

**The Uncomfortable Sayings of Jesus**  
***“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor,  
the crippled, the lame, and the blind”.***

Passages: Luke 14:1-14  
Isaiah 25:4-8

Back in August, we started a new sermon series entitled, *“The Uncomfortable Sayings of Jesus”*. Today’s *Uncomfortable Saying* is found in Luke’s Gospel, chapter 14, verses 12 to 14. Let me read it to you again.

***“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,<sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”***

Now, let’s be honest here. How many of us follow this piece of advice from our Lord, Jesus? How many of us, when we give a luncheon or a dinner, make a point of inviting the poor and the handicapped instead of our well-off and beautifully-healthy friends and family? I certainly don’t! For me, **this is definitely an uncomfortable saying of Jesus.**

We certainly need to begin with **prayer!**

These three verses form part of a much larger section of dialogue in chapter 14 that stretches from verses 1 to 24. Throughout this entire section, **Jesus has only one focus—He is talking about banquets...about the art of inviting and receiving invitations to meals.** What causes Jesus to take such a focus?

It all begins back in verse 1.

***“One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.”***

Jesus’ focus on ‘banquets’ begins here, when He is invited to attend a meal at the home of a very prominent Pharisee. It is an exclusive banquet, organised by this obviously wealthy man as a way of honouring himself and his chosen guests.

This was not unusual. You see, in Jesus' day, banquets were part of a long and well-established system of patronage. In a typical first-century banquet, the host would not only be publicly showing-off his own *social standing* through his display of affluence, but he would also be displaying his *social connections* with the elite and the politically powerful!

Of course, this same thing continues to happen today! Why do wealthy people, like Gina Rinehart, Rupert Murdoch or James Packer, give parties and invite the Queen or the Prime Minister? They do it to show-off both their wealth and the breadth of their influence.

Moreover, just like today, people in Jesus' day *accepted* invitations to these banquets in order to rub shoulders with wealthy and important people. (Have you seen the movie, *'The Great Gatsby'*? Back in the 1920's, Gatsby was a wealthy man who gave huge parties... and most of the people who came simply wanted to be seen by others. It was their opportunity to move up the social ladder.)

This idea raises a very important question: **Why was Jesus invited to this exclusive meal at the Pharisee's house?** After all, Jesus was but an itinerant Rabbi; a wandering preacher. **Who would invite him into such a select club?** The very fact that He was invited must mean that *this Pharisee thought that Jesus was interested in climbing the social ladder*. Didn't Jesus have political ambitions? Couldn't Jesus be *tempted* into embracing this exclusive lifestyle! And so, the Pharisee invited Jesus thinking that he might be able to facilitate the right connections and help Jesus use the system to his benefit. *This Pharisee would become Jesus' benefactor—His 'patron'!*

But, of course, Jesus was not going to climb any social ladders, nor was He going to use the patronage system to further His cause. To the contrary, as we discover, Jesus publicly rejects this system as something that is utterly inconsistent with the values of the Kingdom of God. In fact, it seems clear that **Jesus has only accepted the invitation to the banquet so He might use the occasion as a way of teaching the crowd about the Kingdom of God!** And that's exactly what He does in **verses 8-14!** He launches into a two-pronged teaching session (first, with the guests and, then, with the host) in which He subversively undermines this ancient system of patronage!

First, Jesus offers the following advice to **the guests**: (vv 8-11)

***<sup>8</sup> "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. <sup>9</sup> If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honoured in the presence of all the other guests. <sup>11</sup> For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."***

Even wedding feasts had become corrupted by this ancient **system of patronage!** That's why the guests all compete for the best seats, that they might somehow be near *the host*—and this was not the bride and groom! Indeed, in an almost callous disregard for the occasion, *each guest is pitted against the others in an attempt to win the approval of the host!* And so, each guest must boast about their own worth and publicly *exaggerate* their own value in an effort to gain the host's attention and patronage. Meanwhile, the host just sits back and gets his own ego stroked by everyone! In other words, *climbing the social ladder* is a competitive sport in which only a select few can win. It is cut-throat, divisive and socially destructive!

And that's why Jesus suggests *a better way forward*. His advice to the guests is to **subvert the system through humility**. Instead of competing for the host's honour, just relax and sit back; be confident in who God has made you to be! Instead of being 'played' by the system, opt out of the system! Go and sit down at the lowest place; stop competing with each other; instead, treat all the other guests as if they are better than you and, in that way, you will show the value and worth of everyone! And in the end, if it is God's will, God will see that you are lifted up.

Jesus' point is simple: **Humility** not only frees you from slavery to the system but it **opens up a better (and more humane) way for everyone to live!**

That piece of advice for guests sets the stage for Jesus' next contribution. In verses 12-14, Jesus turns to the host and advises him that, for his own good, *he should also undermine the system of patronage through humility!*

***<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,<sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."***

As we saw a moment ago, Jesus is deliberately undermining the ancient system of patronage...a system in which even relatives and friends were forced to prove their worth and social status to the host! In the end, the host had all the power!

And yet, there was one way that this social system could **severely backfire on the host!** What would happen if the guests (as a group) suddenly refused to come to your banquet? What if they boycotted your table? You would be stuck! Without guests, the host has no power! Indeed, the host suddenly becomes *a victim* of the system that once gave him so much power!

That's why Jesus offers to his host the same basic advice that He offered to the guests—**Be humble!** Be humble enough to open your home (and your banquet table) to a far wider range of people—particularly the poor and the disadvantaged. Why? Because this immediately removes all sense of competition! It undermines the distinctions of class and social standing! It takes away the distinctions of who's in and who's out! Humility means that the system can no longer turn on you!

If the wealthy Pharisee follows Jesus' advice, he will help to undermine a system that ruthlessly divides people, chews them up and spits them out! And in this way, says Jesus, ***“you will be blessed! Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous!”***

Now, we don't know if the Pharisee does follow Jesus' advice, but it's interesting to see how Jesus goes on (in verses 16-24) to tell a parable about a rich man who does learn this lesson and follow the ways of the Kingdom:

***16 “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ 18 “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ 19 “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ 20 “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ 21 “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ 22 “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ 23 “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’”***

Here is a **host** who, as usual, invites all the high status people to his banquet who will later pay him back. But something goes wrong! For some reason, all

his guests conspire to embarrass and shame him, offering shoddy excuses and leaving him high and dry with a prepared banquet and no guests. He quickly learns that the status game is a risky game; one that can easily backfire. *And so, he decides to listen to Jesus' advice.* He invites the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame to come and feast at his table with the result that his table is filled and he is blessed. As you can see, it's a parable that supports the advice that Jesus gave to his host earlier, back in verses 13 and 14.

***"When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,<sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed."***

OK! I think we now understand today's passage. But, tell me-- **How does it apply to us**, today? Is there something we need to learn from this story?

The first thing we need to learn is that **this story does not necessarily apply to us!** (What a relief!) Like the story of *the Rich Young Ruler* (in Luke 18), who was told by Jesus to give all his money away, we cannot immediately read these words and directly apply them to us today. As I've been trying to explain, **Jesus was correcting the ancient** (and highly divisive) **system of patronage**. He was calling both host and guest to humbly reconsider the system that was enslaving them! That's why I can say that, **unless** you are also a very wealthy person and you're using your money to divide society into class structures for your own benefit, then Jesus' words of advice to the host (to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to his dining table) don't directly apply to you!

**But, before you start feeling comfortable with the passage**, there is a general aspect of the text that does apply to us, today! As we saw in today's passage, *Jesus worked diligently to subvert this worldly system of patronage because it was incompatible with the values of the Kingdom of God! Instead of bringing social harmony and peace rooted in the equal value of all people before God, it divided people according to their perceived social worth.*

What is clear to me in this passage is that **Jesus was initiating a quiet revolution...a revolution of humility!** He was calling people of all walks of life to come and follow Him; to leave behind the divisive and worldly ways of the banquet and **to join Him at a new banqueting table in the Kingdom of God where all people are equally welcome!** This, however, can only happen when we, first, *allow God to inwardly transform us!* We must let Him humble us! For only the *humble person* can be used in God's revolutionary work of *social transformation*.

**And this is where we come in!**

As His followers, we must be (first and foremost) inwardly transformed... marked by a deep **humility**! Humility means that we recognise that we are just fellow human beings; sinners amongst sinners; persons who merit nothing from God, and yet, (through His grace) have received all things! Only the truly humble are able to resist the temptation to join the social systems that promotes class distinctions and divisions. Only the truly humble have the eyes to see the awful way that our man-made social systems divide and exploit each other, causing competition rather than social harmony.

I was sitting in a pub in Perth last week, having lunch, when a group of young men sat down at the table next to me. At one point, their discussion was about a mutual friend of theirs who recently purchased a huge house in Sydney with amazing views of the Harbour Bridge. From what I overheard, this house was formerly used as an Embassy, and they were all very impressed at the way their friend was able to buy it and use it-- for amazing parties! They were all so *impressed*, and they couldn't wait to be invited to one!

Do you see what was going on? They were all falling under the spell of riches! In awe of their rich friend, they were waiting/hoping to be chosen...invited into the inner circle of the rich and famous! It's just a new form of the ancient patronage system! The wealthy call the shots and the *wannabes* fall in line, waiting for the crumbs to fall!

Are you *impressed* by the rich and famous? Do you give-in to a way of thinking that elevates the rich and makes you want to climb their social ladder, competing to be accepted into their inner circles? If so, then beware! You are supporting a system that exalts the beautiful and the rich while pushing the poor and the handicapped outside (where no one will see them). Those who play these sorts of systems can easily become their victims!

As Christians, humility is the **weapon** God has given to us to *resist being sucked-in* by these social systems. But humility is not only a weapon for resistance. It is also a **tool** that God has given to us to bring about change!

Did you notice how Jesus operated in the home of the Pharisee? In humility, He spoke up with constructive advice that had the power to change lives! Surely, we must do the same! For the fact is that these same sorts of patronage systems continue in our world, today! And we, as Christians, must

raise our voices...whether with friends or family or colleagues...humbly offering them a better way of life. And when we see these sorts of systems corrupting our society, it may even mean lobbying our local, state and federal governments on these issues. (That's how people like Wilberforce brought an end to slavery in England! He humbly spoke out on behalf of the exploited minority against a system of patronage that devalued human beings!)

And even if we don't see problems here in Australia, then why not speak out to encourage changes overseas? We have all heard, for example, of countries where garment workers are being exploited; children are being exploited; women are being exploited. So why not join organisations like Micah Challenge or World Vision. Why not support Christian NGO's as they invest in micro-development projects to bring people out of exploitative situations.

Perhaps one of the biggest things we can do as Christians right now is to lobby our new federal government over the issue of *the Foreign Aid Budget*. For years, Australian taxpayers have been making a big difference in our region. (Did you know that twenty per cent of the world's poorest people live in our region? And with poverty comes exploitation. The patronage model is alive and well!) Our Aid dollars have been having a positive influence on bringing about change in some of the most exploitative places of the world! That's why we, as Christians and as taxpayers, must tell our government that it's not OK to cut the foreign aid budget! Under the Coalition policy, Australia will spend only 32¢ of every \$100 of gross domestic income on foreign aid—that's less than half the international standard for developed countries! We must speak out!

Today's passage may not *directly* apply to us, but there is surely an *indirect* application—one that makes us all feel **uncomfortable**! And rightly so! As God's people, we must carry the torch of His Kingdom into the world...speaking out against injustice and exploitation...with the strong and humble hope that, one day, every patron will see the value of inviting ***the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind*** to share in his banquet table.

*Even so, come Lord Jesus, come!*

Let's pray.