

Too Good

Part 2

Luke 14:15-24 – The Parable of the Great Banquet

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

¹⁸ “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

¹⁹ “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

²⁰ “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

²¹ “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

²² “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

²³ “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

Most mornings at 6am a member of our congregation walks around Mona Vale Beach and watches the sun rise. It just so happens that this is also the time a woman walks her Tibetan temple dog around the beach, as you do. For the last six months these two people from two different worlds have been getting to know each other and recently the member of our congregation began praying a simple prayer, “Lord, Help me to share my love of you to this lady in a simple and natural way”.

This week they met down at the beach and somewhere in the chat the woman was moved to remark at the beautiful sunrise, where our guy replied, “You know I don’t know if you believe in God, but I do and I see God’s love and glory all over that sunrise”. Just simple and authentic. This series leading up to Easter is entitled; “Too Good” – which is short for; “Too good not to share”. This beautiful message that we have of a loving God reaching out to us is too good not to share.

Last week Paul pointed out that the best way to have this message received in this day and age is simply to give an authentic recommendation. This week we want to go a little deeper into what helps people see us as authentic. The answer I think, is pretty simple, it’s all about what kind of heart we have for people.

Jesus is all about this. One of His major teaching themes was challenging the attitude of people about people. Which brings us to the parable of the banquet. I used to think this parable was about people making excuses for not following God, but it is really about people’s attitudes towards other people. Jesus tells this parable in Luke

14 while he is at a banquet of a prominent religious leader. As he looks around the room he notices the way people behave. He notices that people who were constantly jockeying for the places of greatest honour at the banquet and he also noticed that poor people, struggling people, sick people were not ever invited to these kind of shingdigs and he strongly questioned their heart attitude towards both those things.

To understand what Jesus was getting at in the parable we need to understand the practice of banquet giving. In these days people gave banquets to display and increase their social status. If you were to attend such a banquet you were honour bound to reciprocate in some way, giving more honour and status to the host.

So, for the people in one banquet Jesus paints the picture of another banquet, a very similar picture, featuring the same endless game of social climbing that Jesus has been observing. It begins with *a certain man*, a representative man, a very rich man, we know that because the banquet was great and the guests were many. This certain man invites his equally wealthy high status neighbours to a banquet. We know that because they own land, they have lots of livestock and they can afford to get married. Now understand the way Jesus works, as he paints this familiar picture to this group of puffed up status seeking religious types, they all nod and grin to each other when Jesus reaches the part where the banquet invitation is knocked back on the grounds of a dubious bunch of excuses. Well played they all think, in the game of social climbing, the people in the story have delivered a grand insult and set- back to the banquet holder – good one, they have just advanced their own status in the game.

So far this story is making perfect sense to Jesus audience, but then Jesus does His thing and turns the whole story on its head. Now what the audience will be expecting is that the banquet giver will find some way to turn the tables or seek revenge on those who have insulted him. Instead the banquet giver does the unthinkable, he abandons the whole game of social climbing and instead invites to his banquet the lowest of the low, *“the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame”*, people who will not advance his status or be able to pay him back. The key message is very clear to those people at the banquet, In God’s kingdom the way you look at people is all wrong, the way you treat people is all wrong. Pry your heart out of your own self-interest, start to genuinely care for people if you are going to be part of God’s kingdom.

I must admit this parable cuts fairly closely to the bone for me. As a university student I was trained to share my faith with other students and sent out in hunting teams of two with a clip board and a desire to save souls. While I have led people to Christ over the years, I never led a single person to Christ with the hunt them down and corner them approach, and when I am being really honest with myself, part of the issue is that I really didn’t care about those people. I was seeking to evangelise in order to be a good Christian. I was wandering around campus inviting people to the banquet for my benefit, for my sense of status, I really didn’t care about them at all.

And there are two consequences that flow out of that kind of attitude. Firstly people quickly cotton on to the fact that you don't really care about them. And secondly if you do evangelism for these kind of selfish reasons you become easily discouraged. I found people strangely did not want to cooperate with my evangelism plan. They did not give their lives to Jesus and they did not come with me to the next student service so I could show how I was kicking goals for Jesus. Instead I found that people were really rude, telling me where I could stick my religion, so I gave up. I stopped evangelising, I reasoned that it was not my gift, which is a crock, because sharing our faith is not about giftedness it is about loving God and loving others. The real reason for my dismal failure was that I was doing it for the wrong reasons, I was doing it for me; I really didn't have a heart of people.

I believe that 99% of what makes us authentic in sharing our faith is our heart attitude towards people. So how do we get a read on our heart attitude? Here's a little heart test that Jesus put me through a few years ago. It started with a simple question, "Stephen why are you afraid to share your faith?" Sounds like an innocent enough question but when I got down to the nitty gritty of it all, I realised that the only reason to be fearful about sharing my faith was if my self-esteem was somehow central to the whole process and our self-esteem only becomes central to the process when it's not about their eternal life but about our religious success. If our focus is on another person's eternal life then we should not be engaging our self-esteem in the process at all. Sharing my faith should be all about them, it should be all about how good it is for them to know the love of God, not all about how important it is for me to succeed in faith sharing – do you see the difference? Because believe me there is a really big difference here and it manifests powerfully in the attitudes that people see in us.

A really clear example of this is the day Peter failed the fear test. Jesus had just been arrested and Peter had followed Jesus and the soldiers to the house of the high priest.

⁵⁶ A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

⁵⁷ But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

⁶⁰ Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed.

⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times."

⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:56-62)

In this moment Peter's behaviour is all about himself, and when it is all about ourselves we become fearful. This becomes really clear in the light of what Jesus says to Peter after the resurrection.

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" (John 21:15-19)

Where is Jesus asking Peter to focus his life in order to be a sharer of the Gospel? In the love of Jesus and in the service of others, three times he demands that Peter focus on these things. And at the end Jesus tells him it's going to be tough, you are going to die for me, but fear will not master you if you have your heart set on love of me and love of others.

It's like this, I'm generally quite fearful of heights and I stay right away from the edges of cliffs. But one day when our children were a lot smaller we were bush walking along an escarpment when our youngest child tripped on a tree root and wobbled towards the edge of the cliff and in a flash I was standing on that cliff edge pulling him back. The first thing I registered was immense relief and second thing I registered was that I had done something that I was afraid of because I was completely focussed on the well-being of another person who I loved.

The other side of this truth is that one of the reasons we can be fearful of sharing our faith is that it is too much about us and not enough about them. This is something that we can bring to God because I know from personal experience that God can re-shape us, he can make us a new creation, but in order to do that we need to push into our fear in order to find the heart God wants for us. Here is some pretty good advice from two of my favourite theologians on facing fear.

Video: [Five ways to kill fear](#)

According to the Bible what drives out fear?

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear... (1 John 4:18)

Perfect love

The church I served at Turrumurra was next to the main shops and the railways station and we constantly had people dropping in looking for help. One day through

the door came this tall scarecrow looking guy, with heavy tattoos and piercings, and a kind of wild look in his eyes and I felt the first stirrings of fear and I quickly prayed asking God to give me a love for this guy and God answered my prayer. Because this really agitated guy started staring at my face, he stopped twitching and without breaking eye contact, he slowly sat down in a chair and he mumbled, “*you look like Jesus*”. Now I realise in truth I have a face only a mother can love but in that moment Jesus placed his love for this guy inside of me and because my insides are wired to my outsides, what I felt from God manifested on my face and he saw it. This is exactly what Paul means when he says:

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)

If we are to share our faith we need to unveil our face and receive a deep download of Jesus love and glory. If this is going on in our spirit then people will want to know about the hope that is in us.

I'm leaving the final word to one of our young adults who answered the challenge I issued the other day of living a day praying with our eyes wide open and then email me about it. This is part of what they sent, and my thanks to those people who sent me really encouraging emails.

By really seeing the world around us we are reminded that everyone needs God. Irrespective of who they are... The only way that they are going to meet God (short of a road to Damascus experience) is if we as believers first see them, then connect with them and share God's love. Put that way – It sounds so, so simple.

This last week I have tried to pray more specifically for the people I pass in the street, those who serve me in shops/cafes and anyone who God places on my heart. As I shared on Monday night, I failed when I didn't talk to a guy in Mona Vale I've seen a 100 times over the years. I'm praying that I see him soon again and start a conversation.

The challenge we are issuing for this month is to ask God for one person to bring along to the Alpha dinner in May – you have one and half months to work on it – and don't worry about forgetting – we will keep reminding you.