

Live in the perspective of the kingdom of God (Luke 14:1-35)

We have been studying the gospel of Luke together. We learned that cp 12 and 13 are filled with the airs of tension, with the awareness of death, second coming and judgment. And Jesus says, "Enter through the narrow gate." Jesus is the salvation.

Today, we will study cp 14. The theme is "Live in the perspective of the kingdom of God."

1. Missing the point

1-6

¹ One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ² There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. ³ Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" ⁴ But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. ⁵ Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" ⁶ And they had nothing to say.

Why did they remain silent? That is because if they answer the questions, especially the second one, it will cause inconvenience to them. Because it will clearly show the self-contradiction within them.

They think they shouldn't heal on the Sabbath because the law says they shouldn't work on the Sabbath. So they think if they heal on the Sabbath, they will violate the law. But, on the other hand, if their son or their ox falls into a well, they will not just leave them drown without doing anything. Even on the Sabbath day, they will still rescue their son or ox. But if they answer so, their contradiction will become clear.

Jesus healed this man who is suffering from dropsy on the Sabbath. Not only this time, but Jesus also healed many people on the Sabbath. It is right to heal on the Sabbath from God's kingdom perspective. And Jesus showed it by his action.

They had been studying the law seriously. And they had been practicing it. But somehow their understanding went out of God's will. What they were

doing may have looked right before people and in their society, but in God's eyes, it was out of perspective of God's kingdom.

7-11

⁷ When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸ "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹ If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰ 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 honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The Pharisees and experts in the law loved the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues. They also make their straps wide and the tassels on their garments long. All of these things, they do for men to see. (Matt 23:5-6)

They loved to be noticed and honored by people, because in they thought those who are noticed and honored are the ones who are exalted. And they wanted to be exalted.

Jesus said to them, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (v.11) And he also said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave." (Matt 20:26-27)" They are the ones exalted in the kingdom of God.

They had been studying the law seriously. And they had been practicing what they had studied. But somehow their understanding strayed out of God's will. What they were doing may have looked good before people and in their society, but in God's eyes, it was out of perspective of God's kingdom.

12-14

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be

blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Here Jesus is not teaching about table manners or how to hold a banquet. But he is again pointing out that there is a gap between the perspective of people and that of God's kingdom.

As we have bodies, we need food. We also need enjoyable time of fellowship with our friends and family members. Food and fellowship are both important and indispensable for us.

However, if we are not careful, we can easily fill our heart with only things on this earth. In the days of Noah, people were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. Of course, Noah was also eating and drinking. His sons also got married. But they believed in God's Word and had been preparing for the flood.

What kind of time is this present time? This is the last days. Jesus' second coming is drawing near. The kingdom of God is coming near. We need to measure even things on this earth, with eternal scale, in God's kingdom perspective, with Jesus' second coming in mind. Otherwise, it may look good on the surface, but we may deviate from the truth.

Why did God give the law to the people of Israel? It was in order that they might receive God's blessings and might become blessings for all the nations. Actually the law shows God's will for the poor, afflicted, needy, and helpless very clearly. They are the very ones who will bring God's righteousness and splendor. "They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the place long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations." (Isaiah 61:4) God wanted to invite all people into His kingdom. It's not about after the death, but it's about on the earth. However, the people of Israel lost the perspective of God's kingdom. On the contrary, they opposed it in their thoughts and deeds. And what is more, when they were shown the gap, how they have deviated from God's perspective, they didn't accept nor change their ways.

2. Making excuses

15

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

To this, Jesus replied with the parable from v.16. So, we can clearly see that Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God with this parable.

The summary of the story is like this. A certain man planned a great banquet and invited many guests. But when the time of the banquet came, they all began to make excuses and refused to come. Now the man who planned the banquet became angry and would not have those guests in the banquet any more.

What truth is Jesus teaching about the kingdom of God through this parable?

God chose Israel as blessed people of God. God taught them about Himself and God's kingdom through Abraham, Moses and many other prophets. And the time had come and the kingdom of God was near. John the Baptist pointed Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The apostles preached the gospel of the kingdom of God with the authority given by Jesus. However, the Jews rejected it. They didn't accept Jesus. And the point of this parable is this. God will not accept people, who deny Jesus, into His kingdom, even if they are the people who were originally invited, entrusted with God's Word, and chosen as blessed people.

When we think about this parable, we shouldn't forget another context. That is, for whom and for what was Luke writing this?

Luke is writing "this gospel of Luke" and "Acts" for Theophilus. Theophilus¹ was a gentile, and probably a government official or someone in high social position in Roman Empire. And he was a rich man.

The motivation of Luke's writing is to lead Theophilus and other future

¹ Allison A. Trites, "The Gospel of Luke," Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 12, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2006, (p.8)

"We have already noted that the Gospel was specifically addressed to Theophilus (1:3), a name that means "lover of God." While the book is profitable to anyone who loves God, it is probable that it was directed to a specific individual who bore that name. The description of the person as "most honorable" (Gr., *kratistos* [TG2903, ZG3196]) seems to point to a Roman official or at least a man of high social position and wealth, as elsewhere in Luke-Acts the name is only associated with Roman governors (Acts 23:26; 24:2[3]; 26:25)."

readers to be confident that "Christianity is true and is capable of confirmation by appeal to what has happened."²

There are some questions that can be obstacles which prevent Theophilus from believing in Jesus. One of them is that experts in the law and the Pharisees are denying Jesus. Is it still reasonable to believe in Jesus? Is it a right decision to follow him whom experts in the law and the Pharisees refuse to follow?

To this, Luke answers the point is not the fact that experts in the law and the Pharisees are denying Jesus, but the point is the reason why they are denying him.

In the parable of Jesus, people who were invited made various different excuses when the time of the banquet came.

16-20

¹⁶ Jesus replied: "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.'

Taking care of property, hard-working, thoughtfulness toward wife. It sounds fine. But when we think about them carefully, we can see that they are all excuses.

Surely experts in the law and Pharisees are rejecting Jesus. But it doesn't testify that Jesus is wrong. If we examine the reasons why they reject Jesus, we know that they are actually out of Bible teaching.

Another question that might prevent Theophilus from believing in Jesus is

² Allison, (p.33)

"Luke undertook his historical work with the utmost seriousness— the task of studying the sources, interrogating the witnesses, evaluating the evidence, and arranging the matter in a logical way. ... His aim was to provide a narrative or "account" (diegesis [TG1335, ZG1456], 1:1) that would offer solid information about Christ and the early church. ... "The 'main point' of the Prologue [and the "order" it claims] is that 'Christianity is true and is capable of confirmation by appeal to what has happened'" (Morris 1974:67, quoting Stonehouse 1951:44)."

that he is a gentile, and he might have wondered if it is appropriate for him to join Jesus community and receive blessings while God's chosen people, especially experts in the law and Pharisees are not taking Jesus invitation.

To this, Luke answers the point is not who were invited first, nor who rejected the invitation, but the point is who is inviting you.

21-23

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 make them come in, so that my house will be full.

In the parable, at the end those who enjoyed the taste of the banquet were those who were invited later. According to the common idea in those days, they were probably not the kind of people who would be invited to a great banquet like that. However, because the owner of the house is inviting them, they can come to the banquet without hesitation. It doesn't matter whether you think you are worthy or not. The owner of the house will decide it. Because the master is inviting, you can come.

It is the same for the kingdom of God. It doesn't matter how others see you, nor how you see yourself. The Lord is inviting you. If you respond to the invitation, you can enter.

3. Live as the salt of the earth

25

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

Large crowds were walking with Jesus. But it doesn't mean that they were all disciples of Jesus. Some people just came because they expected to receive some free bread. Some people came for free healing. Some people came for free entertainment, to see Jesus' performing miracles. There were some others who came just because everyone went, even though they didn't

know where they were going nor what they were actually expecting.

26-27

²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Jesus said, his disciple will carry his own cross and follow Jesus. In order to follow Jesus, we need to be prepared to pay some cost. Our family members may oppose us. Our spouses may oppose us. In the midst of all these, we must give priority to the Lord's will over our plan, our convenience or our appearances. Otherwise, we cannot follow Jesus.

28-33

²⁸ "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

"The parable of the tower builder who must first count the cost of the project (14:28–30), and the parable of the king who assesses the strength of his forces relative to another's before engaging in battle (14:31–32), both stress the same point—to follow Jesus is no lightly undertaken project for it will be costly, at least in worldly terms (cf. Paul in Phil. cp. 3)."³

In the previous section, Jesus explained about the kingdom of God, comparing it to a great banquet. There is abundance beyond our position, which we don't really deserve to receive. The Lord is inviting all people into his kingdom. Jesus promised to give us life, which is abundant life.

³ Noel Due, *The Gospel According to Luke*, New Creation Publications Inc., 1992, (pp.92-93)

At the same time, we cannot follow Jesus without carrying our own cross. It will not be fair if we are just told the good part of being his disciple so that we follow, but later told there is a cost to pay. Jesus told about both: his wonderful promise and the cost we pay, the cross. We cannot make disciples with watered-down gospel. It is no use sweetening the gospel by covering up and hiding the hardships we will face. Jesus said, "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (v.27) And he encourages his listener to think carefully to make decision.

"Jesus called his listeners, and he calls us, to recognize clearly the extreme and radical conditions of discipleship, to accept decisively the responsibilities of discipleship—the cross—and to undertake unreservedly the path of discipleship."⁴

34-35

³⁴ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

In the parable of the great banquet, Jesus showed that people who don't respond to the invitation cannot gather there. Here he teaches us if disciples lose the character of his disciple, they will be useless for their call. If they are useless for their call, their mission cannot be done, just like if you use salt which lost its saltiness, your dish never gets taste.

When Jesus started to preach the gospel, he proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matt 4:17)

This is the invitation to the kingdom of God, and at the same time, it is a signal to let people notice about their worldly view, negative thoughts, mistakes and resignation, encouraging them to leave them. And it is the first call to be his disciple.

Let's think whom Jesus talks at about and to.

In the parable of the great banquet, what kind of people came in the end? They were "the poor, crippled, the blind and the lame." (v.21) In the scene

⁴ Jim Denison, Ebbie Smith, Ray Pollard, *The Gospel of Luke: Parables Jesus Told*, BAPTISTWAY PRESS, 2004, (pp.71-72)

from v.25, there were many around Jesus. When we observe the Gospel of Luke it is easy to see that many of them were poor, weak, discriminated, socially oppressed, losers and dropouts, and those who consider themselves sinners.

Jesus didn't tell them to give up and accept the reality, nor bear it till they go to heaven for that is their fate. No, totally opposite! Jesus invites them into God's kingdom. Not only that, he encourages them to bring the blessings of the kingdom to the society with him and other disciples, to transform their society.

Jesus was called "a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mat 11:19), "a Samaritan (John 11:19), and he was discriminated with them. And he boldly opposed injustice. And the kingdom of God was realized among them and expanded.

Oppressed and marginalized people can be born again through the gospel. Receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, they can be sent to the world as Christ's disciples. They can have power to transform the society into the one where justice and compassion rule. Only those who experienced pain can be truly sensitive and thoughtful toward the weak, and know how important it is for justice to be done in the society. They are the very ones who can realize the kingdom of God on this earth for all people. They can be the salt of the earth. Jesus is inviting them to be his disciples. ⁵

This "blessed calling" is not just for people of privileged class nor middle class, but also for marginalized people. Oppressed and marginalized people are usually sensitive toward social injustice. But it doesn't necessarily mean that they understand that they will be sent out as the salt of the earth and act accordingly. And we sometimes forget that these oppressed and marginalized people can also be the salt in their society, just as we are the salt in our society. If the salt lost its saltiness, the dish never gets salty taste.

God tells everyone to repent. Those who oppress people, the rich who exploit people, as well as socially oppressed people, the poor, the weak, and people in all positions and circumstances, God tells all of us to repent.

Repentance is to have perspective of God's kingdom, instead of generally accepted idea of our society, or common idea of the society, or our own life philosophy. It is to make Jesus' heart "my heart", and to walk with Jesus. Simply put, it is to sent out to where we are now, as the salt of the earth.

And it shows where and from whom the kingdom of God actually starts.

⁵ Tetsurou Honda, *God who is on the side of those who were humbled, the sequel*, Sin-yo-sya, 1992

It is a “blessed calling” to encourage us, strengthen us and send us out. And the response to this calling is the repentance and entering into the kingdom of God.

For closing, let us review what we learned. We live in the last days. If we interpret “this present time” wisely, we will know the Lord’s second coming is definitely drawing near. And Jesus says, “Enter through the narrow gate.” Jesus is the salvation. There is no other salvation than him. Jesus is inviting all people into God’s kingdom. And he wants to bring the blessings of God’s kingdom through us, from where we are. To live as Jesus’ disciple is costly. Now as we live in the last days, while the Lord’s second coming is drawing near, we need to sit down and think carefully how we are to spend the rest of our lives. The salt which loses its saltiness has no-value.