

The Gospel According to Luke (Part 5)

March 19, 2017

What we've covered so far:

(Luke 1-9) Luke's portrayal of John the Baptist and Jesus as the fulfillment of the story of Israel and of God's promises told in the OT Scriptures. We then watched Jesus launch His mission and bring the good news of God's kingdom to the poor among Israel, people of low social status and also people who are outsiders. Jesus taught that his kingdom is upside down, it's a reversal of all our common social boundaries. This section culminated with Luke showing us how Jesus was a new Moses, about to bring a new exodus by his death in Jerusalem.

(Luke 10-19) So we come to the large center section of the book where Jesus leads his newly formed Israel on a journey to Jerusalem. This part of the book consists mainly of Jesus' teaching and parables given on the road to the various people he encounters, mainly his growing group of disciples. In this way, Luke portrays following Jesus as a journey, it's something you do when you learn as you go along life's path. So first, Jesus invites his disciples into his mission as he sends a wave of them to go ahead of them announcing God's kingdom. So being a disciple, right from the start, it means participating in Jesus' kingdom mission; making it your own.

*Summary of Luke 10-14

Another key theme in these chapters is Jesus' continued mission to the poor. As he travels, he keeps forming his new Israel and he encounters all these people who are sick, blind, he meets Samaritans who are ancient enemies of the Jewish people and famously, a man named Zacchaeus, a Jewish man who heads up tax collecting for the Romans. All of these social outsiders meet Jesus and they're transformed by the encounter and so they join his kingdom community, which Jesus describes as a great banquet party. He is here to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10; Story of Zacchaeus) and so he's celebrating when people discover the mercy of God.

But not everyone at the party is happy. Luke includes multiple stories of Jesus at banquets with Israel's religious leaders. These all become heated debates where Jesus confronts their pride and hypocrisy. So these contrasting banquet parties are captured most memorably in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son.

Luke 14:34-35 (ESV)

³⁴ "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear"

Luke 15:11-32 (ESV)

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to ^[b] one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ^[c] ²² But the father said to his servants, ^[d] ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

In this famous parable Jesus is explaining his whole kingdom mission to these leaders. His parties represent God's joyous welcome of every kind of person into his family. The only entry requirements are humility and repentance. And so it highlights the tragedy of Israel's leaders who reject Jesus and his upside down kingdom.