinners saved by grace. We need to always remember the admonition of Paul to Titus, in **Titus 3:4**:

**4 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,  
5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,  
6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

Our station in life makes no difference. Whether we are church leaders, church members or unchurched, we all share a sinful background, and none of us has any particular righteousness of which to boast. It does not really matter how much righteousness we claim to have in comparison to those with whom we come into contact because the standard against which we are judged is that of a Holy God who judges not just actions, but thoughts and words as well.

Listen to the standard by which we are going to be judged, as recorded by Matthew, in the fifth chapter of his gospel. **Matthew 5:21-22** says:

**21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'**

**22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' [which is a term of contempt] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.**

Anger is an attitude and saying "you fool" is simply speaking. You can commit these sins without actually doing anything bad to your brother. **Matthew 5:27-28** continues:

**27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'**

**28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

Lust only requires a thought. You don't have to say or do anything. **Matthew 5:38-39, 43-45** continues:

**38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’**

**39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.**

**43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’**

**44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,**

**45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.**

To comply with these commandments requires us to recognize evil without judging it, leaving all judgment in the hands of God. But not only that, we have to bless the person that does evil to us, praying that the person that wrongs us is able to repent in time to avoid the punishment that he so justly deserves. Jesus taught us, in **Mark 11:25-26**:

**25 “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.**

**26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”**

Remember that which Jesus said of the men that sent Him to the Cross, in the ‘a’ portion of **Luke 23:34**:

**34 Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”**

To behave in accordance with these passages of Scripture requires the demeanor of a saint, and I am as sure as the day is long that none of us will claim to have lived our entire lives in accordance to these teachings of Jesus. Some of us have matured over the years and have become better than we were, and some of us are better than others, but in the judgment, how much you have improved over the years or well you have lived as compared to other people will not be the question, but the question will be: how well have you lived during your entire life in comparison to the standard?

I just read part of the standard to you, from the fifth chapter of Matthew. When you get to heaven, do you want to tell God that you are willing to stand on your record and be judged? I think that, if you are intelligent, you will not make such a statement. If you are intelligent, you will recognize your deficiency and if you know your Bible, you will recognize that there will be no slack given in the Judgment. God will not grade on the curve. **Revelation 20:12** makes it clear:

**12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.**

Scientists that study the brain indicate that we have conscious control over about 20% of our cranial capacity. The other 80% appears to be storage. There are people that have had certain cranial diseases that required brain operations to be performed while they were conscious, and surgeons have been able to make people actually visualize various past events in their lives by stimulating the neurons in different parts of the brain. The brain may be analogous to a big hard drive that stores all of the events and information that we have ever experienced, and, in the Judgment, God will read the complete contents of our disk and judge us based upon that which He finds there, including every thought we ever had, every word we ever spoke, and every deed that we have ever done.

Suppose you never did anything wrong in your whole life, but occasionally, you thought about it. Maybe once a week, you had a bad thought. You never acted on that thought, but you had it. If you were this good, no sins, but just one bad thought a week, at the end of the year, you would be guilty of 52 sins. By the time you were ten, you would be guilty of 520 sins, and if you lived to the age of seventy, that would amount to 3,640 sins. Suppose I don't count your childhood, and don't start keeping track until you are eighteen years of age. That's still 2,704 sins.

Now suppose you were standing before a judge in a courtroom with a record of 2,704 moving violations? Would you expect to keep your license? Suppose the person who was judged before you had 2 million violations? Yes, you would be a lot better than that person, but still, would you expect to keep your license with 2,704 moving violations? When you told the judge, 'Yes, I have 2,704 violations, but look at that guy. He had 2 million!', the judge would say, "Well, he lost his license, and you are going to lose yours too." **Revelation 21:8** tells us: **8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."**

Have you ever communicated anything to anyone that was not true? Ever? In your whole life? If your answer is yes, you just joined the group of all liars. It sounds as though the lake of fire is in your future, according to the Bible.

What is the point of this arithmetic exercise? Simple. The point is, as **Romans 3:23** tells us:

**23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

And, as the old Preacher used to say, all means all, because the meaning of all is all. Regardless of how good any of us may think that we are, none of us are sinless, and so none of us can save ourselves.

The same thing was true of the Jewish religious leaders, but nonetheless, they did not recognize their sinfulness and rejected Jesus Christ. So Jesus warned them about their rejection of Him and of His Godliness, again using the motif of a feast, in **Matthew 22:1-5**

**1 And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said:**

**2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son,**

**3 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.**

**4 Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."'**

**5 But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.**

Jesus is bringing the Kingdom of God to Israel, complete with the miracle ministry predicted by the prophets, but rather than accepting Jesus' invitation to join Him, the Jewish religious leaders made light of the Kingdom, just as those in the parable made light of the invitation to the wedding. Time and time again, the Jewish leaders listened to Jesus teach, and the Bible records that Jesus' teaching filled them with madness, not because of any error or lack of logic in that which Jesus said, but simply because Jesus proved their sinfulness and the

incorrectness of their theology to them. The Jewish leaders despised Jesus and His arguments, because they could not refute His logic that condemned them.

You may remember our discussion of the Jewish leader's displeasure over Jesus' healing on the Sabbath, and how Jesus pointed out to them that they would certainly rescue any of their animals that fell into a pit on the Sabbath Day. Jesus pointed out, that if it was lawful to help an animal on the Sabbath, it was surely lawful to help a man on the Sabbath. The responsible thing for the Jewish leaders to do would have been to simply acknowledge the objective truth of Jesus' argument, but they previously had taken a public position in opposition to Jesus. If they yielded that position to agree with Jesus, then Jesus would win and they would lose face, which would deteriorate their authority. The next verse in the parable **Matthew 22:6**, says:

**6 And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.**

The Jewish leaders chose to save face before the crowd rather than acknowledge the objective truth in Jesus' arguments, first by character assassination, and then having Jesus crucified on Calvary's cross. But the next verse, **Matthew 22:7** says:

**7 But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.**

God's final retribution against sinners that reject His grace is hell. Only one thing sent the Jewish religious leaders that did not accept Jesus' arguments to hell; and that is the same one thing that will send any of us to hell. That one thing is pride, which keeps us from repenting of our sin. **Obadiah 3-4** tells us:

**3 The pride of your heart has deceived you, You who dwell in the clefts of the rock, Whose habitation is high; You who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'**

**4 Though you ascend as high as the eagle, And though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down," says the LORD.**

The parable continues in **Matthew 22:8-10**:

**8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.**

**9 Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.'**

**10 So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.**

Regardless of whether or not we choose to accept the grace gift of Jesus Christ, someone is going to do so and reap the benefit of the Kingdom. Contrary to the opinion of the Jewish leaders, God does not populate heaven based upon our ethnicity, ancestry or status, but upon the evidence of our faith in Jesus Christ that we provide. **John 3:16-17** tells us:

**16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

**17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**

However, the parable continues, in **Matthew 22:11-14**:

**11 'But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.**

**12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.**



**13 Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’**

**14 “For many are called, but few are chosen.”**

The wedding garment represents faith in Jesus Christ.

It is not enough to just become a member of the church, attend the services and pay lip service to church doctrine, but we must actually develop faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ means more than just believing history; it means emulating the life of Christ; taking the principles that He espoused as our own; reacting to the stresses and strains in our lives in the way that He would have done. Jesus tells us, in **Luke 6:46-49**

**46 “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?**

**47 Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like:**

**48 He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.**

**49 But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.”**

So it is not enough to hear; we actually have to do.

But the Jewish leaders never got the memo; they chose not to understand that the purpose of their position was to educate people about the Kingdom of God to save them from being cast into outer darkness. Rather than drawing people into the Kingdom of God, the Jewish leaders were so focused on their personal pride that they chose rather to endeavor to make the Kingdom of God a personal club for themselves and their friends and to drive people away that they considered beneath themselves. Our text for today, **Luke 15:1-2** reads:

**1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.**

**2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”**

Well, Jesus ate with sinners. As we have already noted, all men are sinners, so if Jesus ate with anyone besides Himself, He was eating with a sinner. But the Jewish leaders did not see themselves as sinners; they saw themselves as exalted because of their leadership position in the Temple hierarchy, and the people with whom Jesus was eating as the dregs of the earth.

But Jesus recognized that their complaint was the same as their complaint about His healing on the Sabbath; their complaint was that of a snob that did not want to associate with those whom he considered of lesser degree than himself. Their complaint was that of the man who thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think. Their complaint was that of the man that has a beam in his own eye that disdains his brother for having a speck in his eye. They thought of themselves as good drivers, because they had only 2,704 moving violations, and looked down on someone with 2 million violations. They thought that God should rejoice at having them in the Kingdom because of their excellent track record, not recognizing that at most, they were the best of a bad lot, and no more worthy of heaven than the ones for whom they had disdain.

Their situation was that of the pot calling the kettle black, but they were so self-righteous that they chose not to see it.

We need to be careful to never look down on anyone, and to never condemn anyone, because if our façade were punctured and we were seen as we are, we are no more worthy of heaven than the one upon whom we are looking down. After all, even our ability to understand that we need to serve God is a grace gift from Him. **1 Corinthians 4:7** tells us:

**7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?**

Everything that we have, material, intellectual or spiritual, is a gift from God.

We are saved, not because of our own righteousness, but because God was looking for us and He found us. We did not become Christians spontaneously; somebody had to take the time to explain the situation to us, and then we still had to be drawn by the Holy Spirit. The Christian enterprise is one in which we are being used by God to draw one another to Him. If He does not draw us, we cannot become Christians. We receive the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a grace gift; we have no reason to boast of our righteousness.

So, in answer to the question of Jesus' choice of company, He taught, in **Luke 15:3-7**

**3 So [Jesus] spoke this parable to them, saying:**

**4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?**

**5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.**

**6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'**

**7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.**

Jesus' job is not to sit on the throne and congratulate Himself on His great accomplishments, His great healing and teaching ministry. Jesus' job is to go into the highways and hedges and compel men to be saved.

Heaven has more joy over one man that repents than ninety-nine that have no need of repentance because the ninety-nine that have no need of repentance do not exist. One bum off of the street coming to church gives God more joy than all of the snooty folks with turned up noses sitting in the pews looking down on the bum.

When you look down on someone else, you break God's heart, because the only reason that you are there is because God decided not to look down on you, but to save you. And, He's still in the saving business, because we are His children. Jesus goes on to say, in **Luke 15:8-10**:

**8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?**

**9 And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!'**

**10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."**

God wants His Kingdom to grow. He wants His Kingdom to grow in grace, in knowledge and in numbers. **2 Peter 3:9** tells us that God is delaying judgment in order that to give people more time to repent, as it says:

**9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise [of judgment], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

We are saved simply because God had compassion on us. Let us always remember to have compassion on one another.

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