

Luke 14

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, the reward of service, and the cost of discipleship in the Christian life, highlighting the need for spiritual renewal and separateness from the world.

Scripture: Micah 7:5-6, Matthew 5:13, Luke 14:1-24, Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 4:9-11

Topics: "Discipleship", "Grace", "Humility"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Luke 14, illustrating God's distributive justice and the importance of humility and grace. He emphasizes that true rest can only be found in Christ, as humanity has broken its relationship with God through sin. The rejection of God's invitation to the Supper symbolizes the broader rejection of grace, highlighting the need for a heart aligned with God rather than worldly pursuits. Darby also discusses the cost of discipleship, urging believers to prioritize their relationship with Christ above all else. Ultimately, he calls for a life marked by grace and humility, reflecting the character of Christ.

Transcript

This chapter shews out the distributive justice of God. First, it is toward His saints, the consequence of conduct with God, and the place a man will take in view of that. Next, we have responsibility connected with grace, the moral position of the soul, because of having grace presented to it. Slighting God's grace fills up the measure of man's sin. But here it is the presentation, which is a different thing from the possession, of grace. This is brought out in those who refused to come to the Supper.

Verses 1-6. The Lord, in bringing the dispensation to a close, constantly brings before Israel the sabbath. The question was, Could man, as man, find rest with God? Could man ever enter into God's rest? We know man broke God's rest directly - how soon we are not told: but, perhaps the very day he ought to have rested, he ate the forbidden fruit. Man never entered into God's rest; and now the question was, how to enter in - by his own work or Christ's? It was essential to the rest after creation, to have it at the end of the six days of work, and therefore it was on the seventh day.

So afterwards, when the legal ordinances were given, the sabbath became a sign of the covenant. The Lord, when here, constantly trenched on the sabbath, to shew that, sin being unremoved, He must work. He could not rest, the sabbath being a sign of man's getting rest after work, and the law shewing that man constantly broke that covenant. The Lord presses home to their consciences their sin, by shewing them that He must work if they were to have rest. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

If man had kept the law, he was entitled to the rest, but he neither did nor could keep it. All that was the sign of God's rest, for man, after work done, failed; but "there remaineth a rest for the people of God." The sabbath continued as a sign; and all through the prophets, we find it insisted on, but they did not get rest. Paul, reasoning upon it in Hebrews 4, says, "We which have believed, do enter into rest." But Canaan, the nominal rest, they of old did not enter, save the few faithful ones, and these did not get rest, for if they had, another day would not have been spoken of; and so it is said by the Psalmist, and quoted in Hebrews, "If they shall enter into my rest."

"If" means "they shall not." This being the sabbath was no rest to them. The sabbath was still the sign, but no real rest. The whole thing being therefore gone as to man's getting into God's rest, it must be now on an entirely new principle, by faith and not by works. When Messiah came, He would have been rest to the people, but man would not have Him, as we find it here. Man could not have God's rest by law, and they would not have it by grace, and this proves man has altogether broken with God.

If I have got to God, I have rest, and need not journey farther for it. I have my rest in Himself; for grace, not law, has given me a capacity to enjoy what God is. But when the creature had broken the rest of his Creator, there could be no relationship between them. Sin has come in and caused God to be towards me as a judge, and there can be no link of heart between a judge and a criminal. If God judges me as a sinner, the only word I can have from Him is, "Depart from me, ye cursed."

Therefore all that man can say is, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." There is a link between a father and a child that brings them into relationship; but it is a new thing. All must be put on a new footing, for there is no rest in the old creation.

133 In chapter 15 we have grace at work to give rest, the Shepherd bringing the sheep home, etc.; and in this chapter we have a case of misery brought out in the man who had the dropsy. Christ said, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? But they held their peace. He puts the case to themselves. "If you shall have an ox or an ass fallen into a pit, . . . and they could not answer him." There was no present rest, no hope of rest, no possibility of rest for man as a sinner, and there could be no rest for God, for God could not rest where sin was. There was no sabbath for righteousness, for man had no righteousness. There was no sabbath for love, for love could not rest where judgment must be exercised. Love might come in and work, but work is not rest. Man has lost his communion with God, through his sin; and this is a solemn thing, for he has made God a judge through his sin. The very thought of judgment connected with God shews man a sinner, for there was no necessary association of judgment with God; but when sin came in, judgment must follow, for God is holy. If brought to the consciousness of there being no relationship between us as sinners and God, we learn what a place becomes us, when once we have faith in His grace.

Verses 7-11. "And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms." It is just the place that nature likes. The world which has no relations with God delights in exalting self and shutting Him out. Self gets for self what it likes and forgets God. Man is always setting up self, pushing for self, against God. He does not think so, for he says he is only using his faculties. But so Adam did to hide himself from God. Do not we use our faculties to please ourselves, rather than for God? While the master is away, the servants go on their own way and do their own will. A man is naturally hurt when he is put down in a corner and despised. Flesh does not relish being thrust aside, but this seeking for a place is to seek for it where Christ had none. "Therefore," He says, "when thou art bidden to a wedding, sit down in the lowest room."

134 The point of this parable is seen in verses 8-11: it refers the heart to the Master, to "him that bade thee." If I am conscious of being a sinner, and therefore deserving no place, I shall take none, but wait till God bestows one on me. I shall have honour indeed, when God gives me a place. The point is, What does He bestow upon me? Having the eye upon God, and referring to Him, seek for the lowest place as Christ did. It will not do to say, I will not have a place in the world; the great thing is, the heart resting on God's place in the world. When the eye is thus upon God, self is forgotten; if not, I am thinking of the slights I receive, and neither faith nor grace are in exercise. If I could think nothing of myself, I should be perfect. The man who bade the guests has the right estimate of each and the honour due to them. The evangelist's place, the pastor's, the apostle's, etc., will all be appointed by God. When God gives me a place, it is one of power and nighness to Himself; but when a man takes a place for himself, it is one of weakness and alienation from God, because self is the object.

Then, again, we must guard against the mere refusing to take a place in the world, because we know it is wrong, as followers of Him who has been rejected. A mere legal estimate of what is right can never last. A thing may be very right; but there is no stability in pursuing it, because there is no power to subdue the flesh in merely doing what one knows to be right. There was the sense of obligation with the law, but the law did not set an object before me to attract my heart; it did not bring God to me nor me to God. That lasts which feels that we are nothing and that God is everything. Many have begun very energetically, and taken a certain place, right in itself; but if legality be the source of it, there will be no power of perseverance, for that which is taken up under law will be sure to be lost in the flesh. When God is the object, the low place here is sufficient. He Himself carries me on; and whatever it be, if the mind and affections are upon Him, what was hard at first is no effort as I proceed. His love, which attracted and gave me power at first to take such a position, becomes brighter and brighter when better and longer known; and what was done, at first tremblingly, is easy with increasing courage. The only thing which can enable me thus to go on is to have CHRIST the object before me, and just in proportion as it is so can I be happy. There may be a thousand and one things to vex me, if self is of importance; they will not vex me at all, if self is not there to be vexed. The passions of the flesh will not harass us, if we are walking with God. What rubs we get when not walking with God, and thinking only of self! There is no such deliverance as that of having no importance in one's own eyes. Then one may be happy indeed before God.

135 If we look at Christ, we learn two principles: first, that He humbled Himself, because of the sin of the world all around Him; second, the world did all they could to humble Him, for the more He went down, so much the more they sought to pull Him down.

No one cares for another; so that if a man does not care for himself, he will be sure to be pushed down low enough. Then again, so deceitful are our hearts that it is possible we should be willing to humble ourselves, if we could get anything by it, even the approbation of men. On the other hand, if we, in the usual sense of men, merely seek to imitate Christ in this, it will be but legal effort. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." He humbled Himself. First, "He made himself of no reputation"; that is, He emptied Himself of His glory to become a man. In doing this, He left the Father's glory to become a man. This was a great descent (though we think a great deal of ourselves). But was that all? No. He humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross. It is the same principle which is put before us in this chapter in Luke. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Real lowliness is being ready to serve any and everybody: and though it may to the eye of man look low, it is in reality very high, being the fruit of divine love working in our hearts. God, operating in our hearts, makes us unselfish. The only thing worth doing in the world is this service, except it be enjoying God. We should be ready to serve our enemies. "He that

humbleth himself shall be exalted." This is not only being humbled but humbling one's self, and not doing it before those who would honour us all the more for being humble. Paul could say of himself and others, "ourselves your servants for Christ's sake." He felt they had a title to serve in grace; and in proportion as he took the humble place, he will be exalted in the day that is coming.

Verses 12-14. The next statement in the chapter goes on to speak of him who bade. Before, it was about the guest; but here it is the principle on which feasts are made. "Call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind . . . and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Thus He takes them all out of the world again, to the time when they shall meet God, and makes it a present guide for action. They must not act on the principle of getting reward here, but must wait for the time when they are to meet the Lord, as it is not till the Master of the house returns that the servants receive their wages. This is not a question of salvation, but of reward for service. "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

136 Mark how the Lord brings out the JUST as a separate class. The resurrection is not a common one; there is no such thing in Scripture. There is no thought of confounding in another world what God has separated in this. Grace has separated the believer, so that he is risen in his soul now; but he does not get the reward of his service till "the resurrection of the just." A sinner is quickened here, though not judicially manifested here; because we are in a dispensation of faith, and the portion is in glory. There is no "general" resurrection to good and bad alike; but there is the "first resurrection," which is God separating in power those whom in grace He has made His own. It was the "resurrection from among" or "out of the dead" that awakened such wonder among the Jews. The Pharisees could teach resurrection though the Sadducees denied it. A resurrection was commonly believed, as Martha said, "I know that he shall rise again at the last day." But they could not comprehend divine power coming in to Satan's house, and taking the righteous dead out from among the rest of the dead. Jesus replied to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life" - speaking of the living power that visits a man when he is in a state of death, and takes him out of it. They knew nothing of the discriminating process of the one to life, and the other to judgment (John 5).

The Master of the house will shew His approval of the faithful servant. There will be degrees of glory given according to the service done. Not that I shall be saved for what I have done; but my service will be rewarded, whatever may have been produced by the Holy Ghost answering the desire of Christ in working in me; for it is service of which I could not do an atom without His power. It is likewise the answer of God according to His counsels; as we may see in the reply to the mother of Zebedee's children, "It shall be given to those for whom it is prepared of my Father." The service of love is never influenced by recompense. Reward is not set before the soul as the motive for doing anything; but when we find difficulties in treading the path of service, then the crown is set before us to encourage us to go on. So, even Christ, for the joy that was set before Him, "endured the cross, despising the shame." So also Moses, while esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, had respect unto the recompense of the reward. If the recompense and not love be the spring of our service, it would just amount to this, "Take thy penny, and go thy way." But if the world is broken with, no recompense can be looked for from that source, which is as great a deliverance as the deliverance from self.

137 Now (v. 15-24) see how grace, when brought in, is rejected. The Supper was ready; the guests were bidden, but they would not come. The Lord had before spoken of the kingdom, and here He shews what the reception of the kingdom would cost. All things are now ready; but they all make excuses. They do not care enough for the Supper to leave their yoke of oxen, the piece of ground, etc. The Supper was in God's

thoughts from the beginning, and it was to be when He came to the Jews, as their Messiah, at the close of the day; but they rejected Him - they did not want Him. It does not say that their sins shut them out from the Supper, for God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Neither was it the piece of ground, the oxen, or the wife that were in themselves the evil; but in their case they became so, because their minds were intent on them to the slighting of the Supper. And is it not just the same now? What harm is there in these things, do you say? If they have occupied your heart, and made you slight God, that is the harm. In the kingdom of God where are you? There was not one link of heart between Christ and the people He came to, and therefore they rejected the Supper. This is also a test to our souls all through the day. It is not a question of whether a thing be right or wrong, but what savour have the things of Christ to our souls in it? It may be a very small thing. If we find the reading of a book makes the manifestation of Christ to become less precious to us, we have got away from God, and we cannot tell where the next step may take us. Satan often cheats us in this way. The soul is put to the test day by day, whether the things that are revealed by God in Christ have so much power over us as to engage the heart; but if other things have come in between when we want the enjoyment of the things of Christ, we shall not have it, and this will shew us how far we have got away. If anything comes in and takes the freshness of Christ from your soul, take heed! for, if the oxen, etc., are thus cared for, when you have opportunity for the things of Christ, you will have no taste for them.

138 In verse 21 the Lord turns to "the poor of the flock," those who have no yoke of oxen, and are glad of the feast. The priests and chiefs of the Jews had the first invitation, but, they rejecting it, the Master of the house sends out into the streets and lanes of the city, to bring in the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind of the people. Still the house is not filled; and then He sends outside the city, into the highways and hedges, and compels them to come in, that the house may be filled. These are the Gentiles. In this Gospel the poor of the flock and the Gentiles are distinguished from each other. But in Matthew, whose aim is Jewish, there is no mention made of both classes as distinct. "The wedding was furnished with guests" includes the Gentiles, gathered in after the Jews are brought into the blessing. Then mark the lowliness of the servant and the patient grace of the Master; that goes right on to the end. He cannot rest till He gets His house filled with guests.

What perseverance there is on the part of God! and we are called to go on in the same spirit. It does cost a great deal, to go on, and on, and on, in spite of everybody and everything; and for us to do so, marks the presence of divine power in us, for God's grace is unwearied. There is indeed judgment at the same time, for it is said, "Not one of those that were bidden shall taste of my supper." But God's acting thus shews us what lowliness there should be in us, as regards self, and grace as regards everyone else, and all grounded on this one fact, that all man's relationships with God are morally broken; and if you are really going to take such a path as that of following Christ, you must count the cost. It is all very well to see such grace and admire it; but there is no power to persevere in it, without such love in the heart as the establishment of a new relationship with God gives. There must be a link in the heart with the new thing; and Christ must have such strength in the heart as to give power to break with old things.

139 Verses 25-33. Multitudes were attracted by the hearing of such grace: so in verse 26 He tells them what discipleship will involve. There may be an allusion here to Micah 7:5, 6. Friends must be given up for Christ. A man may have to leave everything else, but the question is, Am I to leave God? What! life too? Yes - no matter. In that life you are linked with the world, and that must be given up too, if I am in question: you cannot have two hearts - a heart for the world, and a heart for Me - Christ would say. I tremble when I see people who have not counted the cost, setting out in the profession of following Christ. It is God's way

to put the barrier at the first start. If you can leap that, you will do. Legal obedience will not stand, but following Christ. If He is in the path, it is happy and easy; but it is a path between two hedges. If Christ is not with you in it, there will be nothing but trouble and difficulty.

Verses 34, 35. "Salt" is grace in spiritual energy; that is, the saints being witnesses in the world of the power of holy love, instead of selfishness. Salt is the consecrating principle of grace: if that is gone, what is to preserve? Salt is rather grace in the aspect of holy separateness unto God, than in that of kindness and meekness, though of course these are also inseparable from grace. If the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? If I have meat without salt, I can salt it; but if there is no saltness in salt, what can I do? What a character we have here of an unspiritual church, or an unspiritual saint! Like the vine which represented Israel, good for nothing at all but to dishonour the Lord its owner and be destroyed. Mercy, it is true, may recover us; but as saints we should have the savour of Christ. Whatever enfeebles attachment to Christ destroys power. It is not gross sin that does it, which of course will be met and judged; but it is the little things of every-day life which are apt to be chosen before Christ. When the world creeps in, the salt has lost its savour and we shew that a rejected Christ has little power in our eyes.

The Lord keep us in the path with Christ, where all is bright and blessed. If the film of this world has been drawn over our spiritual vision, hiding Christ from us, He alone can remove it.

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