

Hypocrites and Hospitality

Read Luke 14:1-24
further Matthew 22:1-10

Key Verse:

“I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen.”

Acts 28:28

Extra: What do you think is the most important message from all of this for us today?

Level 5 lesson 21

INTRIGUING INVITATION

A Chief Pharisee in Jerusalem once invited some of his wealthy friends to have dinner with him on the Sabbath Day. Somewhat surprisingly, Jesus also received an invitation and accepted it. We don’t really know why the Pharisee invited the Lord for a meal in this way. We’d like to think he was genuinely being hospitable, but the words at the end of verse 1, seem to hint quite strongly that he perhaps had an ulterior motive.

We read there, “they watched Him.” Sadly, it appears this man and his friends were hypocrites; their critical eyes were watching His every move, hoping to find some fault in Him. Outwardly these men appeared friendly, yet inwardly they were antagonistic. It seems, they particularly wanted to observe Jesus’ reaction to a sick man whom they had also arranged to be present. Would Jesus deliberately break the traditions of the Pharisees by healing this poor man on the Sabbath day? This was what they really wanted to see!

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus asked them, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath Day?” Afraid to say no, and realising Jesus had ‘called their bluff’, the Pharisees kept quiet. Jesus healed the man and immediately asked another question, “If one of you has a son, or even an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath Day, wouldn’t you immediately pull him out?”

The answer was obvious – of course they would! How much more important, and quite right then, to heal this poor man on the Sabbath Day; the Pharisees were again silenced!

IMPORTANT LESSON

After this, Jesus used a simple parable to teach the whole group a valuable lesson on humility; being willing to put others first. He had earlier noticed the guests almost scrambling to sit in the important seats, nearest the host at the head of the table.

Their self-seeking pride saddened the Lord. His parable showed them how unwise, indeed humbling, it can be; to rush to a high place of honour and then perhaps be told to move down for a more important person. It is far better to be asked, “Friend, come up higher” than to be told, “Sorry, you must move down lower!”

It is just the same if we would enter the kingdom of Heaven: first we must be willing to humble ourselves, and admit our sin and need. Then, God will cleanse us

and exalt us, making us His very own children, so precious to Himself. Jesus continued, “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Later, Jesus had some more wise words for His host. “When you make a feast, don’t call your rich neighbours and friends as you have done here, but call the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. The rich can reward you by inviting you back; the poor can’t do this, but you will be blessed at the resurrection of the righteous.”

This man wanted to appear generous, but as always, Jesus went to the heart of the matter – his motives. If you really want to be generous, as God would have you, then spend your money on those who can’t repay you! This doesn’t prevent us showing hospitality to our friends, but it does condemn an outward show of generosity and hospitality, which is merely seeking to impress the rich and important people; for an earthly reward or social advancement. Instead, we should care for those who really need it, and wait for the reward of our Heavenly Father.

IMPORTANT INVITATION

At this point, one of the guests suddenly interjected, “Blessed is he that shall eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God.” The Lord’s reply was interesting: “A certain man prepared a great banquet”, He began, “and sent out his servant to invite the guests, saying to them ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ However, one by one, his friends all began to make excuses and reject the gracious invitation.

Hearing their excuses, the man became angry and withdrew his invitation. Instead, he sent it out to the back-streets and alley-ways, to the beggars and drifters of society. Soon his banqueting-house was filled with poor, maimed and blind people who gladly accepted the invitation.”

Jesus’ story has lessons on several ‘layers’. Firstly, it was an indictment on the Jewish hierarchy, the supposed ‘friends’ of God, who would soon reject their Messiah. The Kingdom of Heaven would then be made open to all – Gentiles included!

The lesson for us is clear. God invites us into His Kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sins. WE CAN ACCEPT OR REJECT this important invitation. It is also a reminder that the Kingdom of Heaven is open to all; we need to present the Gospel to everyone, not just who we think might want to come.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why did the Pharisee invite Jesus to dine with him and his friends?
2. How did Jesus show the Pharisees that it was not wrong to heal a man on the Sabbath day?
3. Why is it better to take a low place than a high place?
4. What did the invited guests do when given their invitation to the feast?
5. What must we accept or reject?

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My Name is Age

Lost and Found

SORRY SON

He soon discovered though, that “the way of transgressors is hard”! His money was quickly spent and his new ‘friends’ were suddenly very hard to find! On top of that, a terrible famine descended on the land and he was soon desperate for food and shelter. The only work he could find was feeding a farmer’s pigs – a disgusting job for a Jew, for whom pigs were ‘unclean’. Soon, he was so hungry even the pig ‘slops’ began to look appetising!

Sitting in the smelly pig-pen one day, hungry and desperate, the foolish son’s thoughts wandered back to his home and father. Suddenly, a thought flashed into his mind – even the servants at home were better off than he was now! He thought again of his wise, loving father and the grief in his eyes when they had parted.

Remorse filled his heart as he realised just how hard-hearted and sinful he had been! Could he ever go back? Would his father still welcome him? Finally, he decided, “I will return to my father!”

Jumping out of the pig-pen and without a backward look, he set off on the long road home. As he walked, he thought about how he would ask for forgiveness, and for a job as a servant when he met his father.

SIN FORGIVEN

The grieving father had never forgotten his boy. In fact, he had been watching and praying for his return ever since he left. One day, looking over the fields, he saw in the distance, a figure approaching the house, dressed in tattered rags. His heart fluttered.....could it be?.... It WAS! His long-lost son had come home!

Excitedly, he ran towards him, and joyfully threw his arms around him hardly noticing the smell of pigs and filth. He kissed him, interrupting his son as he began his little speech; calling out to the servants, “Bring the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet. Quick, kill the fatted calf, let’s have a feast and celebrate, for this my son was dead and is alive again,; he was lost, and now is found!”

Do you see the beautiful picture of our Heavenly Father in that story? God is waiting to welcome each sinner who will acknowledge their sin and return to Him, accepting Christ as Saviour. Will you do that today? He longs to welcome you into the family of God!

Sadly, the older brother did not share his father’s joy at the return of his brother. He was bitter and jealous. This is the same self-righteous attitude of the Pharisees who, blind to their own sin; knew nothing of God’s love, grace and forgiveness. Don’t YOU be like them, and miss out on God’s gracious love and forgiveness!

Read Luke 15:1-32 Further: Luke 19:1-10

THREE GREAT STORIES

The Pharisees and Scribes had a ‘problem’ with Jesus. “This man,” they said scornfully, “receives sinners and eats with them!” In their self-righteous pride, they would never acknowledge anyone who was obviously a sinner – let alone speak or eat with them. How could this Man be ‘Holy’? Oh, how little they knew of God’s love, and His tremendous desire to be reconciled to each of us who are lost in sin!

So the Lord told them three stories about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. Each one told of the incredible joy of the finder when “that which was lost, was found” (vv.6,9,10). Even the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of this and the Pharisees should have appreciated it (Ezekiel 18:23).

In each case, “that which was lost” represents humanity; we were ‘lost’ in sin. The ‘finder’ in each case (the shepherd, the woman, and the father) represents God, who rejoices with His angels when sinners are ‘found’ and saved. Jesus said, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents!”

SINFUL SON

Let’s look a bit more closely at the third parable, the story of ‘The Prodigal Son’. In this story, a man had two sons who both worked hard on the family farm. However, the younger son grew tired of life on the farm and resented the restraints of his father’s authority. He wanted to get out and ‘see the world’ – to please himself, and have a ‘good time’.

Sound familiar? I wonder if perhaps this is how you are thinking today? Well, this ungrateful young man was determined to have his own way, and one day, he decided the time had come for action. Going to his kind, loving father, he rudely demanded, “Give me my share of the inheritance now; I don’t want to wait till you die!”

Deeply hurt, no doubt, by this callous request, his father tried to reason with him, but it was no use - the son was determined to leave. Finally, the father reluctantly agreed and gave the young man his share. Turning his back on his father and home, the son travelled to a far country. There he plunged wildly into all sorts of sinful pleasures and as verse 13 says, “squandered his wealth in wild living.”

Key Verse:
“You are kind
and forgiving, O
Lord, abounding
in love to all
who call to
You.”
Psalm 86:5

Level 5 lesson 22

Extra: Name the necessary steps
before the son could be forgiven.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Who are represented by the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son?	.....
2. Who rejoices most when sinners are saved?	.....
3. What did the prodigal son make up his mind to do?	.....
4. How was the son welcomed home?	.....
5. What great truth about God do we learn from the boy’s father?	.....

The Death of Lazarus

Key Verse:
“For the Lord Himself will come down from Heaven with a loud command..... and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will..... meet the Lord in the air.”
1 Thess 4:16-17

Extra: We all will die. How and when do we prepare for it?

Level 5 lesson 23

Read John 11:1-37 Further: 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

GREAT LOVE

Mary and Martha were two sisters who lived with their brother Lazarus, in the little village of Bethany, about two miles east of Jerusalem. Jesus often visited and stayed with them when passing through the village. They loved our Lord very much and we know from Scripture that He too “loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (v5).

GRAVE SICKNESS

One day though, Lazarus became seriously ill. Worried, the two sisters did the best thing possible; they sent a message to the Lord, who was twenty-five miles away on the other side of the Jordan River. “Lord, the one you love is sick”, the message read. They knew He would know straight away who that was, and thought He would come as quickly as possible.

“This sickness will not end in death,” Jesus commented to His disciples as He read the message, “but to the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified.” We often forget that God is at work in the circumstances of our lives, to bring glory to Himself. As Christians we can be assured “that all things work together for good, to those who love the Lord.” (Romans 8:28).

Even when we don’t understand everything that happens, we can learn, like Mary and Martha; to wait for God’s perfect answer and continue to trust in His love and goodness. So, instead of rushing to Bethany to heal Lazarus, Jesus stayed two more days where He was.

GREAT SUSPENSE

The two sisters were surprised and no doubt, dismayed, as the days went by and Jesus did not come. What was going on? Didn’t Jesus care? We can imagine that it was very frustrating for them to watch their beloved brother getting sicker and weaker. However, there was a purpose in everything Jesus did. After two days, He told the disciples He was going to Judea again.

His worried disciples thought that He would be heading into real danger. “The Jews just tried to stone you!” they reminded Him. “Why go there again?” Calmly, Jesus replied, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walks by day, he will not stumble....” Jesus appeared to mean by these words, that He knew all about the

danger; He was going ahead with full knowledge of everything that lay in front of Him. His Father would look after Him, and He wouldn’t be killed before the appointed time. Having said this, Jesus told them the reason for the trip. “Our friend, Lazarus, has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him up” (v11). Seeing their confused looks, Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead!” (v14).

GREAT STATEMENT

As Jesus approached the house in Bethany, Martha saw Him coming and rushed to meet Him. “Oh Lord,” she sobbed, “if only You had come earlier – my brother wouldn’t have died!” We can understand why she thought that way, can’t we?

Showing great faith, she went on to say that even now, His prayer to God would be answered. Jesus said, “Your brother will rise again”. Martha said, “I know he will....at the resurrection, at the last day.”

In reply, Jesus made this great declaration, “I am the Resurrection, and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me, will never die.”

All who die believing in Christ as Saviour, will be resurrected to eternal life. In fact, those who believe in Christ will never truly die. For them, physical death is but a doorway to eternal life in the presence of God. When our Lord returns, those believers who are alive at the time will not experience physical death, but will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye” and taken to be “forever with the Lord” in the glory of Heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17).

There is another great difference between the death of a believer and an unbeliever: the believer awakens to eternal life in God’s presence, while the unbeliever awakens to judgement and damnation; an eternity of punishment and separation from God. Faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour determines the outcome!

Jesus then asked Martha bluntly for a statement of her faith, “Do you believe this?” What a tremendous answer she gave! “Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.” Mary too, stated her complete faith in Jesus Christ later on. Are you able to say it with them? Jesus asks YOU the same question today!

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What message did the sisters send to Jesus?	.....
2. What do we often forget?	.....
3. What can we be assured of as Christians?	.....
4. What great declaration did Jesus make to Martha about Himself?	.....
5. Contrast the death of an unbeliever with that of a believer.	.....

Lazarus Raised to Life!

Key Verse:

“Jesus said to her, “I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die..”

John 11:25,26.

Extra: What important lessons can we learn from this event?

Level 5 lesson 24

Read John 11:33-57 Further 1 Thess 4:13-18

DEEP SORROW

Jesus was truly human as well as Divine, and was not immune to sorrow and grief. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were close friends, and Jesus sorrowed with them in the loss of their brother. We can easily forget that Jesus viewed the whole scene from God’s viewpoint too. He saw and appreciated, as no-one else could, the horrible effect of sin on humanity and the terrible suffering and sorrow that death brings to us all.

“Where have you laid him?” He asked. “Lord, come and see,” they replied. So Jesus went with them to the tomb, ‘deeply moved’. As He saw the crowd’s grief, we read that “Jesus wept”. Some people commented “see how He loved him!” while others criticised Him saying, “if He was able to save him, then why didn’t He?” They were about to find out!

DECISIVE ACTION

The tomb was a hewn-out cave with a large, round stone lying across the opening. Jesus ordered that the stone be removed, but Martha objected; reminding Him that Lazarus had been dead now for four days and his corpse would smell bad! Gently, Jesus reminded her of His promise; that if she believed, all would work out to the glory of God.

So the stone was removed. Jesus then prayed to His Father in front of the whole crowd, thanking Him for hearing His prayer, and explaining that it was so that all who stood there watching “would believe that You sent Me!” Then in a loud voice, He cried out, “LAZARUS, COME OUT!”

Can you imagine that moment? All eyes would be ‘glued’ to the mouth of the cave; everyone scarcely daring to breathe. What a defining moment for Jesus! The One who claimed to be the ‘Resurrection and the Life’ had given a command, but was He who He claimed to be? Would there be any response from the lifeless corpse inside the tomb?

How the crowd must have watched breathlessly to see what would happen! Then, before their very eyes, Lazarus walked slowly from the tomb, “his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face!” So the mighty deed was done; the great sign was given. Jesus then told the people to unwrap the linen bandages which Lazarus had been buried in and “let him go”.

What an amazing reunion it must have been! No doubt there were tears of joy as he re-joined his waiting sisters. Just as Jesus had said earlier, this sad event “did not end in death” and in fact worked out for their good, and for the glory of God. Many of those watching immediately put their faith in Jesus.

DESPERATE ACTION

Sadly, we also read, that even after witnessing this amazing miracle with their own eyes, some did not believe! Instead, they sneaked off to the Pharisees to report what had happened. Realising that the situation now required urgent, decisive action, the Pharisees gathered together the full 71-member Sanhedrin, the Supreme Council of the nation. They were fearful that if Jesus was left alone, the people would gather round Him as their Messiah, resulting in a revolt against the Roman authorities; who would destroy “both our place and nation.” In discussing the developing ‘crisis’, the decision was made that Jesus must be somehow got rid of!

Caiaphas, the head of the council, put it this way: “It is better for us that one man should die for the people, than that the whole nation perish!” Although he simply meant it as a pragmatic solution to their immediate problem, this was also a prophecy of our Lord’s death and what it would achieve for the people of God scattered abroad.

So it was resolved that Jesus must be put to death. They issued an edict that if anyone knew where Jesus was, they must advise the Pharisees, so they could seize Him. Meanwhile, Jesus took His disciples away to Ephraim, in the wilderness, knowing that His hour to die was near.

DECISION REQUIRED

This miracle of the raising of Lazarus from the dead was a special one, in that it brought the conflict between Jesus and His enemies to a climax. From this point on, they were compelled to take definite action, for or against Him. In a similar way, as you read the account of what happened, YOU must make a decision.

Who do YOU say Jesus was – truly God, the ‘Resurrection and the Life’ – or an imposter? The Pharisees stubbornly refused to believe the evidence of Lazarus’ resurrection before the eyes of a crowd. Similarly, they did not believe the evidence of Jesus’ own resurrection shortly after this either, inventing a story to try and explain it away.

Will you believe the evidence and trust Him as your Saviour today? Remember Jesus’ prayer to God the Father before He raised Lazarus? “That they might BELIEVE that You sent ME!” For those of us who have trusted in Him, what encouragement we can take from this account: Jesus is who He claimed to be – the Resurrection and the Life!”

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why was the raising of Lazarus a special miracle?

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2. Why did Jesus pray to His father just before working the miracle?

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3. What words did Jesus use when calling Lazarus from the grave?

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4. What did the Pharisees say and do after the miracle of the raising of Lazarus.

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5. What did the Council decide after listening to Caiaphas?

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