

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Luke 14:1-24

(Discussion questions at the end)

What makes a person truly “good”, “moral”, “upright”, “blameless”, “righteous”? This passage gets to the heart of that question, without specifically stating the question that way...but it is strongly implied/inferred. The Pharisees thought they had the corner on the market for the “right answer” to that question. And, of course, they thought they were the standard for righteousness. The setting for this passage was at a prominent, though unnamed, Pharisee’s house. The tension, however, is that amidst this gathering of the standard bearers of righteousness (as they liked to consider themselves) was the actual Righteous One.

As was mentioned in the sermon yesterday, the sheer fact that there just happened to be a man with dropsy at this dinner party was likely a set up. It would seem the Pharisees wanted to bait Jesus into healing on the Sabbath so they could prove that He wasn’t/couldn’t be all that righteous—at least not as righteous as them—because He broke the law of the Sabbath. Unfortunately for them, they didn’t realize that the person they were trying to trap with the law was the actual Law Giver Himself.

But Jesus gets the drop on them and turns the table on them by asking two piercing questions that bookended His healing of the man with dropsy. What the Pharisees designed as a set up Jesus turned into a set up of His own: *“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”* To that question they seemed to have no answer...or at least no answer they were willing to verbalize. Then after Jesus healed the man, He asked, *“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?”* Again, crickets.

So we begin to see in this little interaction/confrontation a starting point to our opening question: What makes a person truly good and righteous IS NOT strict adherence to the letter of the law. Jesus sheds light on the idea that keeping the letter of the law while missing the heart/spirit of the law will by no means make someone good and righteous. To misunderstand the heart of the law is to misunderstand the heart of God. Characteristics like love, mercy, compassion are what the law was meant to engender, and embodying such qualities is what makes somebody good and righteous. Being rule followers, particularly to the extent of creating a religious cast system based on rule following performance is the exact opposite of goodness and righteousness. People are image-bearers of God, and should be treated with the highest respect. The Pharisees, instead of having any mercy or compassion for the man with dropsy, simply used him as a pawn in their little game. Unfortunately, this is symptomatic of our fallen/broken human nature...we objectify people instead of honoring them as fellow image-bearers of God.

In the two parables that round out this week’s passage Jesus elaborates more fully on what makes someone good and righteous. The most basic, fundamental virtue/character quality upon which all the others are built is humility. And that is at the heart of the parable of seats at a banquet. This is a timely parable in our day of self-promotion. Self-promotion is almost

considered a virtue by our world's standards; it's the way you get ahead. But for the believer, we must remember that self-promotion is NOT a kingdom value. So therein lies the tension we feel/experience: our faith explicitly informs us that *"everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*; and our world tells us "if you don't promote yourself, if you don't look out for number one, who will?" So which are we going to trust?

Jesus was not bringing in some new value or teaching with what He said about humility. In fact, He was simply reinforcing ancient wisdom. Proverbs 25:6-7 states, *"Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, 'Come up here,' than for him to humiliate you before nobleman."* Likewise, Proverbs 27:2 states, *"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips."* While the Pharisees were trying to establish their superiority over this young rabbi, Jesus, through the telling of a parable with ancient roots, demonstrated His superior handling and understanding of Scripture.

Jesus then turned His attention specifically to His host, the prominent Pharisee. To rephrase Jesus' point to the Pharisee; don't use your social activity such as hosting a lunch or dinner as a way of building your social equity or boosting your social standing, rather use it as an opportunity to generously bless others, especially the less fortunate. To operate with such a heart is a sign of a good and righteous person. It's interesting that Jesus mentioned that in doing so, you will be *"blessed"*. We tend to link such "blessing" to some later reward because Jesus also mentioned being *"repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"*. But I would suggest that Jesus, perhaps, had 2 different things in mind: a present "blessing" AND a future reward. Whereas it is commonly thought that the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind have nothing to offer, the reality, from a Kingdom point of view, is that they give us a glimpse of the King. So at the heart of what Jesus was saying is this (which has been a consistent theme throughout Luke): Are you seeking what the world has to offer or seeking the kingdom of God? The world's value system is about building a name for ourselves. The kingdom value system is about lifting up the name of God and blessing others. When Mother Teresa, for example, cared for the lepers in her leper colony, she would testify to the idea that in so doing she, herself, was being blessed. She wasn't doing it in hope of a future reward; she was experiencing the blessing real time.

The catalyst for the next parable Jesus gave was an unnamed person we will call "Captain Obvious". Someone at the table said, *"Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God."* Uh...yep. A very true statement indeed...no one would argue with it. But the point of the parable of the man who prepared a great banquet that Jesus told in response to this guy is that WHO will actually participate in this kingdom feast is less obvious. The ones who we would most naturally expect to be there—the invited guests—may not actually partake do to not responding appropriately to the invitation. To be invited to participate in the Kingdom is the highest honor and, thus, should be of the highest priority. In Jesus' telling of the parable, it seems that lesser things take priority for some, and so they miss out on the banquet (i.e. the

Kingdom). But just because some people do not respond properly does not negate the reality and activity of the banquet/kingdom...it will go on. It is the ultimate reality.

So, to quickly review: what makes someone truly good and righteous? Humility (viewing ourselves properly), compassion, mercy, and generosity (viewing others properly), and responding well to the invitation/initiation of God (viewing God properly).

Quick side note: In the Hebrew and Greek languages (i.e. the languages of most of the Bible) there are NOT two different words for righteousness and justice (or righteous and just). They are the same word, meaning the same thing. Unfortunately, it seems, we have in modern times mistakenly separated this word into 2 different ideas: righteous(ness) being something on a more personal level (and a high priority), and just(ice) being something on a more societal level (and thus a lower priority, or more optional). From a Biblical/Kingdom perspective this is totally WRONG!!! So, should we ever hear someone talk about the church being involved in social justice in a way that makes it sound secondary or optional, or somehow as less of a priority, know that is a totally flawed idea. Try this exercise: every time we read the word "righteous" or "righteousness" in Scripture, we can accurately substitute the word "just" or "justice". Allow that to shape our understanding of the heart of God.

- Q. Describe a good, righteous person. What makes them so? What character qualities do they have?**
- Q. Describe some ways in which people today are objectified. Describe some ways in which you objectify others. Can you describe any ways you have felt/been objectified?**
- Q. In what ways do you feel tempted (or perhaps pressured) to promote yourself?**
- Q. While none of us would likely disagree with the idea that a good/righteous person is humble, loving, compassionate, merciful, generous, etc. Let's drill down a little deeper: How do we become more humble, loving, compassionate, merciful, generous, etc.? What specific examples do you have of challenges/opportunities to grow in these areas? Who are models/examples of these character qualities for you?**
- Q. Think about the people you pursue relationship with. Why them? What is it about them that makes you want to pursue them? Is there any selfish motivation involved in your reasoning? Explain. Are there any people you tend to avoid? Why?**
- Q. In what ways are you tempted to trust, lean on, place confidence in religious performance? In what ways have you seen/experienced a religious caste system at work? (By "work" I don't mean on your job, I mean "in operation".)**
- Q. Describe a humbling (or perhaps humiliating) experience you've had. (possible icebreaker)**

- Q. What competes with the Kingdom of God for your time, attention, affection, allegiance and loyalty?**

- Q. How can someone in a less fortunate position than you be a blessing to you?**