**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**KINGDOM PEOPLE**

**Luke 14:1-24**

**INTRODUCTION**

This is our third sermon on the topic of the Kingdom of God as we continue our journey through the Gospel of Luke. So far, Jesus has taught us that the Kingdom of God has arrived. It’s right here in the midst of us. It may not be seen (at least not yet), but it is here. God’s Kingly reign has broken into our world, and slowly but surely, it is growing, as people like you and me acknowledge him as King and joyfully submit to his Lordship.

To get into the Kingdom, however, is no easy task. Jesus taught us last Sunday that we must “*Strive* to enter through the narrow door” that leads into the Kingdom. The door is open. Jesus has opened the door into the Kingdom through his atoning death on the cross, but now, with the grace of God empowering our every step, we must fight with all our might to enter that door by daily repenting of our sins and trusting in Christ as our Saviour.

So we’ve looked at the “where” and the “what”. Where is the Kingdom? It’s here in the midst of us. What must we do to enter? Strive for repentance and faith. Today, we’re going to look at the “*who*”. Who will enter God’s Kingdom? Although the citizens of God’s Kingdom will be diverse in skin colour, language, and culture, they are united by certain characteristics. There is a “Kingdom Culture” within God’s Kingdom that characterizes every single one of its citizens.

Think about the kinds of things that characterize us as Canadians, the things we value, and the things we celebrate. Last Monday, Canadians across the country learned that a young man went on a rampage at Yonge and Finch, killing as many pedestrians as he could in a rented van. Ten people dead, 16 more injured. It was without a doubt one of the most tragic acts of violence in Toronto’s history. And yet, in the midst of all the loss and sorrow, we found a reason to celebrate.

Police Constable Ken Lam was the first officer to confront the driver. Immediately after exiting the van, the driver pointed an object at the officer that looked like a gun. Officer Lam didn’t shoot. The driver stepped towards the officer, reached back fast to his hip pocket and pulled it up quickly as if drawing another gun. Again, Officer Lam didn’t shoot. The driver started yelling, “I have a gun in my pocket!” again and again and kept advancing, and yet Officer Lam still didn’t shoot. Finally, Officer Lam himself advanced, the driver put up his hands, and he was safely arrested.

In some parts of the world, Officer Lam would have been criticized and insulted. “You didn’t have the guts to pull the trigger”, some would say. Or, “That man deserved to be shot for what he did. You should have killed him!” But in Canada, we celebrate what he did. We celebrate his restraint, and we hail him not as a coward, but as a hero. That’s one of the things that characterize us as Canadians, and I am so glad that’s true.

Likewise, there are certain characterize that define citizens of God’s Kingdom, and today, Jesus wants to teach us what some of those characteristics are.

The title of this message is **Kingdom People.** My aim today is to show you that **Kingdom People Humbly Serve as They Hope for the Kingdom of God.**

The outline of this sermon is as follows:

1. The Humility of Kingdom People
2. The Hope of Kingdom People
3. The Mission of Kingdom People

(1) **THE HUMILITY OF KINGDOM PEOPLE**

Verse 1 tells us that our text today takes place over a meal. It’s the first of four meals mentioned in verses 1-24. Jesus mentions a wedding feast in verse 8, a “dinner or banquet” in verse 12, and a “great banquet” in verse 16. All of this teaching is given in the same place.

Verse 1 tells us that this was in the home of “a ruler of the Pharisees”. The host was a leader among the major religious faction that stood opposed to Jesus and his teaching, and that remains the case here. Luke tells us that “they were watching him carefully.” So although Jesus was there at the Pharisee’s invitation enjoying a meal with them, this wasn’t a friendly environment. It was a hostile one. Behind fake smiles they hid their true intent, which was to try to catch Jesus in something he said or did so that they could get rid of him.

Verse 1 also tells us that this meal took place on a Sabbath. By now we are very familiar with the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees on the topic of the Sabbath. The Pharisees enforced strict rules about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath, rules that went beyond Scripture but in their view carried the authority of Scripture. Included in this list of rules was the rule that no work was to be done, and since they saw healing as a form of work, they prohibited healing as well.

But Luke tells us in verse 2 that a man was present who had “dropsy”, which was an old term to describe a sort of sickness involving the accumulation of fluid in certain tissues in the body. This is the third time in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus is given the opportunity to heal someone on a Sabbath in front of the Pharisees, and every single time, including this time, he takes that opportunity. Luke’s point at this point in his Gospel is not that Jesus can heal, nor is it that the Pharisees objected. Luke’s point here is that, even after all Jesus said and did, the Jewish religious leaders still persisted in their rejection of him and his teaching.

This is made obvious in verses 3-6 as they remain silent and have no reply to the power of Jesus’ teaching. They had no reply because they weren’t really concerned about God and his glory. They were concerned about their own.

Jesus notices this in verse 7 when he observes the Pharisees seating themselves at “the places of honour” as they walked in. In those days, the dining table was shaped like a “U”, with the host sitting at the bottom of the “U”. The seats closest to the host were the seats of honour. So as the Pharisees shuffled into the ruler’s house, they headed straight for the seats that would seat them closest to the ruler because they wanted the honour and status associated with those seats.

We may not have U-shaped tables today, but we do have certain places in our society that are associated with greater honour, prestige, and status. Think of the “cool kids” table in highschool, or the speaker’s table at a gala, or the head table and the tables closest to the head table at a wedding. Some people really care about those honoured places, while others could care less.

The Pharisees, however, cared a lot, because honour and status meant everything to them. Everything they did, whether it was prayer, or fasting, or tithing, or seating themselves, they did to honour themselves.

Jesus observes this and decides to speak up. He tells a parable in verses 8-11 about a wedding feast where guests are seating themselves much like they are in the ruler’s home. But there’s a little twist to this parable. After the early guests arrive and seat themselves at the places of honour, a more distinguished guest arrives. The host wants this guest to sit near him, so he tells one of the earlier guests to give up his seat for the other guest. By now, all the other seats are taken, so he has no choice but to seat himself at the very back of the room. Ashamed, he walks to the place of lowest honour as all the other guests look on.

Jesus is saying, “Don’t seat yourselves in the places of honour, lest you be humiliated.” In contrast, he tells them what they should do in verse 10: “When you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you.”

What’s Jesus saying here? Is he just giving them some good advice about what to do at dinner so that they won’t be embarrassed? Of course not. He’s doing much more than that. Luke tells us in verse 7 that this is a parable, meaning that there are principles and truths contained in these verses that are meant to be applied outside the context of dinner manners.

Jesus gives us a hint of what that application is in verse 11 when he summarizes the parable’s lesson like this: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” If you’re proud, then one day you’ll be humbled, but if you humble yourself, then one day you’ll be lifted up.

Ok, but when? When will the proud be humbled and the humbled be praised? On first glance we might assume that Jesus is talking about some future point in our lifetimes. This is quite a common belief even outside of Christian circles. “The higher they rise, the harder they fall”, people say, or as Proverbs 16:18 puts it,

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

The pride are often humbled in this life time, and it is often their pride that leads to them being humbled. But here, Jesus isn’t just talking about this lifetime. *He’s talking about* *eternal life*. When he says that the exalted will be humbled and the humbled will be exalted, he’s talking about what’s going to happen when this life ends and the next life begins.

We see that by looking at the context, especially the next two meal discourses which both have a heavy dose of “end times” emphasis. In the third meal discourse, Jesus exhorts his host in verses 12-13 to invite people who cannot repay him for his dinner invitation, whether it be “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind”, because then he will be “repaid at the resurrection of the just”.

We see this emphasis again in the fourth and final meal discourse when someone at the table says, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” He’s clearing speaking about the end times reality when all God’s people are finally with God forever in his Kingdom.

So when Jesus says in verse 11 that everyone who exalts himself *will* be humbled (future tense), he’s looking way into the future and foreseeing their ultimate, eternal demise. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled *forever* when they are left outside of God’s Kingdom. One commentator puts it this way:

“Ironically, those who seek the best seats will lack any seats at the most important occasion.” (Darrell Bock)

The reverse is true as well. If you humble yourself rather than exalt yourself, then one day, you will be exalted in God’s Kingdom forever.

This is the first characteristic of Kingdom people. They are *humble*. Humility is not an optional virtue when it comes to the Kingdom of God. Humility is an essential part of who Kingdom People are, and who they are becoming through their faith in Christ.

Are you a humble person? Would your friends say you are humble? Would your parents? If you’re married, would your spouse say you’re humble? Are you the kind of person who seeks attention, status, and honour for yourself, or are you content to faithfully serve the Lord and let the praise come from others?

If the answer is “no”, then I don’t want you to feel discouraged. There is hope even for the proud. I do, however, want you to feel challenged. If you struggle with pride like most of us here (including me), then Jesus is warning us that if we truly want to belong to the Kingdom, we need to start taking our pride seriously, so seriously that every day, we’re doing whatever we can to put it to death so that we can truly become humble people.

How? Well our text gives us a great starting point. Jesus says in verse 11 that “he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Notice that he doesn’t say “the humble will be exalted”. He says “he *who humbles himself* will be exalted.” We can *humble ourselves.* We can build humility into our lives. Humility may be a virtue that will one day characterize who we are, but until that happens, it must be cultivated by the thousands of little choices that we make every day, from who we talk to, to what we think about, to where we choose to sit.

But most of all, humility is cultivated by the daily reminder of our own personal sinfulness and God’s infinite holiness. We are all broken people who have rebelled against a holy God and deserve his eternal wrath. We have nothing to boast about, and we have nothing that we have that we did not receive. The forgiveness that we have through faith in Christ is an undeserved, free gift that God has mercifully given us. If we want to grow in humility, then we must grow in the knowledge of our sin and the greatness of our Saviour.

(2) **THE HOPE OF KINGDOM PEOPLE**

Jesus continues with the third meal discourse in verses 12-14, which leads to our second point: The Hope of Kingdom People.

In this next section, Jesus turns his attention away from the visiting Pharisees and towards the hosting Pharisee. And rather than using the analogy of attending a dinner, he now uses the analogy of hosting one. This is what he says in verses 12-13: “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind…”

What a radical thing for Jesus to say. When do you ever see the social elites of the world like the Pharisees mingling with the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, let alone inviting them to their homes for dinner? It’s one thing to buy a meal for a homeless person on the street, and an entirely different thing to invite that person into your home and cook for them. There’s something special about inviting people into your home. It increases the intimacy of your relationship. It communicates to the person that you’re inviting them into your life, to share your table, to get to know your family, to *do life* together.

The Pharisees, however, weren’t willing to do this, for one, simple reason: it brought them no tangible benefit. They didn’t see any point in spending time with the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, let alone inviting them into their homes, because such people had nothing to offer the Pharisees in return.

At this point, you might expect Jesus to rebuke the Pharisees for their selfishness. You might expect Jesus to say, “How selfish you must be to only invite people to your dinners who can repay you. Don’t just think about yourselves, or about what other people can do for you! Think about what you can do for others.” We might have expected Jesus to call them out for seeking self-gain or personal blessing, but he doesn’t.

Why? Because there’s nothing wrong with wanting to be blessed by others in order to live a blessed life. Scripture everywhere encourages us to seek the blessed life, and it uses that as motivation to obey God’s commands. In fact, when Jesus told his followers to sell their possessions and give to the poor just a few chapters earlier, he motivates them to do so by promising them treasures in heaven. Jesus wouldn’t have used this as motivation if it were wrong. There is nothing wrong with wanting to live a blessed life and to be blessed by others.

The Pharisees weren’t wrong to look for a blessing, but they *were* wrong in what kind of blessing they were looking for. They were seeking a blessing from the wrong source, for the wrong time. Look at verses 13-14, “But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and *you will be blessed*, *because they cannot repay you*. *For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just*.”

They were seeking a blessing from the poor, but Jesus says the blessing would come from God. They were seeking blessings now, but Jesus says the blessings would come later. As Proverbs 19:17 says,

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.” (Proverbs 19:17)

In other words, Jesus is telling them to be a blessing to others by hoping in a future blessing from God. This is the second characteristic of Kingdom People. They have a future hope that leads to present change.

When people typically say they “hope” for something, what they’re saying is, “Oh, wouldn’t it be nice if that happened. I don’t know if it will, but I sure hope so.” People “hope” to win the lottery, or “hope” to travel the world, or “hope” that the Leafs will get out of the first round. This isn’t Christian hope. Christian hope is steadfast and confident. There is zero uncertainty in Christian hope. Christian hope is a settled conviction of a future reality that is so strong that it changes the way that you live now.

That’s what Jesus is talking about in verses 13-14. He’s talking about a hope of future blessing that is so strong, and so confident, that it changes the way that we live now. Serving the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind may not seem to bring much blessing *now*, but hope makes the Christian confident that the blessing will come *later*.

Kingdom people hope for the Kingdom. They long for it so powerfully that it completely changes the way they live now.

I’ve always loved travelling. When I was younger, I travelled to eight different countries and had a blast every time. But now that I’m a little older, a little more settled in my convictions, a little more steadfast in my hope, that desire to travel has faded away. Why? Because I’m confident that, once this lifetime is over, I’ll spend an eternity travelling and enjoying the new heavens and the new earth, to the glory of God!

Kingdom people have a future hope that leads to present change, and Jesus tells us that one of the ways it changes us is it leads us to serve those who cannot serve us. If we truly belong to the Kingdom and hope for the Kingdom, then we will bless those who cannot bless us, and we will *keep blessing* them even when don’t see any present blessing because we know a *future blessing* is still to come.

(3) **THE MISSION OF KINGDOM PEOPLE**

Now as Jesus is saying these things, Luke tells us in verse 15 that one of the people at the Pharisee’s home declares, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” It appears that, as Jesus spoke about future blessing at the resurrection of the just, the man was feeling quite confident that he would be there to receive these blessings. But Jesus has something to say about this, which leads to our third point: The Mission of Kingdom People.

Jesus now launches into the fourth and final meal discourse. It’s about a man who invites many people to attend a great banquet that he’s hosting. At the time, invitations for big events such as this one were sent out in two stages. The first stage is what we see in verse 16, where the man “invited many”. This is like the initial e-mail blast or wave of invitations asking people to RSVP. Then in verse 17, we see the second stage of invitation, where a servant is sent to all who had responded positively to the first invitation to tell them to “Come, for everything is now ready.”

But there’s a problem. Person after person who had accepted the invitation and said they were going to attend now have other things to attend to. Other things have become more important to them than attending this great banquet. In verse 18, the first man says, “I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.” In verse 19, a second man says, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.” Then in verse 20, a third man says, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.”

If you’re a Christian, this should sound very familiar to you. How many of you have invited a friend to church, only to be told, “I want to, but I can’t. I’m too busy right now.” Or how many of you have shared the gospel with someone, only to be told, “It may be that what you’re saying is true, but right now, life is too full to worry about things like heaven and hell.” People can come up with countless excuses to put off seeking God, and many of them can even sound reasonable.

That’s certainly the case here. The first man just bought a field, which would have been a very significant financial investment. After spending so much money, of course he should go check it out right? The second man is similar. He just bought five yoke of oxen at a time when the typical farmer would have only owned one or two. Clearly he had some big plans for them and needed to make sure they were in tip top shape. Or what about the third man? He sounds the most reasonable of all, doesn’t he? He just got married, and since he’s a real family man, he wants to spend some extra time with his new wife and can’t attend the banquet any longer.

All these excuses sound so reasonable, and they may have expected the master of the great banquet to understand. Yes, they said they were going, but things change, life gets in the way, and they no longer have the time. “Forgive and forget, and let’s move on”, they say. “Hopefully we’ll be able to attend the next one.”

But there is no forgiving, and there will be no more banquets. Jesus says in verse 21 that, when the servant reported these things to his master, “the master of the house became angry” and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’” When that’s done and there’s still room at the banquet, the master says in verse 23, “Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.”

This is first and foremost a warning to all those who would put off seeking God and acknowledging Christ as Lord and Saviour. Jesus is saying, “Don’t delay! The banquet is prepared, the invitations are sent, and you *must* respond *now*.” It doesn’t matter if you have some excuse that sounds reasonable. You can say you’re focusing on your career, or on your grades, or on your family life, it doesn’t matter. It may sound reasonable to you, but none of these excuses will hold up before the master of the house.

God has invited us to the greatest banquet the world has ever known, a banquet that we will enjoy forever in God’s own Kingdom as God’s own people. And we, in our pride, assume that the invitation will always be available. It won’t. God may be seeking you now, but there may come a time when he does so no longer. Instead, he will seek others, whether they be the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, or those who are far off in the highways and hedges and bring *them* in instead.

God has invited you to his banquet. He has invited you to know him through Christ who was crucified in the place of sinners so that when we turn away from our sins and put our trust in him, we will be welcomed into God’s Kingdom as forgiven sinners to enjoy this eternal banquet forever. God has invited you to his banquet, but if you do not respond, or if you make up some excuse, he won’t wait for you.

The banquet is taking place with or without you. If you will not respond, then God will ensure that others will respond, so that his house will be filled.

And if today you have responded to God’s invitation, the message for you is this: *you* are the servant in the parable. *You* are the one whom the master sends out to the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. *You* are the one whom the master sends to the highways and hedges. To do what? To hand out invitations to God’s great banquet. That’s what we’re doing every time we share the gospel with someone, or invite someone to church, or give someone a Bible. We’re handing them invitations. Whether they respond or not is not up to us, but in God’s providence, whether they are invited or not *is*.

Jesus could have easily told this parable without a servant in it. He could have simply said that the master invited people to his banquet himself. But that’s not what Jesus does. He intentionally includes the servant in this parable so that Christians, the servants of the master, might find their place in God’s plans to fill his house and complete his banquet.

This is the mission of Kingdom People. We are servants of the King sent to invite others to his banquet. Sharing the gospel isn’t easy. We need to talk to people about sin and hell. But if we remember that the reason why we need to talk to people about sin and hell is so that we can invite them to God’s banquet, and so that they can have a chance to attend God’s banquet, then it will all be worth it.

**CONCLUSION**

The Kingdom of God is here, and we have the chance not only to enter through faith in Christ, but to invite others to join us. Whether they be friends or family, or the poor and marginalized of this world, our desire as Kingdom People must be to humbly extend the invitation to all. So will you commit yourself to doing that? Will you start making plans to share the gospel with someone, and then go and do it? And will you cultivate the humility you need to extend the invitation through the thousands of little choices that you make every day? Humility, hope, and a burden for the lost. These are the things that characterize God’s people, so let us pursue them with all our might, with the strength that God supplies.