

Dining With Jesus:

Conversations On Religious Reform From Luke 14:1-24

Lesson One: Signs We Are In Need of Reform

Introduction

- A hostile setting
 - Jesus invited to the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees to eat with a large group of religious leaders on the Sabbath.
 - This is the exact opposite of Jesus' meal with Levi/Matthew and all of his companions (Lk 5:29: *And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them.*).
 - Rather than sharing a meal with the ungodly, Jesus is dining with the extremely religious.
 - This isn't a typical meal with friends. They were watching Him closely.
 - It's quite possible this whole meal was planned by the Pharisees to provide opportunity scrutinize and criticize Jesus before an audience, i.e. a man with dropsy just happening to be before Him there on the Sabbath day.
 - So why does Jesus accept the invitation? What good can come?
 - Regardless of their motives, Jesus sees people who need the truth and so he takes the opportunity to speak with them.
 - So it's going to be a very tense and awkward meal.
 - Jesus helps the religious
 - Jesus' compassion to help the religious
 - It's a big deal that Jesus was compassionate to the irreligious and ungodly, but He shows the same degree of compassion to the religious as well.
 - It can sometimes require more compassion to help the religious:
 - They can be even less desirable people:
 - Very knowledgable
 - Self-righteous
 - Belligerent
 - Condescending
 - They should know better
 - The religious have a harder time recognizing their spiritual need.
 - They can be more likely to resent help.
 - It requires more compassion to set yourself up to be hated for speaking the truth, and sometimes the religious hate more than the irreligious.
 - Why does Jesus equally help the religious just as much as the irreligious? Because they equally need help.
 - Jesus is truly indiscriminate.
- * You're religious, are you willing to accept that you still need help?
- * Are you compassionate enough to help the religious?
 - Even if it's harder, are you willing to do it?
 - You, being a religious person need the help too.
 - Are you compassionate to treat others the way you need to be treated. N

- What kind of help do the religious need?
 - They don't need the same help as irreligious people do.
 - They don't need to be told to practice their religion, i.e. go to synagogue and pay tithes.
 - They need help reforming their religion:
 - Practice: doing the proper and correct religious practices (baptism? circumcision?)
 - Purpose: doing them with the right motives and for the right purposes (glory from God vs. glory from men).
- What is religion?
 - Religion is the things that we do for God.
 - Variety of different things done for a variety of different gods.
 - Or even different things for the same supposed God.
 - This includes the worship of and service to God.
 - Religion is a dirty word.
 - There are many different religious people and practices.
 - Many of them the people are bad.
 - And many of the practices are bad.
 - If the bad examples aren't enough, the sheer number of different and opposing beliefs and practices makes people just want to stay away from any kind of religion all together.
 - They want God without the nonsense, or sometimes, spirituality without the religion.
 - However, the Bible tells us we need to be religious
 - The Bible's instruction to be religious
 - We don't necessarily need to use the word religion if we don't like it.
 - But we certainly need to correctly worship God, and serve and obey Him properly.
 - We need to meet with the body of believers as Jesus has composed it.
 - However it needs to be proper religion
 - The Bible itself makes a distinction between false religion and true religion.
 - False religion: Mat 7:21-23: *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'*
 - True religion: James 1:27: *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*
 - So religious reform is about correcting the error in our religion, and getting back to making sure our religion is pleasing to and for God.
- Jesus tries to help the Pharisees reform their religion
 - The religious debate:
 - Is it a violation of the sabbath to perform a miraculous healing?
 - It isn't, but Jesus knows that the Pharisees think it is.
 - He's been tested on similar occasion:

- Mat 12:10: *And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him.*
- Jesus' response: Mat 12:12: *"So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*
- This question has an answer
 - There are definite answers when it comes to religion.
 - As is in every case, Jesus is right, and they are wrong.
 - In our case, do we really know what Jesus teaches and believes?
 - Do we agree with Him and therefore practice true religion?
 - Or have we gone astray in some modified and adapted idea or practice?
- Jesus doesn't mind being tested because He knows He's right
 - So Jesus is preemptive and He asks the question Himself, showing He has no doubt or fear.
 - He knows He's right.
 - He knows what the truth is.
 - He doesn't apologize for His religious convictions even if they are uncomfortable for other people.
 - The number of opposing people and the degree of their hostility doesn't change what the truth is, so it doesn't affect How Jesus acts.
 - Jesus starts off by doing something controversial that He knows they will all disapprove of.
 - The He proceeds to tell three parables that condemn both the dinner guests and the host who invited Him.
 - It's incredibly uncomfortable and awkward, but Jesus is right, and compassionate enough to share with them.

* Are we bold enough to support true religion?

* When challenged, are we humble enough to accept true religion?

Signs That We Are In Need of Religious Reform

- How can we know if we need reform in our religion? The Pharisees needed it, and it was evidenced by their silence.
 - Let's consider four signs that we need religious reform.
1. We don't care about the truth, we only care about being right.
 - The Pharisees were silent, but not because they lacked an opinion, but because they didn't want to be wrong.
 - No right answer:
 - If they say Jesus *doesn't* have the right to heal on the sabbath, they are jerks who don't want their own dinner guest to be healed (should have thought that one through a little better).
 - If they say Jesus *does* have the right to heal, then they are wrong from condemning Him.
 - So they remain silent, revealing they don't actually care about the right answer, the truth, but only want to not make themselves be wrong.

- * If we only care about being right, we will never understand the truth.
 - Being right is self focused - ourself.
 - Jesus is the truth, knowing the truth is God focused.
 - If your sincere destination is Jesus, you'll get there.
 - If your destination is supporting your own ego and being right.... then....

- * If we care about the truth, we won't care about being tested.
 - We don't have to defend ourselves, we just have to know what the truth is.
 - And if we know something's true, we'll defend it because it's true, not because it's *my* belief.
 - — although it's true that if we believe it, we think it's right, and are afraid of being deceived from believing what's right —

- * Signs we only care about being right.
 - We won't think through or consider an issue.
 - We won't listen to another side of the issue.
 - We get mad, because the issue is about *us* and *our* beliefs are under attack.

- 2. Our reasoning is illogical
 - The Pharisees remained silent because they didn't have anything to say.
 - Their conclusions were not supported by solid reasoning so they couldn't properly defend them.
 - Who decided that miracles were prohibited on the Sabbath?
 - The only reason they believed healing was in violation of the sabbath is because Jesus was the one doing them and they didn't like Jesus.
 - So the real argument is: "It's unbiblical to do miracles on the sabbath because we don't like you."
 - Hmm... maybe this is why they kept their mouths shut.

- * If we can't support our beliefs with reasoning then maybe they're wrong.
 - Where's that verse that says you can't use instruments?
 - Well that's just how we do things.

- * If the logic doesn't add up.
 - We don't believe that because Calvinists believe that - someone who has wrong beliefs doesn't make something wrong just because they believe it.
 - It's a stretch - born of water and spirit - can't be water baptism, must be embryonic sac at birth.
 - The JW members hold the bread and put it back because only the select 144,000 can eat it.

- 3. Our reasoning is inconsistent
 - Jesus points out what they would do and have done when they find themselves in a similar situation: their animal is in need, so they rescue it; much like this man is in need of being rescuing.
 - Their inconsistency:
 - Either their behavior is inconsistent - it's unlawful for Jesus to heal on the sabbath, therefore they are equally condemned for breaking the sabbath in like manner.
 - Or their reasoning is inconsistent - they are condemning Jesus of breaking the sabbath for doing something that they don't actually consider to be in violation of the sabbath.

- What is the source of their inconsistency
 - Self-focus.
 - They don't help their animals out of compassion, but rather just to protect the value of their property.
 - And since they personally don't like Jesus they accused Him.

- * If there are inconsistencies in our beliefs and practices, that shows something is amiss.
 - To justify our sin - using the Bible to support American slavery.
 - Preaching to be generous and give - and being super rich.
 - Loyalty to our religious group or peers - head coverings?

4. We are missing the point - God

- It was the sabbath - a religious day.
- A chance to scrutinize Jesus' religion - is He really religious? Does He really keep the sabbath.
- Sabbath
 - Rule - Ex 20:8-11: *"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.*
 - Must seep it -
 - Ex 31:14: *Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.*
 - Still surprisingly vague and ambiguous
 - Why
 - Deut 5:14: You shall **remember** that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.
 - Ex 23:12: "Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may **refresh** themselves.
 - Lev 23:3: For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy **convocation**. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings.
 - Isa 56:7: ????? Keep from doing evil
 - Isa 58:13: If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, And honor it, desisting from your own ways, From seeking your own pleasure
 - God's example - life more than physical
 - Sabbath keeping
 - Ex 35:3: don't kindle fire
 - Num 15:32-36: man stoned for gathering sticks
 - Neh - closed gates on sabbath
 - Rest is room for judgement

- Why
 - What you don't do
 - What you do
- The sabbath in Jesus' day and today
 - Doing a miracle is breaking sabbath.
 - Sabbath's days' journey - 0.5 miles - have to live near synagogue
 - Sabbath today
 - Not start fire
 - Walk to synagogue
 - Sabbath elevator - even weight going down?
 - Have we missed the point to religious practice?
 - Jesus doesn't argue against religious practice
 - Samaritan woman - Jn 4:22: You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.
 - Mat 23:23: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others
 - Yes tithe, but don't neglect the bigger things.
 - It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath
 - Jesus came to give people rest
 - To do good, the point of the Sabbath.,
 - Jesus argues against the bigger things!
 - God focused things.
 - Why are we doing what we're doing?
 - Thinking about God? For God? Because God says so?
 - In accordance with God's teaching?
 -
 - We focus on details of religious practice to justify our greater errors, we make up for them without addressing them.
 - It's not about just having more feeling and less structure - it's about having more God.

Dining With Jesus:

Conversations On Religious Reform From Luke 14:1-24

Lesson Two: Religion Is Not for Self Exaltation

Introduction

- Reminder about context:
 - Jesus dines with the religious (just like He did with the ungodly).
 - He's going to help the religious (just like He helps the ungodly).
 - But the help they need is different:
 - They don't need to be told to be religious.
 - They need for their religion to be reformed.
- Lessons
 - First lesson: signs that our religion needs to be reformed.
 - Next two lessons: the purpose of religion
 - Religion is not for self exaltation
 - Religion is not for self service
- The importance of understanding the true purpose of religion:
 - If we we don't understand the purpose of religion, our practice will be wrong.
 - Sufficiently understanding the purpose of religion ensures that our practice will be proper.
- Today's lesson
 - We often use religion to glorify ourselves instead of God.
 - That leads to all kinds of improper practice.

The Text

- Read it
- 7: Intro
 - To the invited guests - Jesus is speaking directly to the people He was dining with.
 - He noticed - He is going to address their behavior He is witnessing on this occasion
 - Picking out places of honor
 - Seats close to the host - this would mean they are important guests.
 - Places of Honor - esteemed: these are the places you sit if the host esteems you.
 - What if the high priest is hosting this party?
- Speaks a parable
 - How is this a parable?
 - He sees them selfishly taking the places of honor, and he talks about the potential consequences of this social blunder.
 - It sounds like He's speaking clearly about exactly what is going on.

- But Jesus isn't just trying to teach them social technique and manners.
- He's using their current behavior as a metaphor for their religion and relationship with God.
- 8-11: Summary of the parable
 - Don't come to feast and take the best seat because then you can be disgraced and demoted in the presence of all.
 - Instead, take the last place because then the host can find you, and exalt you to a higher position.
 - If you exalt yourself, you will be humbled, but if you humble yourself, you will be exalted.

The Parable

- Understanding the parable
 - Being esteemed by the host
 - We are supposed to care about what the host thinks of us, rather than what the other invited guests think of us.
 - The party is an opportunity to promote yourself in front of the invited guests, or be exalted by the host.
 - Their desires for the honorable seats was motivated by their desire to impress others
 - The guests make the party about themselves - how they can impress.
 - They wanted the best seats, not because they wanted to be near the host ...
 - They know they don't have a close relationship with the host.
 - This is why they have to take these seats for themselves.
 - ... but because they wanted others to see that they were sitting near the host.
 - Taking the higher seats won't change what the host thinks about you - *"Oh wow, I didn't know I liked this guy that much!"*
 - It *will* change what others think of you - *"Oh wow, I didn't realize he was so connected to the high priest. He must be really important."*
 - How to be esteemed by the host
 - In general
 - You need to be a long term honorable trusted friend.
 - It's about who you are outside of the party.
 - You desire His true companionship, not just a good seat to impress others.
 - At the party
 - You don't need to esteem yourself.
 - Based on your relationship, you're already esteemed, so you wait for the host to exalt you rather than exalting yourself.
- Meaning of the parable
 - Our religion is like this party
 - The party is religion.
 - And the host is God.
 - We need to care more about being esteemed by God than impressing other people
 - If we really care about being close to God and esteemed by Him, then we will be faithful friends who walk with integrity always.
 - If we care more about being impressive to other people then we will use religion as an opportunity for self exaltation.

- Act closer to God so people will think we are so spiritual.
- Occupy ourselves with religious practice and good deeds so that we will be more valuable than others.
- Yet, this vain religious practice does not change how God esteems us
 - Fake
 - If we are using religion for our own vain purposes and will be humbled by Him.
 - The only reward is the attention we get from people.
 - Sincere
 - We are true friends of God.
 - Our religion is governed by a desire to be close to Him.
 - We don't need to seek our own exaltation, because He will exalt us.
 - And we aren't interested in glory from other people.

The Purpose of Religion: to Glorify God

- Why so much self exaltation in religion?
 - There's a lot of glory going around.
 - So we want to step in the spot light and get some for ourselves.
- Purpose of the world
 - God's glory
 - God chooses for us to be holy and blameless adopted sons of Jesus for His glory
 - Eph 1:4-6: *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace*
 - Jews saved for God's glory
 - Eph 1:12: *to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory*
 - Gentiles saved for God's glory to be praised
 - Eph 1:14: *In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.*
 - God raises us up with Christ so that all ages will know of His grace
 - Eph 2:4-6: *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace*
 - God saves in a way that glorifies Him
 - Eph 2:8-9: *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
- What's the purpose of religion?
 - If the purpose of the earth is for God's glory to be praised, then what's the purpose of religion?
 - For us to glorify God.
 - Our glory has *NO* part in our religious practice.

- Danger of self glory in religion
 - But religion has so much glory for God, that we want a piece of that ourselves!
 - Self glory in religion is one of the most common and most dangerous sins to the church and for all time
 - Cain & Abel
 - Korah's rebellion
 - Ananias and Saphira
 - Simon the sorcerer
- God's purpose to glorify us
 - God is planning on glorifying us
 - Rom 8:30: *and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*
 - In the end
 - II Thes 1:10-12: *when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - So...
 - Humans don't glorify humans
 - Not self
 - Not others
 - God glorifies us, on *HIS* time - wait for it.
- Compare Ananias and Saphira with Jesus
 - Phi 2:8-11: *Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Our Practice

- If the purpose of our religion isn't to glorify God, then our practice will be wrong.
- Improper practice
 - That was the case for the Pharisees
 - Mat 23:1-3: thinking they have authority - can boss people around
 - Trusting in men rather than God
 - These guys are so great lets trust them
 - Mat 23:5-7: attention and praise from people
 - Deeds to be seen by men
 - Performance focus
 - People centered
 - Praising people
 - Mat 23:8-10: titles, positions, hierarchy.
 - Elevating self over others

- Mat 23:23-24: focus on external verifiable religious practice, not true integrity
 - About religious practice
 - Not about integrity and goodness
- Mat 23:25-26: moral hypocrisy / double life
 - Living a lie
 - Not being open about sin
- Mat 23:29-30: Comparing with others
 - Justifying self by being better than others
- Proper practice
 - Jms 1:26-27: *If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*
- These are the things people only do if they're really trying to be close to God.

Conclusion

- What does your religion look like?
- Seeking to be close to God?

Dining With Jesus:

Conversations On Religious Reform From Luke 14:1-24

Lesson Three: Religion Is Not for Self Services

Introduction

- Reminder about context:
 - Jesus dines with the religious (just like He did with the ungodly).
 - He's going to help the religious (just like He helps the ungodly).
 - But the help they need is different:
 - They don't need to be told to be religious.
 - Their religion needs reform.
- Lessons
 - First lesson: signs that our religion needs to be reformed - healed on the sabbath.
 - Next two lessons: the purpose of religion
 - Last message: Religion is not for self exaltation - criticized the guests.
 - *Today's Message*: Religion is not for self service - criticizes the host.
- The importance of understanding the true purpose of religion:
 - If we we don't understand the purpose of religion, our practice will be wrong.
 - Sufficiently understanding the purpose of religion ensures that our practice will be proper.
- Today's lesson
 - We often use religion to serve ourselves in this life, rather than
 - That leads to all kinds of improper practice.

The Text

- Lk 14: 12-14: Read it
- To the host
 - How can you speak against the host when they were nice enough to invite you and provide a meal?
 - Jesus challenges the genuine niceness of the host's actions.
 - It's possible to do something "nice" without genuine motives.
- The situation: when you give a lunch / dinner
 - A nice deed?
 - It's providing a meal for people.
 - Something you voluntarily choose to do for others.
 - Perhaps in this setting...
 - All the guests were thinking the host was very noble for providing this meal.
 - The host thought himself to be very noble for providing this meal.

- Jesus' instruction:
 - (In the context of doing a nice deed) ... don't invite these people:
 - Friends and family
 - These are people that you want to spend time around.
 - So why host a meal? Because you want to.
 - You enjoy the time spent with them - and *that* is your reward.
 - Yes - you are giving, but to get something that you want ...
 - Time with these people that you want to be around.
 - Pleasing people that you are building a relationship with, so that they can appreciate your act of kindness - and also be willing to do the same for you (holiday meals).
 - Rich neighbors
 - These people have a lot to offer in return.
 - Example:
 - Neighbor with pool, so you invite them to your place for a cookout.
 - Neighbor with super big screen TV, so you invite him over to watch the game.
 - This is serving in order to be served - and the return service is your reward.
 - Repayment - the enjoyment you receive from the social gathering + whatever future hospitality you receive from your invited guests.

* Doing nice deeds that have a reward

- It's not that they aren't nice...
- But a nice deed done expecting some personal benefit in return is more of a trade or an investment.

• Instead invite these people:

- Guest list
 - Examples
 - The poor
 - The crippled
 - The lame
 - The blind
 - People that can't repay you
 - Being disabled, they wouldn't be able to work, and would have to beg to survive (as we see throughout the gospels).
 - They wouldn't have the resources to invite you to their home and provide a meal.
 - People you wouldn't normally spend time with
 - If you invite disabled people just for the sake of inviting them, you'll likely be inviting people outside of your common circle of friends and family.
 - Being impoverished they would have some of the stigmas that come with the territory, being less presentable or less hygienic.
 - It wouldn't be your common comfortable social gathering.

* Notice how the meal for your friends and family is a lunch or dinner, but this is a banquet - even *more* of a gift.

- Repayment

- Not from your guests - the social event isn't the same as inviting your own close friends + your guests won't be able to show any real return hospitality.
- Future repayment from God - God knowing that you're doing a good deed that won't be immediately repaid, will repay you Himself at the resurrection.

* It is a blessing to do good deeds that don't have any immediate repayment or reward in this life, because that's when God will reward us in the next.

* Only doing good deeds that have a reward in this life means that we won't be rewarded by God in the next.

* It's the same as last lesson - about self exaltation...

- It's not that God doesn't want us to be exalted.
- It's that He doesn't want us to exalt ourselves or each other.
- *He* wants to exalt us.
- So...
- It's not that our good deeds aren't meant to be rewarded.
- It's that God wants to reward us for our good deeds.
- Instead of us trying to be seek for our own reward.

How Does This Relate to Religion

- It's a parable
 - Remember how in the last lesson we looked at Jesus' message to the invited guests choosing the best seats, but really it was also a parable about something deeper - their use of religion for self exaltation.
 - Here, it's another parable, and so is the next story.
 - So yes, it's true that the host shouldn't do acts of generosity for personal gain.
 - But it's also deeper than that.
- The real lesson - religion is not for self-service
 - Religion isn't meant to serve us - we can't use our religion or do religious deeds for our own earthly gain.
 - True religion is about us serving others - without earthly gain
 - Serving
 - We serve God
 - We serve people
 - And God provides us with the future reward to make it worth it.
 - It's not about receiving a reward from people.
 - It's not about receiving our reward in the present.
- Paul's example
 - Paul's words:
 - I Cor 15:19: *If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.*
 - If the gospel is false, then his whole life is an immense pity because he served and sacrificed greatly for nothing!
 - Moderate / mediocre religion has equal reward to sacrifice ration in this life.
 - Serving God is beneficial in this life.
 - If we start living as Christians, we begin to benefit from the lifestyle changes and have satisfaction from the blessings of spirituality.

- I Tim 6:6: *But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.*
- As we serve God some, we are rewarded in this life some.
- It's a good arrangement.
- Examples:
 - Going to church some, we make some friends.
 - Moderate amount of time in prayer makes us feel calmer.
 - Moderate generosity makes us feel better.
- If it turns out that the gospel is untrue, well in the end, our religion enhanced our over all life experience, so it's all good.
- True religion is goes far beyond the earthly gain we receive in this life.
 - Consider Paul's religion
 - What he gave up
 - Didn't marry
 - Didn't have a home
 - Lost all of his friends and family
 - Hated and abused
 - Disappointed and betrayed by brethren
 - The weight of stress for his brethren
 - His earthly gain ...
 - Umm...
 - Ya.
 - Paul's true religion was all about serving, rather than being served.
 - If it turns out that he gave up his entire earthly life for zero spiritual reward, he'd be furious! It wasn't worth it!
 - Is our religion worth it?
 - Our religion needs to be so extreme that what we gain in this life isn't worth what we're giving up!
 - Examples:
 - Serving, exhorting, and rebuking our new Christian friends
 - Waking up an hour early to pray every day
 - Generosity until it really costs us

* Is your religion about what you get? Or what you give?

Applications

- Extreme cases (maybe more easily seen in others, and not so much in us)
 - The Pharisees - using religion to seek fame and glory
 - Verses:
 - Mat 23:5: Do deeds to be noticed by men
 - Mat 23:6: They love places of honor
 - Mat 23:7: They love respectful greetings
 - Are people today still using religion for the earthly gain of fame and glory? Yes!
 - Be at least a little skeptical of some of the celebrity preachers.
 - Corrupt false teachers
 - Verse: Phi 3:19: *whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.*
 - They lie and deceive in order to get money, possessions, and sex from people.

- This is out there.
- We need to protect ourselves from these deceitful false teachers.

* Now, applications for us; ways we use religion for what we get out of it, rather than what we give.

1. Worship services

- We go to services caring more about what we get out of it, rather than what we give.
- Bad: we say the lesson didn't edify me, the singing is weak, these people didn't talk to me.
- What about us coming to edify others?
 - Heb 10:24: *not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.*
 - The reason we need to be at church gatherings is so that we fulfill our duties to encourage and exhort each other.
 - Class participation, conversations with brethren.
- What about us trying to improve the singing with our loud voice?
- What about us seeking out people who may need our attention?

2. Church involvement

- We're only at the minimum required services.
- We don't come enough so that we can actually be a working member in the group.
- Picking up responsibilities to teach and serve and help.
- Church needs to be about delegation, and members need to step up. Hard!
- Examples:
 - Order of worship and slides
 - Church cleaning
 - Kids class
 - Evangelism workshop
 - Special events
 - Visiting and calling

3. Relationships with members

- Only hang with our friends that we are comfortable with.
- Use church assemblies and afterwards just to be with the people we want to be with.
- What about others?
 - Members you don't know as well?
 - Newer members who don't have as many friends here?
 - Members who are a little shy or socially awkward - less fun for you to be around.
 - Members you have a hard time getting along with

4. Outreach and evangelism

- What about the visitors in the assembly?
- We don't want awkward moments in conversation, but get over it.
- If Jesus left comfort of heaven, we need to leave our comfort zone and make sure people are seeing that Christ is in the building!

* James 2 - preference to the rich, what about preference to our own people?

- Do we seek to save the lost, and personal cost?
- The greatest way to serve

5. Love
 - You love the people who love you.
 - Even worldly people do that.
 - Mat 5:46: *For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*
 - Do you love those who are hard to love? In the church? In your family?
 - Do you only do good deeds to those who are grateful for your help? What about people who complain and criticize?

6. Repentance
 - Do you only change in your problem areas to make your personal life better?
 - Or are you changing in every aspect of your life?

7. Self-worth
 - Are you doing this just to feel better about yourself?
 - Are you self-righteous?
 - Better than the world?
 - Better than other Christians?
 - Or are you truly humbled by your sin and the God who saved you?
 - Are you serving because you know you owe everything to God?
 - Does your self worth come from your obedience of religion? Or the God who loves you?

Conclusion

Mk 10:45: *For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*

Dining With Jesus:

Conversations On Religious Reform From Luke 14:1-24

Lesson Four: Prioritizing Kingdom Values

Introduction

- Reminder about context:
 - Jesus dines with the religious (just like He did with the ungodly).
 - He's going to help the religious (just like He helps the ungodly).
 - But the help they need is different:
 - They don't need to be told to be religious.
 - Their religion needs reform.
- First lessons: Signs that our religion needs to be reformed - healed on the sabbath.
- Next lessons, about purpose of religion
 - The importance of understanding the true purpose of religion:
 - If we we don't understand the purpose of religion, our practice will be wrong.
 - Sufficiently understanding the purpose of religion ensures that our practice will be proper.
 - Next lessons
 1. Religion is not for self exaltation - criticized the guests.
 2. Religion is not for self service - criticizes the host.
- Today's lesson is about prioritizing kingdom values
 - We might be religious, but...
 - If we don't know the kingdom values...
 - If we don't personally value those values...
 - If our church doesn't uphold those values...
 - ...then our religion isn't truly a part of God's kingdom.

Intro to the Parable

- Read the text: Lk 14:15-24
- Previously
 - Jesus controversial healing on sabbath to expose their false thinking.
 - Jesus criticizes the guests.
 - Jesus criticizes the host.
- Easing the tension
 - Awkward tension and silence in room - so much controversy.

- When there is tension and controversy, we want to smooth things out so everything feels better.
- Man tries to ease the tension by saying something positive and uncontroversial - *“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”*
- What does this statement mean?
 - The Jews were waiting for God’s promise to restore the kingdom of Israel and make everything better.
 - So this guy is trying to just say, boy it’s gonna be great when the kingdom comes.
 - This is kind of like saying, “It sure will be great when we all go to heaven!”
 - But that’s making a dangerous assumption!
- Jesus won’t allow the tension to be released.
 - There is tension between wrong and right.
 - When things are wrong and there needs to be change, then there should be tension.
 - Exposing wrong and upholding right leads to tension that can bring change.
 - Jesus won’t allow the tension to be eased because he wants these religious people to change and reform.
 - So he’ll turn this non confrontational statement into a controversy.

The Parable

- A prepares a big dinner and invites many
 - Lots of preparation.
 - Trying to provide the guest a great experience.
 - Because he wants to spend time with them.
- Everything is done, and he calls for the invited guests
 - He finished all the work.
 - The amount of work was determined by all the guests he was expecting would show up.
 - All of this labor is for them - he wants to be with them.
- The invited guests make excuses
 - The excuses:
 - I bought land - I have to go see it; please consider me excused.
 - I bought oxen - I have to go try them out; please consider me excused.
 - I got married - I can’t come.
 - Prioritizing
 - Understanding the excuses:
 - These aren’t last minute unexpected problems - getting sick, family member dying.
 - Assuming these are valid things they need to do, they are things that they were working on and planning, and decided to do knowing full well they would conflict with their previous engagement.
 - Or they’re just completely wack excuses to come up with any reason not to come to the feast just because they don’t want to.
 - They prioritized their own things
 - They made sure they did the things they wanted.
 - Their own things came first.
 - They didn’t prioritize the dinner
 - The dinner gets pushed to the side.

- This is because they didn't want to go in the first place.
- Arrogance
 - They were ungrateful for what was being done to them.
 - They weren't considerate to let the host know they weren't planning on coming.
 - They just assume, "He'll be fine, he'll probably host another dinner."
- The host is angry and offended that nobody cares about his dinner
- But the banquet is not cancelled
 - The dinner is still going to happen because all of the food has been prepared.
 - Only the guest list will change.
- New guests
 - First wave - anyone willing to come
 - Streets, lanes, city - public areas.
 - The poor, crippled, blind, lame - rejected jobless people who have nothing to offer and nothing to do.
 - These would seem like secondary citizens to the invited guests.
 - The dinner is about the dinner, not the guests
 - This would make the invited guests realize that the dinner isn't about them, they are replaceable.
 - The dinner is about what the host is providing to others.
 - This would humble the invited guests.
 - Second wave - those who were convinced to come
 - The host isn't satisfied.
 - He has prepared a lot for all, he wants all to come!
 - So go to the outskirts - the highways and the hedges.
 - Convince people to come even if they don't want to at first.
- The host wants his house to be full of those who want to come, but those who don't want to come, will have no part.

The Meaning of the Parable

- The kingdom
 - Jewish expectations
 - The physical kingdom of Israel was destroyed and their king dethroned.
 - But God promised that he would send a son of David to restore the throne and establish a new kingdom.
 - This was predicted by Daniel to happen during Roman rule (their present day).
 - They expected a powerful Jew descended of David to come and unite all the Jews to rebel against Rome and regain political independence and put the physical nation of Israel in power once again.
 - This was going to be for all the ethnic Jews.
 - And everyone at the dinner expected that they would automatically be a part of this great coming kingdom.
 - What those Jews valued
 - Power, physical prosperity, success, prestige.

- This is what they valued, this is what occupied them.
- And it is seen in their religion.
 - The powerful religious leaders who were like political leaders.
 - Using religion as an excuse to abusing the poor and take their money (“*devour widows’ houses*” (Mk 12:40))
 - Using religion to gain honor and attention (Mat 23:6)
- The reality
 - God was preparing a spiritual kingdom.
 - Based on repentance
 - Mat 3:2: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*”
 - Not about conquering Rome
 - God’s people scattered among the enemies - Mat 13: tares
 - He would call us to love our enemies instead of conquering them - Mat 5:44: *But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*
 - About humility and service to others
 - Mat 18:3-4: *and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*
 - Mat 20:26-28: *It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*
 - The Christ would be a humble nobody from Galilee who rides into the city on a donkey who gave up everything and died on the Cross.
 - His disciples would be called to do the same:
 - Lk 14:33: *So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions.*
 - Lk 14:27: *Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*
- All things were ready
 - The Christ had come.
 - He was going to build His kingdom by purchasing His people from sin by dying.
 - They were going to eat bread in the kingdom by remembering His death (Mat 26:28-29: *for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.*”
 - Come to the feast! Join the kingdom!!!
- How the Jews responded to the kingdom
 - God’s kingdom was based on very different values than what they actually cared about.
 - They valued their own things - power, physical prosperity, success, prestige.
 - They didn’t care about God’s things - humility, repentance, sacrifice.
 - They weren’t interested because they didn’t want this spiritual kingdom!
 - They didn’t want to confess and worship a humble Galilean.
 - They didn’t want a spiritual kingdom that wasn’t going to be powerful and rule the other physical kingdom.
 - They didn’t want to be humble servants - generous and caring.
 - They didn’t care about God slaying the lamb, they didn’t want to come to His feast

- Rom 10:3: *For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.*
- But the kingdom isn't cancelled!
 - The value of the kingdom
 - The kingdom isn't about those invited guests!
 - It's about what God has done to prepare the kingdom! Death of Christ.
 - So God goes out and invites and compels anyone and everyone to come in.
 - The irreligious Jews!
 - The gentiles!
 - The value of the guests isn't in how "good" or religious they are, but about how much they care about and value what God has done, and want to be a part.

Applications for Us

1. If our religion is based upon kingdom values, then our religion is not really a part of His kingdom.

- Those Jews
 - They were very religious.
 - They expected to be a part.
 - But their religion was all about their own self-serving values, and not God's.
- Bad values of modern Christian religion (not all of these are bad, but not the main point)
 - Power
 - Hierarchies that give men power to rule over others.
 - Systems that bottle authority into human rulers rather than one head Christ.
 - Human wisdom
 - Human religious creeds setting forth standard beliefs and explanations in order to create inauthentic uniformity - based on our own standards than scripture.
 - Christian teaching that conforms to the wisdom and the values of modern society.
 - Wealth
 - Powerful organizations designed to make money.
 - Perhaps to feed the poor or other good causes - but still not what we see in scripture.
 - More often to get a few people wealthy.
 - Feel good / self help
 - Everyone wants to be happy and peaceful now - "Your best life now".
 - "God just wants me to be happy" - to support divorce.
 - "God wants me to follow my dreams" - why is no one ever called to be an electrical technician - doesn't need the justification.
 - Health
 - There were a lot of sick people.
 - OT dietary laws weren't about health.
 - This isn't the point.
- The real values of the kingdom
 - Humility
 - Service
 - Loving enemies

- Righteous living - II Pet 1:4-8: *For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- Spiritual wisdom and understanding - Eph 1:18: *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints*

* If our religious group doesn't emphasize and value these true kingdom values, then we're just wrong.

2. If you don't value the kingdom values then you'll miss the kingdom all together

- Few find the kingdom
 - Mat 7:13-14: *"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*
 - Few are looking for it.
 - Of the few that find it, even less want to take that path because it's not desirable to the earthly minded.
- We need to desire God's spiritual values so we will recognize the truth and want to go down.
 - 1 Cor 2:14-15: *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one.*

3. The kingdom is not about us

- God rejected the Jews, the sons of the kingdom, who didn't accept what God's kingdom was about.
- You're not so important that God is about to change the nature of His kingdom to make room for you.
- We are only in God's kingdom if we want to be in *His* kingdom! As it is!
- We can't bend the nature of God's kingdom to compel others to come in.
- Our minds need to change, not God's kingdom.

4. We need to make God's kingdom our priority

- Those Jews didn't make the kingdom a priority to them, so they didn't enter in when the kingdom came.
- What are your priorities?
- How much is the kingdom your priority?
- Do you care more about the conduct of the kingdom? Do you care more about your earthly accomplishments? Or repenting from sin and being holy and righteous? Moving up ladder - or becoming more obedient?
- How much do you care about the cause of the kingdom? Leading others to Christ? Or instead you own pleasure - fun and possession.

- How much do you care about the code of the kingdom? Better understanding the Bible? Or entertainment?
- Prioritize church attendance:
 - God is not church.
 - And going to church is not the whole of true religion.
 - However, it's a part of it, and it's natural for our attitude towards congregational gatherings to reflect and influence our attitude towards God.

Conclusion