

## TCC Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2013 – Luke 14v1-14

### **Title: “Table Talk”**

### **Purpose:**

Remembrance a day for both WATCHING & WEIGHING up whether we evidence a Kingdom Humility:

- BEING WATCHED – all eyes on Jesus
- GETTING WATCHED – Jesus eyes on them
- And now in conclusion what I’m going to call – SELF-WATCHING – when our own eyes look back at ourselves to see if we evidence a humility of self-sacrifice & service or rather something more akin to seeking our own profit & loss.

### **Introduction**

Remembrance Sunday brings onto the stage this morning a wealth of scenery. Scenery that is really quite familiar now to most of us – poppies, people lining up around the various cenotaphs.

And yet it is only familiar **because** we make a point – a very definite point of marking this day each and every single year.

Remembrance Sunday is a day where people are encourage to WATCH ON – here too at Kennet Radio – the day will feature as something to which importance attaches (especially at that traditional 11 o’clock hour).

And just as Remembrance Day incorporates people WATCHING ON – so today our story from Luke’s gospel centres around people WATCHING.

### The scene

Well, let me set the scene – everything in this story takes place around the dinner table and so if you wanted a simple heading for what is to follow I guess you could simply call it “TABLE TALK”.

I don’t know if you’ve ever thought about the best settings for good and in depth conversations to take place. One such is when you go out for a walk – perhaps it’s the fresh air, the scenery – perhaps just the change of location that loosens the tongue and encourages us to talk, to chat, to unburden our hearts.

Another brilliant setting is of course meal times – perhaps in your home it is one of the few places that still exist when people actually talk to each other – well that is if the TELLY isn’t the centre of focus with everyone perching their plates on their laps while strictly is on!!

Reading the various stories in the gospels we quickly see how much teaching goes on, **EITHER** on the road as they travel **OR** in people's homes eating food.

### Jesus is being setup

Now if you are following this at home, the story we are covering, this morning, is the one we find at the start of **Luke chapter 14** – and one of the very first things you realise is that Jesus is invited to a fairly posh Sabbath day meal (it is at the house of a prominent Pharisee – so this chap is an important religious leader in the scheme of things) – but, I think, more important than that – **we need to see that Jesus is being setup.**

Well, before we go any further – let's hear **the opening part of Luke 14**:

\*\*\* READ Luke 14v1-6 \*\*\*

Perhaps you noticed what came at the end of the very first verse – let me read the verse again:

Verse 1 "One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, <b>he was being watched.</b> "
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So I am going to entitle our **FIRST OF THREE STORY SECTIONS**:

## **1. Being Watched (Verses 1-6)**

Now an obvious question we probably ought to ask is – **Q. Why was Jesus being watched?**

The passage gives us two pretty solid clues:

- **FIRST** – it was all taking place on the **Sabbath** – a day set apart, a day not like any others in the week – a day when special rules and regulations were applied – and that very strictly by the religious policemen of the day – the Pharisees and the experts in the Law of Moses
- **SECONDLY** – Jesus was being watched because they had, no doubt deliberately, invited along a man suffering from the **dropsy**.

Now in modern-day medical parlance – dropsy is what we call **EDEMA** – this is when excessive amounts of fluid collect in the body's tissues, (often in the legs and the feet) – and towards the end of life this can be a sign of heart or kidney failure.

So this man was quite possibly in a serious way – perhaps quite a pitiful sight – a man whose life was **a tale of some considerable misery**.

Now up to this point, in Luke's gospel Jesus has on multiple occasions healed people on the Sabbath day – and the problem was that according to the Jewish Rabbinical laws (**of which there were no less than 613!**) – healing on the Sabbath was considered as **WORKING** – and so it was strictly **FORBIDDEN**.

Their design was to catch Jesus in **EITHER** what he would say **OR** more probably in what he would do.

It was all part of an on-going and increasing policy of spying on Jesus so as to accumulate a body of evidence that would be used to engineer his downfall!

So you might say, these Pharisees were really being very hospitable hosts in inviting Jesus to dine with them.

However, **the man was clearly bait** – and Jesus was never going to stand idly by when confronted by a man whose life was a bit of a “living hell” – you see - **man’s misery** is something that always moved Jesus. One good example comes in:

Matthew’s gospel and chapter 9 verses 35-36: “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and **healing every disease and sickness**. When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** on them, because they were **harassed** and **helpless**, like sheep without a shepherd.”

#### A dilemma for Jesus

So Jesus clearly knew what they were up to – he saw through the shallow veneer of hospitality.

The dilemma he had boiled down to a couple of apparent options – (neither of which will leave him in a good place):

- **EITHER** – he does nothing – he keeps his counsel to himself and ignores the very obvious and pitiful plight of the man.

This will open him to the criticism that he does not really care about people – he is not actually as compassionate as he would like people to believe.

- **OR** – if he heals the man then clearly he is a Law-Breaker and should be shunned by the people.

#### Turning the tables

They had seriously hoped to get Jesus on the back foot – to catch him on the hop – but very easily he turns the tables and gets to the heart of the matter:

Q. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not”?

Well – the issue that was formerly being kept under the table is now out in the open and the law experts are apparently stumped because they don’t have anything they wish to say on the matter.

You see – now the dilemma is passed in their direction:

- **IF** they stick the letter of their own law – then they will seem rather rigid and harsh, overlooking this man’s misery.
- **IF** they lay the Law aside, then maybe people will consider them to be Law-breakers.

#### How ridiculous your laws are

Jesus then sweeps away any notion that this is a tricky problem – by pointing out the total inconsistency

of doing nothing just because it is the Sabbath day. Their own law allowed them to rescue an animal who fell into some misfortune (**such as tumbling into a well**) – so how could they place this man and his very obvious misery at any lesser level of importance!!

**Ouch!** No wonder that once again they have nothing to say. Nothing that they can really say – because Jesus has said it all.

We love the spectacular

Q. Wouldn't you just like to know what exactly happened when Jesus laid his hands on this man with the huge swollen legs or feet?

We all tend to be a little bit nose-y – Q. Was it like watching a balloon slowly deflate? But Luke doesn't give us any details at all since this is not what we should be watching as readers of the story. No, Luke simply records that Jesus just sends the man away.

Q. Did you ever wonder why he does that? After all, the man is not going to get any lunch!! Well, I guess Jesus knows that this poor man was not really being invited for the meal, he was only there for other reasons – and so really this was a bit of a mercy sending him off and away from the dragons den!

So much for all their plans!

Well so much for all their so carefully laid plans and all their close watching of Jesus.

It had spectacularly backfired on them – and now the spotlight has swung round on them and exposed their sham pretence of Religiously Policing the law. All their **proud indignation** at Jesus breaking the Sabbath day law is shown up as being only a **threadbare legalism of the most uncaring kind**.

Saved by the bell!

Well if there was ever a case of being “**saved by the bell**” this was it – the guests are now summoned away from their **pre-prandial drinks** and are ushered into the dining room to take their seats.

## 2. Getting Watched (Verse 7-11)

So, we are following the events of a Sabbath day meal where Jesus is supposedly the guest of honour, but is really **nothing of the kind!** This is just one more “**Pharisee stich-up operation!**”

They are **spying on Jesus** and trying to set him up. They have been **watching closely** his every move and his every word.

But now as we come to the meal table – Jesus is going to tell them a story, a parable and this time – rather than them watching him, he lets them know that he, in fact, has been closely watching them.

Let's hear the next section (and this is **Luke 14 verses 7 thru 11**):

\*\*\* READ Luke 14v7-11 \*\*\*

Did you catch how Luke introduces the parable - speaking of Jesus he says: "When he **noticed** how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, he told them this parable..."

Little do the Pharisees know that they now are being monitored, closely watched by Jesus.

And I imagine that Jesus has no less a sense of sadness and of compassion as he looks at the Pharisees as they engage in a rather **ignominious scramble** for all the best seats around the table.

Feeling Indignant -> Feeling Important

- Now if these religious people, **before the meal**, were evidently → **FEELING INDIGNANT**
- Now, **at the meal**, they are -> **FEELING IMPORTANT**

Everyone wants to be noticed

Now, I don't suppose I need to prove the point that in life – **everyone wants to be noticed**.

We all have, I would suggest, what you might call – "**an insistent need to feel important**" – (\*\* now I'm not saying that everyone wants to be prominent, up there on stage and in the spotlight \*\*) – but we have a hunger, maybe even a craving, to feel that **we count for something** – that in some way or another **our life is making a mark, making a difference**.

And for the **Pharisees** – (these very religious people) – this is **quite some pre-occupation of theirs** – Jesus observes how everyone negotiates the best positions.

A word about DINING ROOMS

**For a moment – let me just say something about DINING ROOMS.**

In a Roman household, (and yes I know this was a very Jewish setting, but I suspect that the differences were probably not so very great) – they had a DINING ROOM called the **TRICLINIUM** – which you could roughly translate as THREE COUCHES.

And the general idea was that these were arranged in a **U shape** with the **TOP TABLE** (or couch in this case) being at the bottom of the U shape and then the most important seats were those directly to the left.

Everyone wanted to be placed the closest to the person or persons on the top couch.

As a brief aside

As a brief aside at this point:

Q. Did you ever wonder why it might have been that the disciples of Jesus after the Last Supper started arguing about who was the greatest?

Very possibly it was all sparked off by the seating plan at that important meal.

Q. Were they comparing the positions that they had had during the meal, were some of them boasting that they were just 2 seats along from the Lord?

Certainly, I think, it's not beyond the limits of possibility.

## THE PARABLE

Anyway, back to our story, and in particular to the **PARABLE** that Jesus now tells – and notice that it **IS** a **PARABLE**.

Q. Now why do I flag this up?

- Well **FIRSTLY** – because the Scripture here tells us so – and normally the Bible does not waste space on telling us things that are of absolutely no significance whatsoever.
- And **SECONDLY** – because a parable is more than just an interesting story – it is a little snippet of narrative that powerfully illustrates and makes vivid - a **SPIRITUAL POINT**.

Not a lesson in table manners!

It would be really quite easy to go away from this parable thinking that Jesus is simply giving them a slightly wiser and more helpful approach to taking your seat at a dinner party.

Nothing much more than “**table manners**” and the rules of “**Kingdom etiquette!**”

## The SPIRITUAL POINT

The SPIRITUAL POINT comes directly at the end of the parable (as it tends to in quite a lot of the parables in the NT) – it is there in **Verse 11** and says:

**“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Just as Jesus is **\*NOT\*** simply trying to give them some **IMPROVED POLICY** for taking their seats at a dinner do, he is also **\*NOT\*** trying here to make a **MORAL POINT**.

No this whole section can’t be reduced to “**MERE MORALS**” – **RATHER** he is laying down, what you might call, a “**KINGDOM PRINCIPLE**”.

It has to do with **life everlasting**, it has an **eternal dimension to it**.

Let me try and demonstrate that a bit more drawing from some other words that Jesus said when he spoke to the Pharisees on another occasion – this is from Matthew’s gospel and Chapter 23 – and forms part of the introduction to Jesus delivering 7 woes upon them - he said:

**“The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”**

Radical humility – a mark of the Kingdom

You see - Jesus is giving to us a really important **“CLUE TO THE KINGDOM”** – he is saying that where a **radical humility** evidences itself in a person’s life – then that is a **good sign**, that is a **strong clue** – that that person is truly a child of God, truly one born-again of the Spirit – and saved by the shed blood of Jesus.

Can this really be true?

Now if you’re thinking:

Q. Can this really be true?

Q. Isn’t Jesus just giving us some helpful lifestyle tips here – showing us that humility is basically a good thing?

Well ponder for a moment – **the Sermon on the Mount** and in particular the way it begins, there in Matthew Chapter 5.

It starts with those things we call **the Beatitudes** – a series of qualities, or evidences, that taken together, form a **profile for what a true gospel Christian looks like** – and this is **distinctly \*NOT\* the same as a “polaroid picture” of a generally upright and moral person.**

Notice where the Beatitudes begin - the very first one says **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”** – the 2nd one: **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”**

Now these are clearly *\*not\** saying that it is a really great thing if you are in poverty and if you are grieving – *\*no\** these are Spiritual, Kingdom attributes, and, heading up this list of criteria – **we understand that they are detailing where a truly saved person begins.**

They will be acutely aware of the fact that in Spiritual terms – they are bankrupt – in themselves, they bring nothing to the table and do totally rely on God and His grace to reach out to them.

Not only that they are those who are seriously aware and bothered by their sinfulness. They look within and they cannot overlook how deeply sinful they are and so they are grieved over their state.

And so it is not hard to see that a person who is *\*NOT\** deeply humbled *\*HAS NOT YET\** entered the Kingdom of God.

Put that another way HUMILITY is the front door, the gateway to the Kingdom of God.

Well what began as 1) Being Watched has gone on as 2) Getting Watched – well in a moment we will see that there is yet one final section – but before that ...

### **3. Self-Watching (Verses 12-14)**

Thus far we have been following Jesus, there in Luke 14, having a Sabbath day dinner with some of the top religious people of the day.

It all began with them very closely scrutinizing his every step – they have tried to catch him out by

planting a very sick man right in front of him.

But Jesus has turned the tables on them, silenced them and healed the man.

Well, the dinner gong went, and we have followed Jesus to the table and we get learn that it is now the turn of Jesus to be watching and commenting on the actions of the Pharisees as they scramble for all the best places at the table.

Jesus has then **told them a story** and given them an **immutable Kingdom Principle** – stated in these simple, yet very profound words:

**“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

So thus far we have had:

- No. #1 - BEING WATCHED – all eyes on Jesus
- No. #2 - GETTING WATCHED – Jesus eyes on them
- So in conclusion what I want to call – #3 SELF-WATCHING – when with our own eyes we look back at ourselves

So let’s hear **the closing couple of verses** where Jesus turns to address the **HOST** of the dinner party:

\*\*\* READ Luke 14v12-14 \*\*\*

Jesus points out that playing host at a dinner, in and of itself, does not demonstrate that you are a generous and caring person, **BECAUSE** it may well be done so that you, on another occasion, will be in receipt of a **return invitation!**

True humility, true evidence of the working of God in your life, is when you have a **self-forgetfulness about you** and thus you go to people who have nothing much and can’t repay you at all – people who perhaps struggle with some debilitating illness, people who have little or no sight, those who are deaf and for whom communication is very challenging, those who are crippled and can’t easily get around.

Remembrance Day

**Returning to where we set out - this Remembrance Sunday is a good day for WATCHING.**

As we see people gathering to reflect on those who have paid a high price for our present day freedoms.

We WATCH and we REMEMBER that in the midst are the twin themes of:

- SACRIFICE
- & SERVICE

And as we go to turn away, our story this morning advises us to turn our EYES around on ourselves – to do some **“SELF-WATCHING”** and to see if our own HUMILITY takes on a rather different melody to it:



- Perhaps one of PROFIT & LOSS
- Perhaps one that is – what shall we say - “PROUD” & “LOUD” – a very “me-first denial” of all that the Kingdom of God evidences

A suggestion

Let me finish with this suggestion:

When the 2-minute silence is over – and you have reflected on the selfless SACRIFICE and SERVICE of so very many that have gone before – **take a moment to weigh up Jesus’ TIMELESS AXIOM, his unchangeable statement of a KINGDOM CRITERION** – so that you may observe where you presently stand.

Let me leave you with that PRINCIPLE – but this time taken up by the pen of the apostle Peter where we read:

“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

**“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, **that** he may lift you up in due time.”

**Well - may God sign, seal and deliver that word and make it truly stick – for Jesus’ sake - AMEN**