

April 4: Luke 14-15

Chapter 14

This section begins a series of “Dinner Discourses” where Jesus’ taught those over dinner (a classic setting for teaching to occur in both Jewish and Greek contexts). Vs. 1-6 is very similar to the story from 13:10-17. Dropsy was a condition of edema which was considered unclean. He is once again challenging the Sabbath laws that place livestock’s needs above that of people’s needs for healing. Jesus uses the real-life behavior of the dinner guests to spark his teaching on humility. It’s better to be humble and be exalted by your host, than to consider yourself more important than you are, and be shamed by your arrogance.

In line with his personal mission statement from chapter 4, to proclaim good news to the poor, Jesus urges those in attendance to dine with those who have no way or repaying their kindness. He then tells a parable about a man who prepared a feast, but those who were his invited guests came up with excuses as to why they couldn’t attend, so the master of the house expanded his social circle to be more inclusive, inviting EVERYONE in the town –specifically those who normally would have been excluded or deemed “unclean” by the Levitical law codes. The master sends his slave to seek out those who have only known exclusion, and to bring them into the feast. This parable reveals the nature of the kingdom of God, where those who have only known exclusion are now not only included, but issued a special, direct invitation.

Jesus urges those who have come to believe in him to weigh the cost of discipleship before they really “sign up” to be Jesus’ followers. Following Jesus could cost you your family, your job, your possessions, and even your very life (11/12 of the apostles were martyred). Jesus wants people to know what they’re getting into before they start following him so that they can make an informed decision. Jesus and his mission must be the most important loyalty of his followers.

Chapter 15

Vs. 1-10, In light of Jesus’ teachings from chapter 14, and Jesus’ well known table habits (he practiced what he preached, welcoming sinners to eat with him like they were his family), the Pharisees and scribes begin grumbling. Surely it’s not appropriate for a religious teacher to ally himself with sinners! Jesus then begins to teach the scribes and Pharisees with 3 of the best known parables about how God values the lost, and desires all of God’s children to be gathered together in relationship, around the same table.

The parables Jesus tells to highlight this reality reveal higher and higher stakes. There are 100 sheep, 10 coins, and only 2 sons. Leaving 99 sheep in the wilderness to seek out 1 that is lost, is a really stupid thing to do! This behavior is not practical, but does reveal the deep love of the shepherd for each individual sheep. Returning the lost sheep to the flock is of the utmost importance to the shepherd. These sheep are not just numbers, but you can imagine the shepherd probably has names for each one of them. Each sheep is worth the whole flock to the shepherd. And when that one sheep is found,

there is joy and relief for the shepherd which parallels the celebration in heaven over one sinner who returns to God (repents). Seeking, finding, and leading sinners back into relationship with God is a priority in the kingdom of God, because God loves and longs for the return of each individual who is lost.

The parable of the lost coin follows the same outline as the parable of the lost sheep. Each silver coin was worth about \$20, this is not just a lost penny we're talking about. So, she seeks diligently until she finds it!

Vs. 11-32, Finally, the parable of the prodigal son is perhaps the most well known parable, and the one that Jesus uses to speak directly to the Pharisees who feel resentful of Jesus' table fellowship with sinners. The younger son's behavior was shameful. Asking for his inheritance before the father died would have basically been heard the same as saying, "I wish you were dead." But, the father gave it to him anyway! I wonder why the son chose the place he travelled to. Did he have a business opportunity or simple youthful wanderlust? He was irresponsible in his management of resources. Perhaps if he hadn't lived so wastefully, he would have had enough left over to sustain him during the time of famine. He hit rock bottom. He went from living like a king, to working like a slave, feeding pigs (Gentile territory). The fact that he was starving, rather than his desire to reconcile with his father, drove him to return home. He practiced his speech all the way home, attempting to use his silver tongue to get in enough good graces to at least be allowed to live as a servant. But, the father, upon seeing him, shamed himself by running to greet him. One can imagine that he had been searching for his son to come down the end of the driveway every day since he had left. He runs and embraces his son, and doesn't let him finish his rehearsed speech. The son was not serious about repentance when he left the foreign land, but we can imagine that the father's expression of extravagant grace (undeserved love) changed his heart, humbled him, and restored him to relationship with the family.

However.

The eldest son was not so forgiving. He resented his father's compassion, forgiveness, and grace. Perhaps he'd never been given a goat to celebrate because he'd never asked for one. Perhaps he didn't want to come across as an entitled brat, like his younger brother. This son of YOURS vs. This brother of YOURS. The Father pleads with his oldest son to be reconciled to his brother, to celebrate his return with the rest of the family. The ball is in the eldest son's court, what will he do, how will he act?

Both sons break their father's heart, but the father's heart is big enough to forgive and seek reconciliation with both of them.