

In Luke 13, the first of four chapters in Luke we are studying, we discovered Jesus' goal was to arrive in Jerusalem, at God's appointed time, for God's appointed purpose. As He journeyed across the land, Jesus' mission was to talk about the Father He knows well, whom we call God. Jesus knows, His Father has been misrepresented, and He wants to set the record straight.

One of the distortions that had set in over several thousand years, was in the laws about keeping the Sabbath, which God designed for our benefit, to give us rest, renewal, refreshment and joy in God's creation. The Jewish religious leaders, however, had added 39 other regulations about the Sabbath that were not in the Law God gave Moses.

Going by the book, Leviticus 11–20 list very strict laws of containment for the sick, the infirm and those with disease, to quarantine, to seclude and to isolate themselves, for their benefit and the benefit of society and community. So, what was a man with dropsy (fluid retention and swelling of joints and muscle tissue) doing at a Sabbath dinner party?

This was a set-up. As they arrived for dinner in the posh home of a well-to-do Pharisee, people were scrambling for the best seat in the house, to witness whatever it was that was going to happen<sup>1</sup>; some wanted to sit close to Jesus to hear what He had to say, some to sit opposite where they could see what exactly He would do, and some wanted a place of honour, *I was seated next to Him and saw and heard everything.*

As Jesus entered the room, He found Himself face-to-face with the man with dropsy<sup>2</sup>. All eyes were focused on Him; He was being watched!

The religious leader had set the stage.

On a previous occasion when Jesus healed a double-bent woman on the Sabbath, the leader of the Synagogue was upset. This time Jesus asks His

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<sup>1</sup> verse 7

<sup>2</sup> 14:2 (The Message)

host and others present, *“Does the Law permit to heal people on the Sabbath day, or not?”* Had Jesus asked the question without the last two words, He would be seeking their permission. Adding the last two words, *or not?*, turned the question on them, i.e., *do you know where in the Law it says not to heal on the Sabbath?*

They refused to answer, so Jesus touched the sick man, healed him, and sent him away, i.e., to follow the regulations of being healed: to present himself to a Priest, who on examination will declare him healed, following which he must offer the prescribed sacrifice to God, acknowledging Him as the source of his healing.

The man with dropsy having left, Jesus turned to those present and asked, *“Let’s get to the crux of the matter: which of you doesn’t work on the Sabbath? If your son or your cow falls into a pit, don’t you rush to get him out?”*

Jesus took advantage of their silence, to speak about the Kingdom of God. Drawing on His earlier teaching, about the first coming last, and the last first, and referring to the scramble for seats as they came in, He asked, *Which would you rather face, the shame of being asked to vacate a seat up front you grabbed, which is reserved for a high-ranking person, or the honour of being invited up front, because you chose to sit at the back?* Once again, Jesus turns the tables on popular standards, *Those who think highly of themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be elevated.*

Looking around, Jesus saw His host had chosen his guests from a sense of exclusion and pride, lacking love. Inviting the man with dropsy was not an act of genuine love for the sick; he was a pawn to trigger Jesus’ reaction.

To His host Jesus says, *“You invite your friends, brothers, relatives and rich neighbours, because they will invite you back, and that will be your only reward. If you invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, you will be giving them a taste and feel of My Father’s house! When My Father opens the door to His eternal*

*kingdom, He will be grateful to you for your generosity towards those who cannot repay you, but whom you have introduced to My Father's banquet."*

Jesus had spoken sternly, warning against pride, traditionalism and exclusivity. Among those present, one decided to break the tension: "*What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the Kingdom of God!*", he exclaimed! It is a special gift to speak a blessing in a difficult situation, and this unnamed guest had this gift.

Jesus then narrated a story of a man sending his trusted servant to invite "many" to a special banquet. When it was ready, the invitees made one excuse or the other not to attend. The man is angry at being snubbed and sends his trusted servant to invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, and there is still room for more at the table. The man said, *Compel anyone you find to come, **so that My house will be full!***

God's great desire is that His house is full! But people at the margins of society may not feel worthy of coming to a banquet. They should be lovingly made to understand (compelled), there is no motive behind the invitation. This is the true character of God.

Having healed a man with dropsy, addressed the behaviour of invitees to the Sabbath dinner, and turned the lamp on the motive of the prominent Pharisee who hosted the dinner, Jesus addresses the "crowds that followed Him". Don't follow me because it suits you, is convenient, or to pass the time until something better comes along. There is more to being My follower than simply accepting an invitation to dinner and turning up!

Jesus identifies three things to practise, if you want to be His disciples:

First is a **relationship**. A disciple of Jesus cannot have a half-hearted relationship. It's all or nothing.

During his last days imprisoned on the island of St Helena, Napoleon is said to have made this confession, *I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible*

*term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.*

In the Bible we repeatedly read Jesus describing God's way as founded on love, not hate. This is an important way of testing whether we are doing or following God's will: are we acting based on love?

Yet Jesus used the strong word **hate** only to show how great the difference must be between our allegiance to Jesus and our allegiance to everyone and everything else.

Second, is **death-to-the-self**. In Jerusalem, if you saw a person carrying a cross, usually the cross-beam, you knew they were walking towards their death. Jesus did not refer to carrying **a** cross or **the** cross, he referred to **carrying YOUR cross**. It is possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple. To be a disciple, self-ambition, personal desires and goals must be surrendered on the cross.

Finally, is **count-the-cost**. Count the cost of being a Disciple of Jesus, and the cost of **not** being His Disciple. Builders calculate the cost of finishing and not finishing a building; kings going to war count both, the cost of engaging the enemy, and the cost of making peace with the enemy. Know what you are getting into, **and** what you are missing out, by not being a Disciple.

Luke closes this first part of the dinner party with Jesus' reference to **salt**, probably the only one of all condiments whose nature it is, to be salt or not; no in-between taste.

A Disciple of Christ is a blessing to the world **ONLY** when they, like fill-flavoured salt, exude and display the nature and character of Christ.

Jesus' presence at a rich man's Sabbath meal, and the dialogue during the meal, is very appropriate to the celebration of the harvest. We often confuse privilege with blessings. In one part of society, wealth, race, class,

gender, age, access to healthcare, and so on, can be mistaken for Divine blessings, when they are the result of privilege.

Yet among those at the other end of society, receiving anything unexpected, unmerited or inaccessible **IS** the privilege of blessing!

As we celebrate the abundance of the harvest in our lives, God calls us to turn our privilege into blessings.

His promise, *“As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night”*, is both a privilege to those who trust God’s faithfulness, and a blessing to all who receive it.

**AMEN.**