



“Far From God People”
 Luke 14:1-24

Idea: A person’s true spiritual condition is evident in what he or she does with Jesus.

Intro: During his days as President, Thomas Jefferson and a group of companions were traveling across the country on horseback. They came to a river which had left its banks because of a recent downpour. The swollen river had washed the bridge away. Each rider was forced to ford the river on horseback, fighting for his life against the rapid currents. The very real possibility of death threatened each rider, which caused a traveler who was not part of their group to step aside and watch. After several had plunged in and made it to the other side, the stranger asked President Jefferson if he would ferry him across the river. The President agreed without hesitation. The man climbed on, and shortly thereafter the two of them made it safely to the other side. As the stranger slid off the back of the saddle onto dry ground, one in the group asked him, “Tell me, why did you select the President to ask this favor of?” The man was shocked, admitting he had no idea it was the President who had helped him. “All I know,” he said, “is that on some of your faces was written the answer ‘No’ and on some of them was the answer ‘Yes.’ His was a ‘Yes’ face.”

As we work our way through Luke’s Gospel, we see that Jesus had a “Yes” face. In every story, He is looking for opportunities to help people and ferry them across the great divide that separates them from God. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus is once again doing in chapter fourteen. He sees opportunities to speak into the lives of far from God people.

Read Luke 14:1-6.

Inquiry: Sabbath Day hospitality was an important part of Jewish life, so it was not unusual for Jesus to be invited to a home for a meal after the weekly synagogue service. Sometimes the host’s invitation to Jesus was sincere because he wanted to learn more from Him. Many times, however, Jesus was invited only so His enemies could watch Him and find something to criticize as they built a case against Him. Such is the case in this story.

They were watching Jesus because He was known for violating the Sabbath. On at least three separate occasions, He had done so. In chapter four, Jesus cast out demons from a man and healed Simon Peter’s mother-in-law (4:31-41). In chapter six, He healed a man with a withered hand (6:6-11). Then in chapter thirteen, He healed the bent-over woman (13:10-17). In addition to that, Jesus’ disciples had violated the Sabbath by eating grain as they walked through a field, and He did not rebuke them (6:1-5).

On this Sabbath, Jesus enters the house where He had been invited and finds a man with dropsy or edema. This medical condition is caused by kidney trouble, a heart ailment, or liver disease. The result of the compromised

organ is that the body fails to excrete extra liquid. The liquid often collects in the tissue of the abdomen, legs, or feet. The swelling caused by the fluid retention is painful and culminates in organ failure. Therefore, this man is very sick and most likely terminally ill.

Understanding his medical condition, we cannot help but wonder why such a sick man was invited to this Sabbath meal. It would have been highly abnormal if not taboo to invite a sick man to such a meal. It seems this high-level Pharisee invited him for the sole purpose of baiting Jesus into a Sabbath violation. If the Lord refused to heal the man, then they could accuse Him of lacking compassion. If He did heal the man, then He would be guilty of openly violating the Sabbath. Jesus was fully aware of their scheme, so He asked them if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. He then healed the man and compared it to a common scenario where each of them would easily choose to do good to their son or ox on the Sabbath.

Jesus was attending a hostile dinner party. The host and his guests clearly had no desire to be his friends. As I said last Sunday, the Lord did not help Himself. He does not try to find common ground or build a bridge of partnership. Instead, He fires His own shots at this religious leader and his guests. As Jesus surveys the room, He sees a bunch of far from God people. He lovingly and truthfully exposes the sin in each of them that keeps them far from God. We see that it was their sin that was keeping each of them from Jesus.

Today, the world is still full of far from God people. Perhaps, some people at Red Lane this morning a far from God. Sure, you are at church. You are regularly around the things of God. You might be able to speak the language of the church, but in the words of the Apostle John, you do “*not have life*” (1 John 5:12). You have yet to embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior. Therefore, I want us to see that a person’s true spiritual condition is evident in what he or she does with Jesus.

There are three things I want you to see about far from God people. They are:

1. Those who seek power among people.

Read Luke 14:7-11.

The vast majority of people want to feel important. They desire a title, accolades, and attention. As Jesus scanned the room, He saw the pride of each of their hearts. They all wanted to set in the seat of power and be known. The Lord’s scenario pushed against their proud hearts and the cultural status symbols of His day. If you were invited to the right homes, seated in the right places, and worked with the right people, then others would know how important you really were. The emphasis was on reputation rather than character. Not much is that different in our culture.

Jesus advised the guests to humble themselves and seek the lower seats at the table. His advice was a call to genuine humility. It was not a gimmick to fake humility in order to gain a promotion. No, Jesus hates pride, which obviously includes false humility. He “*opposes the proud*” (James 4:6).

Far from God people strive to make a name for themselves. They seek power for themselves. They are proud, which puts them at odds with God. Perhaps, this is your spiritual condition today. You refuse to bow your knee in humble surrender to Jesus because of what others may say about you. You refuse because you know the kingdom you have been building for yourself will have to fall. You are living for everything you can get out of this world. You refuse because you want to make your own way. You want to do it yourself. You prefer to stand before Jesus one day and say, “Look what I have done!” Sadly, He will say, “Depart from Me. I never knew you” (Matt 7:23).

Such was the case for the Pharisee’s guests. They were far from God because they sought power among people.

2. Those who trust in wealth and comfort.

Read Luke 14:12-14.

The Pharisee had invited his guests for two reasons. First, some of them he invited to pay them back for inviting him to past parties. Second, others he invited to put them in his debt so he would be invited by them to future parties. Therefore, his hospitality was not an expression of love and grace. Instead, it exemplified his pride and selfishness. In essence he was buying recognition.

Jesus' instruction to the Pharisee corrected his fallacy by stressing the importance of serving those who cannot repay. Again, our culture today is not that different. We live in a very competitive world, so it is easy for people to be more concerned about profit and loss than they are about sacrifice and service. We tend to evaluate things through the lens of what we can get out of it, which expresses the self-centeredness of our hearts.

Far from God people do not call on Jesus in faith because their trust is in the wealth of this world. They have no love for Him because they are enamored with the comforts this world avoids. You have probably heard the saying, "I want to go to heaven and be with Jesus. I just do not want to go today." On the surface, we understand this statement and agree with it. In other words, none of us are committing suicide so we can go to heaven early. However, too many far from God people live with this mentality each day. They want to trust in their wealth and comfort all the way up till the day that they die, and then step into heaven with Jesus. Such was the case for the Pharisee. He was far from God because He trusted in His wealth and comfort.

3. Those who rest in religious experience.

Read Luke 14:15-24.

At this point, everyone in the room has been insulted by Jesus. The people are seething mad but silent. The party is becoming a disaster, so a quick-tongued guest attempts to save the day with a pious statement. Jesus' response tells us that his words were insincere. He hoped only to curb the awkwardness of the moment. In essence he was saying, "Blessed are the likes of us who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God." And he hoped others would say, "Amen! Well said. Now pass the bread." Jesus pushed back on the guest's assumption by telling a story about a man who also hosted a party. The host had sent out invitations and then made his preparations. When everything was ready, the host sent his servant to inform the invited guests that the party was ready. One person after another gave their excuses for not attending. Each of them probably thought they were in good standing with the man who invited them. They presumed upon their position with him. The host in anger told his servants to go out and invite the poor, crippled, blind, and lame (vs. 21). There was still room after them, so the servant was told to go out along the highways and hedges and invite others until the house is filled (vs. 23).

The host in the story symbolizes God. The initial invited guests symbolize the Jews who trusted in their religious background. The point of Jesus' story was to point out that people who presume their religious experience gives them good standing with God will be sadly left out. The Pharisee and his guests trusted in their religious experience. They proudly believed themselves to be accepted by God because of how well they lived out their religious beliefs. Jesus, however, makes it clear that not one of them will enjoy food at His table (vs. 24).

Far from God people fail to recognize their brokenness before God. They trust in their religious efforts and knowledge. In contrast, Jesus shows that those who are invited near are those who recognize their shortcomings. The poor, crippled, blind, and lame all knew their conditions, and they did not try to hide

them. Instead, they gladly accepted the invitation and came to the feast. The same was true of those who were along the highways. They were foreigners and not residents of the land.

The quick-tongued guest trusted in his religious experience. He ignored the brokenness in his life. Sadly, unless he acknowledged it and turned in faith to Christ he would be shut out.

Conclusion: Where do you fit in this story? Do you live for the approval of others? Is your trust in the wealth and comfort of this world? Are you resting in your religious experience? Would you say that you are far from God today? The Bible tells us that because of our sin each of us have been separated from God. We stand condemned by our sin, which puts us on the outside looking in. We might say that sin puts us on the other side of a vast river with no way to cross on our own. We have no power to swim the river on our own. We have no ability to buy our way across. And we have no capacity to earn our way over the river. The Lord Jesus, as God the Son, however, has come over to us. As the victorious Savior who has conquered death, hell, and the grave through His resurrection, He rides a white horse. And He stands ready with a “Yes” on His face to ferry us across the river.

Are you far from God today? If so, then I encourage you to humble yourself and call on the name of Jesus. Turn from your sin and receive His forgiveness and grace. This is what it means to be saved. This is how you will eat bread in the Kingdom of God.

Christian, are you walking at a guilty distance? It is time to humble yourself and come home?