

## Lecture 19 - Luke 14-16

Good morning/good evening. The title of our lesson is an indication that we are, as they say in racing, turning the final bend and heading down the stretch – Pressing on Towards Jerusalem. In today's reading, we find Jesus becoming sharper in His teaching towards not just the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the experts in the Law, and the scribes, but also towards the people who were following Him. He's lifting the veil of the stark truths of the differences of living in the flesh – living in this world where Satan reins - compared to living in the Kingdom to which He reins – the Kingdom of God. He's beginning to make it clear that the two cannot peacefully coexist, and for those who choose to follow Him, they are going to have to consider the cost because they will be treated the same way He has been, and is about to be treated.

Our reading begins in Luke 14 with Jesus eating in the house of a prominent Pharisee, and He was being carefully watched. We've been hearing in the last several lessons the level of heavy and convicting "woes" He has been putting on these alleged religious leaders, so it should come as no surprise that the Lord is not feeling a lot of warm and fuzzies from these people. Yet, Jesus is once again knowingly and willingly eating at the house of an enemy. How many of us would do that? Why is He doing this? - To bring the truth of the character of God – to teach the heart and mindset of the Kingdom of God. That was always Jesus' message, and He gave it to everyone – even His enemies. The story continued with us learning that it was the Sabbath, and the Lord was presented a man with dropsy, which is an abnormal swelling in his body. Now let's think about this scene before we go further – the Pharisees would never have invited someone who was not "clean" into their homes. I'm certain that is the way they would have viewed this

suffering man. Furthermore, it is the Sabbath, so it is clear they have an agenda with Jesus by inviting this man to the dinner.

Because God is omniscient – He knows all things - the Lord knew exactly what these hard-hearted people were planning. He asked them if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Their response was fascinating – they didn’t respond. They knew what the answer was; yet, they remained silent. I’m going to ask you what I know is, for many of you, your favorite part of the homework lessons – a “*What do you think?*” question. Even though they knew the answer, why do you think the Pharisees remained silent? Well, I’ll be merciful by not forcing you to answer, but I’ll offer up one possibility. They were under the conviction of their hard-heartedness, and they were quickly realizing their plan was backfiring. These guys were on the offense – they were seeking a way to trap Jesus into doing something that would give them an excuse to condemn Him according to the Law. The Fulfillment of the Law came right back at them with a simple question that left them speechless. I always get a kick out of people who think they are smarter than God and can outwit Him. Psalm 2:4 tells us, “*He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.*” Steve Backlund rightly says, “*God is laughing at what His enemies are thinking and planning.*”

The Lord healed the man, sent him on his way, and upped the ante on His convicting actions by asking a follow-up question. “*If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?*” What was their response? – Silence. The convicted soft heart would have had recognized the need for compassion and at least considered the possibility there was a better way to respond to a situation than what he/she had been conditioned to live like. The hard-hearted is more about protecting what it holds to be true at the expense of the obvious goodness of what it’s being confronted with. *The hard-*

*hearted stands in judgment and condemnation – the softhearted bows in compassion and mercy.*

Knowing He had these guys under the conviction of their hard-heartedness, did He stop there? Nope, He then started to deal with their pride by sharing His thoughts about where to sit at a table when invited to someone's home. Should they seek a place of honor at the table, or a place of humility? Jesus said in Luke 14:11, *"For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."* A cornerstone of the Christian life is the surrendering of all prideful attitudes, thoughts, and actions and replacing them with a life led in humility. 2 Corinthians 3:5 reminds us, *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."* Galatians 6:3 adds to this issue of pride, *"For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."*

In the next few verses Jesus talked to His hosts about whom they should be inviting to their homes for meals. They should invite the wounded and the weak – not those who can repay them by returning the favor. The issue here is what motivates us to do things – do we do them in hopes we'll be appreciated and glorified by man – we want the recognition now, or do we do them out of our love to do what Jesus would do? We will feel a greater sense of purpose by helping those who need help, and trust whatever reward or expression of gratitude from the Lord will be far greater than anything we could get from people. *The flesh wants the glory – the spirit knows it's better for God to get the glory.*

Jesus continued His teaching after hearing someone at the table say, *"Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."* Since He was at a dinner hosted by a Pharisee, this comment was likely from a Pharisee and explains Jesus' motive for presenting the parable of the Great Banquet. So who are the people invited to the man's great banquet? The first invited would be the Jews

– Jesus was their long awaited Messiah. What were their excuses for their unwillingness to come to His banquet? Their devotion to being compliant with the Law and the importance of their own lives as opposed to recognizing the better thing – being in the presence of Jesus.

However, it isn't just the Jews He is talking about in this Great Banquet parable. Because of the Jews rejection of Jesus, it opened the door to all of us to be invited. That invitation came via the cross. Do you know who we are in this story? We are the servant the master is telling to go gather the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame – we're to go out to the roads and country lanes and tell them to come in, so that His house will be full. This is the heart behind the Great Commission that Jesus gave in Matthew 28. There is going to be a great banquet with God one day in heaven, and those who will be there will not be the self-glorifying important ones here on earth – it will be the meek, the weak, and the humble. The good news is – those of us who believe in Jesus will be at this banquet. That is a meal I can't wait to be at – I hope they serve donuts.

Jesus had no problem challenging the belief systems of the Pharisees, but He was beginning to challenge the belief systems of those who were following Him. Jesus had been teaching the people following Him the Kingdom of God, and up to this point, the evidence of this kingdom was healings, miracles, and free food. Who doesn't want to be a part of that kingdom? The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of truth. For those who are not living in the truth, the kingdom of God is a threat to their belief system – what they believe to be true. Jesus said in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by me."* Because God cannot lie, He can only tell the truth. Jesus said in Luke 12:51, *"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division."* Why would He present this point? – Because living in the flesh and living in the Spirit is mutually exclusive – they cannot coexist. Jesus said in

Matthew 6:24, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”* We are all possessed by one of two masters – God or Satan. God is our master in the spirit, and Satan is our master in the flesh. When Jesus said He came to bring division, He meant He came to draw a line in the sand and force each of us to make a choice which master we’re going to serve. He was telling us the truth in love that if we’re going to choose Him as our master, we’re going to become immediate enemies of those who have chosen Satan as their master – those who have chosen to live in the flesh.

Jesus left the dinner and He headed out – we’re told there were large crowds following Him. As I said earlier, He was escalating His words not only to the Pharisees, but also to the people following Him. These people who had been lifted up by His words, healed by Him, and fed by Him were experiencing the great provisional heart of the Lord. Imagine what they must have felt like when they heard Him say to them in Luke 14:26-27, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”* Wait a minute....wasn’t this the same Jesus Who had been telling us to love God and love each other? Why was He now telling us we’re to hate our family – and even ourselves? And what is this “carry the cross” business?

Here is where we need to spend some time digging into the translation of Scripture. The Greek word for “hate” is *“miseo”*, and this word is taken from the word *“misos”*, which does mean hatred or detest. However, “miseo” can also be interpreted *to love less*. So let me clear up any concerns you may have with what Jesus was telling the people and us. He was obviously not telling them to hate their families and themselves. What He was saying that if we’re going to truly call Jesus

our Lord and Savior, He must be our first priority – He must be our first love. What did He say to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:4b? “*You have left your first love.*” If Jesus truly meant that we’re to hate our families and selves, wouldn’t He have said to the Ephesians, “*You have left your only love?*” Of course Jesus wants us to love our families and ourselves, but we must yield to His leading in all things – including how we love our families and ourselves. Let’s face it, we can either fall short in our love for our families and ourselves – to the point of doing harm; or, we can go too far in loving our families and ourselves not providing the kind of healthy discipline and perspective we all need. As our creator, Jesus knows what is best for us, and He’s telling the people and telling us that *the maximum potential blessing of our lives is placing Him first in every aspect of our lives*. That takes a lot of trust, but you shouldn’t have to go any further than the cross to realize Jesus is completely trustworthy.

Speaking of the cross, I want to spend a few moments on what I believe Jesus meant to carry our cross. First and foremost, *the cross we’re to pick up is not Jesus’ cross*. What was on Jesus’ cross? – All of yours and my sins – the past ones, the current ones, and ones we’ll will commit until our final breaths. His crucifixion was the full payment for the spiritual penalty for them. *The cross He is asking us to pick up doesn’t have a single one of our sins on them because they’re already paid for*. Too many Christians believe the terrible lie that they need to live in constant remorse, shame, and guilt because of their sins. Does it make one bit of sense that Jesus would go to the extremes that He went through to provide you complete forgiveness and then expect you to walk through your life burdened down by the very things that He gave His life for? Doesn’t it make more sense that the price He paid with His life would lead to a life lived with the freedom of those burdens? That’s what a good God does. My friends, if you have confessed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are free. Praise the Lord!

So what did Jesus mean to carry our cross and follow Him? My personal belief is we are to model the same mindset that allowed Jesus to go to His cross. You may be asking what that looks like, and I'm glad you asked. What drove Jesus to go to His cross was:

- Complete trust in God (John 12:50: *"And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."*)
- Humbleness (Philippians 2:8: *"And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."*)
- Obedience (John 8:29: *And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.*)
- Sacrificial love (John 15:30, *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."*)

So to carry our cross and follow Jesus, we need to learn to completely trust God and walk in humbleness, obedience, and sacrificial love. Jesus expanded on the seriousness of following in His steps. He gave them a picture of constructing a tower and what one must consider in building it. What was the first thing we're to consider building our tower of faith? – The cost. There is a cost to following Jesus. He then tells us about the importance of laying the foundation that will hold up our tower of faith. 1 Corinthians 3:11 tells us Who that foundation is *"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* He wrapped up His comments with another convicting statement in verse 33, *"In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."* The sincere and committed Christian will live a powerful life, but it will

not be easy. This is why one of my favorite verses is Romans 8:18, “*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*” Doesn’t it make sense that the greater the cost something is, the greater the value it holds? We very likely may not see the full value of the cost of following Jesus in this life, but Romans 8:18 promises we will see it when we go home in glory to be with Jesus. Our dear brother Joe Thibodo learned that last Thursday.

In Luke 15:1-32, Jesus was speaking to the tax collectors and the sinners, and He was giving them the mindset of the Kingdom of God through three parables – the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost son – or what many call the prodigal son. What’s the theme of these three parables? - *God’s attitude towards the lost*. I believe there are two types of lost. Before I get to what those two types of lost are, I think it’s worth a few moments to talk about what lost means in the spiritual perspective. Since there is a concept of being lost, then there must be a concept of not being lost. *There must be a home base – a place where there is truth and you can trust – a place where you are totally safe – a place where you are completely accepted – a place where there is no fear – a place where you are unconditionally loved*. According to Scriptures, that home base; that place of truth; that place of safety; that place of acceptance; that place of no fear; and, that place of unconditional love is *the Kingdom of God where Jesus is King*.

As I said, I believe there are two types of lost: 1) *Those who don’t live in the Kingdom of God*; and, 2) *Those who live in the Kingdom of God but are wandering away from it*. They may not be totally lost, but they are being deceived about the truths of the Kingdom of God and believing lies that are causing them to wander off from home. Let’s pull some truths out of these parables:



First, *the state of being lost is a choice*. Yes, the sin gene we inherited from Adam and Eve is real. However, as we come to an age of accountability, God gives us the free will or ability to choose to believe, or not to believe, in Him. In our parables, the sheep and the prodigal son made choices to leave their homes. Now most of you may think the coin in the parable didn't make a choice, but my money talks. The problem is all it says is goodbye.

A second truth we learn about the lost is *they are all extremely valuable to the owner/Father*. Just because someone is lost doesn't mean he/she is not valuable to God. He created every human being. God is love, so everything He creates is created in love. You're no accident or mistake. You're no "oops". You are also no product of an evolutionary process that has King Kong or Bubbles the chimpanzee swinging around in your family tree. You are extremely valuable to God, and the rest of these truths prove that out.

The third truth about the lost is *the owner/Father of the lost is seeking to find what is valuable to him/her*. In the parables of the lost coin and sheep, what are the owners doing about their lost? They're looking for them. The shepherd leaves his 99 sheep to find the one, and when He finds it, what does He do? Does He condemn it and tell it to find its way home on its own? – No, He joyfully puts it on his shoulders and carries it back to the sheepfold. What about the woman with the lost coin? Does she just turn over a pillow or look in her pockets and then give up? No – she lights the lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully for the one lost coin.

The fourth truth and the second proof of the value of the lost to the owner/Father is *the celebration that takes place when the lost is found*. What are the responses from the shepherd and the woman when they have found what is valuable? They tell their friends and neighbors to rejoice with them over the fact that what was so valuable to them were now found and home. What did the father

of the prodigal son do when he chose to come home? Did He condemn the son for his actions and punish him? – No, the father threw him a party. There was singing and dancing, and there was a barbeque! What does this tell us about the Kingdom of God’s attitude towards the lost? God and the angels are rooting us on – they take no joy whatsoever in a human’s state of being lost. They are cheering for us for the veil of lies we believe to be torn off and see the truth of our value to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a welcoming place.

The final proof of the value of the lost is *the willingness of the Father to forgive*. Now I want all of you to take a deep breath, close your eyes, imagine you are the returning lost son, and listen carefully to the Father’s response to his returning lost son Luke 15:20. *“His father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”* God does not condemn you for your sins, my friends. He has seen the pain and suffering of your state of being lost and wandering, and He is grieved. He knows He can provide you everything you need, and He has been through the Holy Spirit seeking you to come home to Him. He is ready to forgive you.

We learned that being lost is a choice. Secondly, the lost is extremely valuable to God. Third, He proves that value by seeking the lost. Fourth, He, the angels, and the rest of the Kingdom of God rejoice over the finding of the lost. Finally, He is ready to forgive the lost. Now let’s take visual look at the truth of being lost and God’s attitude towards the lost. This is an interesting picture, isn’t it? His heart for the lost – His heart for you - is full of compassion and mercy. Psalm 76:5 says, *“For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.”* Jesus would have never gone to the cross if God did not have a heart for mercy and forgiveness.

What two things should we take away from these parables of the lost? First – *God loves you*, and He proves it in His efforts to find and forgive your state of

being lost. Secondly, as His children and with His Spirit dwelling in us, *we are to have the same mindset towards the lost and wandering people He brings into our lives*. These may be our family members, our friends, our co-workers, or maybe the Starbucks barista or grocery store cashier. For every altar call I have witnessed, when I see someone stand or come to the altar to receive the gift of Christ, I get such a joy over the idea that person has come home to Jesus. I can only imagine what God and heaven must be like when this happens. Well, Jesus gave us a hint in these parables, didn't He? Luke 15:7: *"There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."* That is what happened when each of you came to faith in Jesus.

One last point – was the lost sheep ever not a sheep? Was the lost coin ever not a coin? Was the prodigal son ever not the father's son? We Christians have become way too quick to judge non-believers and especially backsliders. For the backsliders, we call them out for their disobedience and either condemn them as they've walked away from their faith and are no longer saved, or they never really knew Jesus. Do you think God looks at them that way? Think about what we just discovered about God's attitude towards the lost. Are we not all His creation? It's a good thing God isn't nearly as judgmental as we all are – if He was, we would all be toast. *For the lost and the backslider, we must adopt the mindset of Christ – the mindset that led Him to the cross – not to judge them to God but to love them to God.*

In the first half of Chapter 16, Jesus deals with the issue of money. Knowing full well the impact money and wealth can have on people, 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke deal with money. Twelve of the 38 parables deal with money. Chapter 7 of Numbers, the second longest chapter in the Bible, is all about giving money. Verse 10 presents the **responsibility** of handling wealth, *"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is*

*dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.*” This statement has so much wisdom, doesn’t it? When you take your first job with a company out of high school or college, does the owner/management put you in charge of everything? No, you are given an entry-level job to see how you handle yourself. If you can’t handle yourself in an honorable and professional manner in a lower-level position, you’re obviously not going to handle yourself well in a higher-level position.

Verse 13 deals with the **risk** of handling wealth, “*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*” Once again, Jesus was drawing a line in the sand regarding living in the flesh – living for accumulating of and worshipping money – and living in the spirit – recognizing it’s not the accumulation of money that is the blessing, it is the using of the money to bless others by giving it away. Verse 14 revealed the Pharisees loved money, and they were sneering at Jesus’ words. Knowing this, the Lord again bore down on them in verse 15, “*You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God’s sight.*” A lot of people in the church today are looking for a revival – a tidal wave of the moving of the Holy Spirit to reap a huge harvest. That would no doubt be awesome, but I believe what first has to happen is a reformation.

I believe for a revival to take place, the hearts and minds of those of us who are the earthly representation of the Kingdom of God must have the mindset of Christ. If we’re not reflecting the heart of God towards the lost – what I talked about earlier, what attraction are we to the lost? We’re spending mind-boggling amounts of money we don’t have on buildings and programs instead of taking the money we do have and demonstrating the heart of God by giving it away to those in real need. We’re more concerned about the condition of the building we’re in

than we are about the condition of the people who are entering the building. What do the lost see when they look at the church today? The non-believing media is having a feeding frenzy on glorifying the endless examples of deceived and shameful extremists taking hateful positions on certain types of sins such as the Westboro Church in Topeka, KS. What is going to truly attract people to Jesus' church? What attracted people to Jesus? - His mercy, His compassion, and His sacrificial service of love to the lost. Please know I'm not calling out every church and person in the body of Christ. There are many wonderful people who are truly walking in the footsteps of Jesus. These are the reformers, and we need more of them for this world to see the true heart of God towards the lost.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus was presenting a stark truth of the existence of heaven and hell. We all enjoy talking about heaven, but the subject of hell is, at best, an uncomfortable one. Let's make one thing very clear – **they are both places of choice**. *God doesn't send people to heaven or hell – people send themselves to either heaven or hell by what they choose to believe – not by what they do.* Steve Backlund rightly said, “*What changes us isn't our hearts, it is what we believe.*” Our beliefs change our hearts. Our beliefs determine our actions. In this parable, the rich man's beliefs focused on his wealth and comfort while disregarding the needs of Lazarus. Question 16 of our homework asked what was Lazarus' virtue? My answer was humility. The humble recognize their poverty and need for God. Psalm 51:17 assures, “*My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.*”

The message of this parable is the undeniable truth that God's gift of the freedom to choose – the gift of free will – comes with consequences. The rich man chose to lead a life of selfishness and wealth accumulation. He got his rewards here on earth, but the cost of those rewards was eternity in Hades. That's the theme in our reading today – it is **cost**. There is a cost of our choices in how we live our

lives. I mentioned earlier that there is typically a relationship between cost and reward - the greater the cost, the greater the reward. If our life choices are spent serving ourselves and the temptations of this world, then whatever reward that comes with those choices will be fully realized only in this life. The problem with this self-serving mindset is we overestimate the cost of living like this. The reward we get for living our lives for this world is nothing compared to the reward of a life that is truly costly – a life that is lived with the mindset of Christ.

My friends, as we follow Jesus to the cross, I ask that you consider the choices He made along the way. What was more important to Him? - Living in comfort or sacrificing His temporary comforts for the future comforts of others. Who are the others? - You and me. Jesus' resurrection was proof of the ultimate reward of the cost of following Him – an elimination of the fear of death and the certainty of eternal life at peace with God. There is indeed coming a day of judgment – of consequences – for those who choose to deny the gift of salvation through Jesus. However, He takes no joy in this future judgment, even though it must take place. The truth is He looks upon His creation in love with a mindset of redeeming the lost and reconciling them to Him. And that is what I learned about God through Jesus. *Following God and seeking the lost is worth the cost.* May He be relentless in developing that mindset in all of us. Let's pray.