

The Teaching of CHRIST

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PART III

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AN INDIVIDUAL APPLICATION

Luke 14 constitute an almost startling individual application on the part of our Lord of His teaching concerning the Kingdom of GOD. In order that we may catch their true significance, we must recall the circumstances under which they were uttered, and very carefully observe their direct connection with the subject of the Kingdom of GOD.

The fourteenth chapter of Luke is in some senses complete within itself. It is the story of a Sabbath day in the life of JESUS. It occurred in that period of His ministry when the Pharisees were strangely puzzled by Him, when their early interest in Him was changing to perplexity, and merging towards hostility.

One of the rulers had asked Him to his house, and He had accepted the invitation. JESUS was a guest, and the Pharisee was the host. The Pharisees were narrowly watching Him, and He knew it. Among those present was a man sick of dropsy. Deliberately, and of set purpose, the Lord healed the man, and then defended His action as against their unspoken, but self-evident criticism.

Then occurred a strange action on the part of our Lord.

As He had already violated all Pharisaic tradition by what He had done, so now He seems to have violated all the common courtesies of hospitality. He was a guest, and as a guest He began to rebuke His fellow guests for the rudeness of the way in which they had assembled. He then turned to the host and rebuked him for the method which he had followed in issuing his invitations.

Imagine a modern preacher acting thus, and we realize how startling an action this was. He criticized the guests and He criticized the host.

Doubtless all were astonished at the strange things He had been saying; but one man exclaimed: "**Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God**" and JESUS replied to this man, to

whom there had come a sudden moment of clear illumination, "**A certain man made a great supper, and bade many . . . and they all with one consent began to make excuse.**"

So much for the incidents. Now we must connect this exclamation with the Kingdom teaching of our Lord. Whence it sprang is clearly seen in the text, "**When one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God**" (Luke 14:15).

The exclamation was caused by the teaching of JESUS in which He had rebuked, first the guests and then the host.

In that teaching certain ideals of social life in the Kingdom were revealed.

To the guests the Lord said such things as revealed the necessity for a true humility. He charged them that when they came to feasts they should not seek the best room, or sit in the highest place. And why not? At this point is the heart of the teaching.

Notice the actual words of JESUS, "**lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him.**" (vs. 8). A guest at a social function should refrain from seeking the chief place, in order that the best man may have it. Then He proceeded to declare that the attitude of mind that earnestly desires that the best man should have the best place is demonstration of fitness for the highest place of all. Turning to the host our Lord said to him that when he made a feast he ought not to call his friends, his kinsmen, his neighbors; but the poor, the maimed, the blind, the halt. But mark the reason for it: "**lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee.**"

This is the law of hospitality in the kingdom of GOD, not to ask a rich neighbour, lest he should ask us again. CHRIST said: If you ask a man who can ask you again, his return invitation negates the true value of your hospitality. There is an appalling amount of commercialism in social life! Then with that inimitable skill and matchless wisdom that characterized Him, He illuminated the whole situation from the infinite spaces: "**But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just**" (Luke 14:13-14).

Thus He flashed upon the dust of to-day the glory of the coming resurrection, and revealed the fact that all things in this life are to be measured ultimately by the things that lie beyond. Humility in guests is the qualification for the filling of the highest positions at the feast. Hospitality in a host is that which loves to provide, and loves to give, because there can be no recompense. One man sitting at the feast listened to Him, and the glory of the ideal so appealed to him that he exclaimed, "**Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God**"!

These were but illustrations in the realm of social life, yet how searching they were; and they were chosen with consummate wisdom, for in social relationships men, society, and nations stand most clearly revealed as to character. Show me a people as hosts and guests, and I will tell you more about the national character than can be discovered in religious observance, political propaganda, or commercial enterprise.

- In religious observance men may wear disguises;
- In political propaganda they may be seeking votes;
- In commercial enterprise they are safeguarded by a policeman. But
- In social life they are themselves, and are manifest.

If you really want to know what England is as a nation, and how near it comes to the Kingdom of GOD, waste no time examining its religious life, or enquiring into its political institutions, or even its commercial enterprises; watch its social relationships, and see how much it knows of the humility that JESUS CHRIST inculcated; or how much it practices of hospitality according to His ideals. Consider what the character of the people must be when such ideals of humility and hospitality in social life are realized. What manners are these when a man, coming to a feast, halts, because he passionately desires that the best man shall have the best place! What men, and what manners are these, when the host has only one eagerness, that of finding an opportunity to give, never to receive again!

Our mental attitude towards these ideals pronounces them to be counsels of perfection.

They are impossible! Then CHRIST is impossible, and GOD is impossible and the Kingdom is impossible! Let us say so, if we think so. By this means we come to the most searching, sifting tests that our Lord instituted. If at the close of our studies on the teaching of CHRIST concerning the Kingdom of GOD, we discussed international arbitration, everybody would approve; but these are our Lord's tests, the way we behave at a feast, the principle upon which we invite our guests, our manner of life in the social circle.

One guest, knowing that the only Kingdom in which such men and manners are possible is the Kingdom of GOD, cried out, "**Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.**"

The Master, accepting his figure of speech, that of eating bread in the Kingdom of GOD, uttered the parable of the great supper, which moved in the same realm of social ideas. He carried over the same persons He had already been dealing with, guests and a host, and thus directed the already captured imagination to highest applications. The host is now the King of the Kingdom, the supper is the bread of the Kingdom, and the guests are those to whom the Kingdom is offered. Of these our Master said, "**They all with one consent began to make excuse.**"

The parable is evidently the Lord's reply to a man who admired the Kingdom.

Let us examine the statement as a whole; then glance at the particular illustrations of which our Lord made use; and then pause for one brief look at the teaching that followed.

The teaching of the parable focused in the text is that it is possible to admire an ideal, and refuse to realize it; that it is possible to vote for the Kingdom of GOD, and fight against it. The man who exclaimed, "**Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,**" was sincere and honest in his admiration. And in effect, the Lord replied: Very well, the Kingdom is open; the invitations are issued; but you will not come in! "**They all with one consent began to make excuse.**"

This is a day of wide-spread admiration for the Kingdom of GOD, as revealed to us in its ideals and in privileges.

These were expressed in the apostolic word: "**The Kingdom of God is . . . righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost**" (Romans 14:17).

These things are popular within the Church, and outside the Church. Righteousness is well spoken of to-day. Men everywhere are professing to love peace. Joy is the quest of the hour. Yet there is an equally wide-spread refusal to enter into the Kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy; persistence in wrong, in spite of admiration of right; perpetuation of strife, in spite of the adoration of peace; profanation of joy, by which it is killed. We agree that, "**Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,**" but we are not proposing to enter it immediately.

There is distinct approbation of the Kingdom as an ideal, accompanied by definite refusal to submit to the King.

Men pray, "**Thy Kingdom come,**" and say in their hearts, "**We will not have this Man to reign over us.**"

They say "**Lord, Lord,**" and do not the things that the Lord commands.

Some people seem to be profoundly gratified when one of the crowd in Hyde Park calls for cheers for JESUS CHRIST. Yet such cheers constitute a profanation and a blasphemy until men have crowned Him under the shadow of His Cross, and submitted their lives to His awful and insistent claim upon everything that they have. Thousands of people to-day are saying, "**Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God,**" and the Master still declares that the supper is spread, the Kingdom is open, but they all with one consent begin to make excuse.

The excuses given aid the apprehension here, for they are full and final in that they not only reveal the facts, but interpret the secrets.

The first said, "**I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.**" And another said, "**I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.**" And another said, "**I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come**" (vss. 18-20).

Now the common word, describing all these people said, is the word "excuse." "**They all with one consent began to make excuse.**" The first man said, "**I pray thee have me excused**"; the second man said "**I pray thee have me excused**"; the last man did not use the word, but definitely declined as he said, "**I cannot come,**" and so he made excuse.

The word itself is suggestive. The Greek means *to beg off*. They all with one consent began to beg off; as our own word, coming from the Latin, is a singularly apt and accurate interpretation of the idea. An excuse is that from which all reason is absent.

An excuse is really a deceit, a subterfuge, the practice of hypocrisy, in order to escape, because

there is no reason to give.

When a boy at school I went one morning with my homework unprepared. My mother did what mothers have a habit of doing; she wrote a note for me to take to my master. I remember it well. It ran, "Will you please excuse Campbell's work this morning?" I gave it to him, and he received it most graciously. When twelve o'clock came, and I was preparing to go home, I heard a voice saying, "Morgan, where are you going?"

"Home, sir," I replied.

"But your homework is not done!"

"No, sir, but I brought a note."

"Oh, yes," he said, "that was an excuse, not a reason. You will please remain and do your work!"

I have never forgotten the difference between an excuse and a reason from that moment to this. He was quite right. Why was the note written? Because I had no reason to give; I wanted to dodge my work.

"They all with one consent began to make excuse."

We must interpret the parable by the exclamation, "**Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.**"

This man knew perfectly well that in that parable of the great supper the great Teacher was speaking of the Kingdom of GOD. Though the invitation of GOD had gone forth, though the table was spread at which men might sit and eat, though the Kingdom had been brought close to them and they might enter in, they were making excuses for remaining outside because they had no reason to give.

- One man said he had bought land, and must go and see it. That was the pride of possession.
- Another said he had bought oxen and must go and prove them. That was attention to business.
- Yet another said he had married a wife. That was the claim of another affection.

All the ground of excuse is covered in these illustrations of JESUS; pride of possession, the claims of business, the mastery of affections other than those for Himself. Excuses all!

Pride of possession; if the land be possessed, then enter the Kingdom and learn the secrets of how to develop it.

Attention to business; if the oxen be bought, then bring them with thee, let not a hoof be left behind! By the way, it may be added that the true method of a business man is to prove oxen before they are bought.

Earthly affection; that is not to be crucified but sanctified; therefore with the new love enter the

Kingdom; and if not, then, If any man love wife more than Me, he is not worthy of Me, said the great King.

None of these things was in itself wrong. It was not wrong to possess land, to buy oxen, or to marry. And therefore the parable teaches the sinfulness of legitimate things when they interfere with the highest; when therefore they prevent the realization of the highest; and when ultimately through the prevention of the realization of the highest, they react upon and destroy themselves.

We need to beware of the sinfulness of legitimate things. This teaching is focused in an actual word of JESUS, uttered in His Manifesto: "**Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.**"

The man who fails to obey loses not only the Kingdom, but all the things to which he clings in order to free himself from Kingdom obligations.

Then we glance on down the parable for the final teaching of the Lord. "**The master of the house being angry.**" That is a word of great solemnity, leading up to the declaration: "**None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper**" (vs. 24).

That is figurative language, and the revealed fact is that men who admire the Kingdom of GOD, but who will not enter, shall never eat its bread. Admiration of the Kingdom of GOD becomes in time blasphemy and impertinence, unless it lead men to submission to the Kingdom of GOD.

Then we observe the hospitality of the master of the house; the hospitality that followed upon his anger. He brought in the poor, the maimed and the blind and the lame, the very people he had told the host he should ever invite; the poor, entering the Kingdom, come to wealth, the maimed to wholeness; the blind to sight, the lame to power to walk. The hospitality of the great heart of the King expressed itself Finally in that word full of exquisite beauty, "**Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in.**"

Then JESUS passed out of the house; He crossed the threshold, and the multitudes who had been waiting, and doubtless listening, thronged after Him, and He began to say to them the severest things that ever passed His lips, "**If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple . . . So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple**" (Luke 14:26-27).

Our Lord thus said to the people who followed Him, and thronged after Him, Let those who admire, and would share the blessedness of the Kingdom, know that they must crown the King, absolutely, and without counting cost or considering conditions. All other ties must be secondary, and severed if they interfere. The way of the Cross must be taken if a man would come into the Kingdom. There must be the renouncing of all possession, property must be held in trust for the Kingdom.

Strange words, severe words; and we ask why? And this is the one occasion on which with greatest

clearness He gave the reason for the severity of His terms:

"Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost"
(Luke 14:28).

By which He did not mean that they were builders and must count the cost, but that they were the King's helpers, that He was the Builder, and that He must count the cost; that He was the King going to war, and therefore He must count the cost. He needed men in His building upon whom He could depend. He needed warriors who would fight in the day of fiercest conflict. He had to sift the ranks, because the Kingdom, ere it could be established, would demand strenuous toil, constant conflict. So He sifted the ranks.

Now the last saying! Those who admire and refuse to help are salt without savour, are fit only for the dunghill. No, not even fit for that! Cast them out! That was CHRIST's searching, withering, appalling contempt for men who admire and do not obey.

Those poor, bruised, maimed, blind, wretched people, who do not see the beauty, bring them in; I will open their eyes, and heal them! But that smug, self-satisfied man, who listens to the preaching of the Kingdom and says, That is most excellent; and bars his heart against CHRIST, and puts no blood into the business of building the Kingdom, and knows nothing of the Master's compassion; that man, says JESUS, cast him out. Of all worthless men, that sleek, admiring Pharisee, who does nothing, is the most useless! Cast him out!

What is our attitude towards the Kingdom of GOD?

Intellectual approbation, emotional attraction, and volitional antagonism? Then we are not in the Kingdom; we cannot eat its bread, we cannot help its King; and at last even that King, so fair, so lovely, so patient, so infinite in pity, even He will cast us out.

The only true attitude towards the Kingdom of GOD is that in which the whole life is surrendered.

The only true attitude is that in which the life of the individual becomes a microcosm of the Kingdom that is to be, because it is under the reign and the rule of the King.

If that is not so in your case and mine, why not?

Down the millenniums the penetrative voice of JESUS finds its way; excuses, excuses! GOD help us to have done with excuses, and to enter the Kingdom.

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