

The Heart of the Kingdom...

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[0 : 0 0] Are we well? Yeah, we're a bit sleepy, aren't we? Great to be here this morning. Why don't we just pause as we come to God's Word this morning and let's pray and let's ask that He'd be so kind and gracious to us and that He would speak to us this morning. Let's pray together. Dear Father, as we turn to Your Word now, our prayer is that You would capture our hearts with the all-surpassing greatness of Your Son, Jesus Christ. And would You fill our hearts, Lord, maybe even for the first time this morning, for a fresh, with a fresh love for Him and a desire to know Him more. And so it's in His name that we pray these things. Amen. Well, I wonder if there's anyone here this morning and you have a phobia of something.

According to phobialist.com, there is actually such a thing as that website. There are 530 official recognized phobias. Now, I learned of a new one this week. It's on the screen.

It's called Me-phobia. And it's the fear of becoming so great that the world is no longer able to handle you. Now, just in case you wondered whether that is actually a real phobia, really it's a tongue-in-cheek way of telling somebody that they're a little bit proud. It's not a term you use of yourself. It's a term that you use of someone else to tell them that they're a little bit proud. Well, what we're going to see this morning is we're going to see Jesus at a meal.

And at this meal, He's going to interact with some people who have come down with a serious dose of me-phobia. So, would you like to grab a Bible and turn to Luke chapter 14? That's where we are this morning. And as you're turning there, let me get you up to speed with where we're going this morning.

If you remember last week, Alistair helped us see the big question of this new section of Luke's gospel. Jesus has been speaking about His kingdom, this upside-down kingdom, where the first are last and the last are first. This kingdom that is full of followers, not of fans. And it's a kingdom that's full of people. And so the question that we've got to be asking ourselves in this section of Luke's gospel is, what are the marks of this kingdom people? What does the people of Jesus' kingdom, what do they look like? What are they characterized by? Well, here's what we're going to see this morning. Is it humility? Is it the heart of the kingdom? And now here's the warning before we dive into these verses, that Jesus is going to go after your heart this morning. He's going to probe, and He's going to search, and He's going to expose, and He's going to challenge, and He's going to transform your heart. Why is He going to do that? Because that's what He does. That our God loves us too much to see us stay the way we are. So if you're here this morning, and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, and we love that you're here. We absolutely love that you're here. You're so welcome. But Jesus is going after your heart this morning, because He wants you to come to know Him.

[3 : 1 7] If you are a Christian here this morning, then Jesus is going to go after your heart, because God, your Father is committed to the business of transforming you, His child, day after day after day after day more into the likeness of His Son. So Jesus, in these verses, is going to go after your heart this morning. What I want us to see as we work our way through is that there are two confessions at the heart of a humble heart. Two confessions that we'll see that these men that we meet this morning. Two confessions that they don't have, and two confessions that Luke is telling us, as the readers, that we need to have. So Luke 14, let's just read it together from verse 1.

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? But they remained silent.

So, taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. Then he asked him, if one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?

And they had nothing to say. When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, he told him this parable. When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, give this person your seat. Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

But when you're invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, friend, move up to a better place. Then you will be honoured in the presence of all the other guests.

[5 : 25] For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Then Jesus said to his hosts, when you give a lunch or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbours. If you do, then they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. Amen. And I'm sure God will bless the reading of his holy words this morning. So here's confession number one, verses one to six of chapter 14 of a humble heart.

Jesus, you are right and I am wrong. So come with me. Verse one, Jesus is at a meal. So this ruler of the Pharisees has invited Jesus to join him and his Pharisee buddies at dinner.

And Jesus accepts. Now from everything that we've seen in Luke's gospel so far, we may well have expected Jesus to say, dine with you guys? Are you kidding me?

I've actually got some paint at home that I need to watch dry on the wall. But Jesus goes. He goes to this meal. Why does he go? Because he's concerned about the hearts of these men. But Luke lets us know.

Do you see in the text that this was no olive branch invitation from the Pharisees to Jesus? What are they doing? They're watching him carefully. And as if by magic, verse two, behold, behold, says Luke, that's meant to get our attention. Behold, this man with dropsy appears in front of him. This man suffering from intense swelling. And because of his suffering, he would have been rendered unclean and he would not have been allowed to enter the temple. And yet this man just happens to show up at dinner at the ruling Pharisee's house. I'm not buying it. This is a sting operation. This man has been planted there quite deliberately by the Pharisees. Notice when?

[7 : 49] On the Sabbath to get a reaction from Jesus. No small talk at this arrival from this dinner. No mood music to create an ambiance. This dinner party has well and truly kicked off. Jesus, knowing the intentions of these men, he responds with his own words. Do you see verse four?

Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? Genius. Genius. Here's why it's genius. If they say yes, then having Jesus there but forbidding him to heal is lacking compassion and mercy. And if they say no, then they risk admitting that they were wrong the whole time, dividing themselves and having their whole organization and manner of life questioned. Genius question. Checkmate move from Jesus.

See how they respond. They remained silent. And in passing, notice the quite distasteful way that they are treating this man. Like he, this human being who has been so beautifully and wonderfully made in the image of his creator God, this human being is some kind of fodder for their spectator sport.

They have no love for this man. They have no compassion for this man. But Jesus does. And the funny thing is, is what the Pharisees did in using this man as a pawn in their scheme.

Best thing that ever happened to him. Jesus touched him. Do you see Jesus again getting involved in their lives, these messy lives? Jesus touched him and he healed him and he sends him away. Just like that.

[9 : 34] Verse 5. Jesus isn't done. Which one of you? Again, do you feel the language? Which one of you? He speaks to them. Having a son or an ox which has fallen into a ditch won't pull him out. Answer none of them.

Verse 6. They have nothing to say. Nothing to say. Pin drop in this moment. And here's what we need to see. The Pharisees at this point, instead of waving the white flag and saying, you win Jesus, you were right, they cannot bring themselves to say, Jesus, you are right and we are wrong. Now why? Do they have an intellectual problem that Jesus is saying here?

No. They cannot say it because of the stubbornness in their own hearts. And because of the stubbornness in their own hearts, they will not budge. The confession of their hearts for no other reason than their own pride is that Jesus, we are right and you are wrong.

And as Luke invites us in, as he tells us about this incident in Luke 14, he's saying, this is what a kingdom heart doesn't look like. So what is the state of your heart this morning before our Lord? What is the state of your heart this morning before Jesus? Do you see yourself in these men? Are you here this morning? And for no other reason than your own pride, you will not raise the white flag in surrender to Jesus.

[11 : 11] Now could this morning be the first day where you render submission to this King? Jesus, you are king and you are right and I am not.

But let me ask you, maybe you are here this morning and you're thinking to yourself, listen, I've made that confession. I made that confession when I was six. Let me ask you, is that confession day by day, hour after hour, minute after minute, is it working its way through your life?

Jesus, you are right. You are right and I am wrong. Now let me show you what I mean by this. Our little girl, Chloe at the minute, she's really into climbing, just loves climbing.

And in our flat, we've got a toy box and she loves to climb on top of that toy box but the only thing that we know that she doesn't know is that when she presses up against the glass, that there's a 15 foot drop the other side of that single pane glass and she would probably go to her death.

Chloe, come down from the toy box. Chloe, come down from the toy box. Again, and again, and again, and again. The other day she did it. She climbed on the toy box. Chloe, sweetheart, please come down off the toy box.

[12 : 25] So she looks me right in the eye and she proceeds to slowly come down on the toy box. She leaves her right leg up. And it's one of the surreal moments in life when you're looking at her thinking, I'm having a showdown with my two-year-old daughter.

Where have you learned this stuff? And why are you good at this stuff? But the confession of her heart in that moment, Dad, you're kind of right.

Dad, you're kind of right. And because you're kind of right, I'm going to offer you semi-obedience. A kingdom heart, one that says, Jesus, you are right and I am wrong, does not offer him semi-obedience.

Is there an area of your life where right now you've still got your right leg on the toy box? Think about your own life for a minute. You know what God has said in his words. You know what an honoring life to Jesus looks like.

And you may not be like these Pharisees who will 100% not budge. Let me ask you in your life right now, is there an area where you 20% won't budge? Is there an area of your life where you 10% won't move?

[13 : 35] in your relationships, in your conduct at work, in your speech, the way that you speak about people, in the way that you use your money, in the way that you use your free time, in your dreams, in your aspirations for your own life.

A kingdom heart does not 80% submit to him. A kingdom heart does not 90% conform to his word. A kingdom heart offers Jesus 100% devotion. That's a kingdom heart.

Humility is at the heart of the kingdom. Confession number one. Jesus, you are right and I am wrong.

Here's confession number two, verses 7 to 14 of chapter 14. Jesus, you are first and I am last. Verse seven, we're back at this dinner party.

I'm sure the atmosphere would have been at this point a bit frosty, but mercifully, it's time for folks to take their seats for the meal. Now we might not get the full force, no sorry, to get the full force of what Jesus is saying here, we need to understand a bit about how a meal worked in the first century.

[14 : 45] The table would have been shaped something like a U and the host would have sat at the bottom of the U. And so the position of honour at one of these meals was on the immediate left or the immediate right of the host.

You can understand the closer to the host that you sat, the more important you were considered to be. And the flip side is also true, that the further away from the host you sat, the less important you were considered to be.

So what does Jesus do at this meal? He just hangs back, he watches this all unfold. He watches these men, probably elbows and all, battle their way to the top.

Battle their way to be top dog. You can imagine them, can't you? One man so obviously coming in and hanging his coat really obviously over the right hand seat. Another man coming in and getting a

cup and putting big letters, Mark a pen, Bob slamming it down, that's his seat. They want these seats. And Jesus, observing all this going on, tells them a parable at verse 8. About a wedding feast.

[15:48] Now we might not immediately click with the U-shaped table, but we do click with the wedding feast. You know what it's like the moment when it comes to dinner time. You go in to the hall, what do you see?

You see the seating plan. Now we don't normally have a ranking order, but we do have a top table. And close to the front normally comes the close family members and other members of the wedding party.

And if you made it onto the list as a plus one afterthought, you're probably somewhere at the back. Jesus, as he watches these men jostle for position, he speaks to them and he appeals to their sense of knowing what a wedding feast is like.

Would it not be better, says Jesus, if instead of presumptuously racing to the top of the table and taking your seat next to the bride before being confronted by an angry groom who tells you to take the walk of shame to the lowest place and there's no other seats left in the house because all the other guests have taken them and you're humiliated, would it not be better if you took the lowest seat in the house and the groom came over and said to you, dear friend, you don't deserve to be here, come on up.

What are you? You're honoured in front of all the guests. Publicly honoured because you were bumped up rather than downgraded. You ever had that experience on a flight before?

[17:09] Remember when we were young? My dad, we've got two brothers, my dad always used to make us dress really smart because of this reason. But you know what? We laugh at him, one time he absolutely nailed it.

And I remember that moment as we got onto the plane instinctively, what do you do? You go right? No, no, no, sir. Show me your ticket. Hey, you're going left. The thing about these men is they have walked in and they have presumptuously assumed that they're going left when in actual fact they should be going right.

Now what's Jesus getting at? He's not interested in seats. He's getting at the heart. What's going on in the hearts of these men? I need to get ahead.

I need to be in the spotlight. I need to be recognized. And Jesus looks at them and he lays out the principle of his kingdom at verse 11.

If you want to be humbled, go right ahead and exalt yourself. If you want to be exalted, then go right ahead and humble yourself. Humility is at the heart of the kingdom.

[18:18] C.S. Lewis, humility is not thinking less of yourself. It's thinking of yourself less. Jesus then proceeds to talk to the host of the party. Do you see it?

Verse 12. I'll be honest, I'm amazed he's even still at this party at this point. He's offended the guests. He's at a pop at their habits. And here he is talking to the host. What does he say?

Can I make a few observations about your invite list? Can I see the names? Can I see the names? The only people that you tend to invite to these things are the people who are in a position to give you something back.

When was the last time, when was the last time that you invited somebody to one of your parties who had absolutely nothing that they could give you in return? No connections, no prestige, no glitz and glamour.

In particular, if you're struggling to picture them, the crippled, the lame, the blind. Those who have literally got nothing to give you back in return. Now I doubt that this man has ever, ever done that in his life.

[19:19] But here's the crux of it. Why should he? Why should he? I mean, who's this guy, Jesus? He just rocks up and tells me how to run my life. Why should he? Because he's at the heart of who God is, right at the heart of who our Savior is.

And it's at the heart of the gospel. The God who simply, because he is gracious, welcomes the unclean to come and dine with him. Because a heart of humility sees oneself not as the giver of the invitation, but as the recipient of the invitation.

And a recipient who knows that we cannot ever possibly fully repay God, our host. And we are simply at his table because of his free grace. We are the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

And this is who our God is. And Jesus, in the wider context of Luke's gospel, is on his way to the cross to make a way for his people not to be at God's table simply as an afterthought, but to be at God's table as his adopted sons and daughters.

The gospel is incredible and we see it right here in Luke 14. This is how the kingdom works. And this is how kingdom people think. And Jesus is here saying to this man that there is a direct link between how you operate and how you treat others and how you think and perceive God has treated you.

[20 : 46] The second confession of a kingdom heart, Jesus, you are first and I am last. As we seek to apply this to our lives, let me just bring one challenge and one observation.

As we work to a close. Firstly, the challenge. This confession of Jesus, you first and me last. It needs to work through every single aspect of our lives.

It needs to work in our wallets, Jesus, you first, I'm last. It needs to work in our schedules, our weeks, Jesus, you first, me last. It needs to work in our priorities, Jesus, you first, me last.

It needs to work through our dreams and ambitions that we have for our own lives, Jesus, you first and me last. Submitting to Jesus and willfully bringing ourselves to say, Jesus, you first and me last. My prayer this week has just been, Lord, would you help me take my eyes off myself? Help me take my eyes off myself.

[21 : 54] Would you help me to be more aware of people? People in the church, but people outside the church as well. The staff who look after my girls at nursery, the shop assistant who serves me at Tesco.

Father, would you help me see that these people are not just here to serve me, that these are people who you've put in my path deliberately, and would you help me have a heart that takes a loving interest in these people and wants to serve them?

Why? Because that's what you've done for me. You are so good to me, Lord. So let me ask you, is there people in your life that you can think of? How is this going to play out in your own life?

Jesus, you first, your agenda first, your kingdom first, me last. That's the challenge. Here's the encouragement. I see a lot of you doing this.

I see a lot of you doing this. The way that some of you serve one another so sacrificially, the way that some of you, I see it behind the scenes, you give up your time, the way that some of you practically care and love for other people, and you get nothing in return.

[23 : 07] Accept the thought and truth in your mind that I'm living for the last day when I will meet my Savior face to face and he will say to me, well done, good and faithful servant, which I presume in the language of this passage here means when you'll be exalted at the resurrection of the just.

That's what some of you are living for. I see it, and it's inspirational. And is it not a wonderful witness as we do this as a church family? Is it not a wonderful witness to the watching world of the truth of the gospel?

That Jesus is alive and by his Spirit the Father lives in the hearts of his people? That I want people from the outside to look into my life individually and to look into our lives corporately and say that there is no explanation for how those people love one another except that the gospel is true.

Humility is at the heart of the kingdom. Humility is at the heart of the kingdom. Two confessions of a humble heart.

Jesus, you're right and I'm wrong and Jesus, you're first and I'm last. We started out joking about me-phobia.

[24 : 27] I hope you've seen as we've journeyed through this that Jesus, well Luke is telling us that Jesus' kingdom is completely opposite. What does a kingdom heart look like? What does it mean to have these confessions at the heart of your heart?

Well as we close let me just tell you a story of a minister from Glasgow named John Harper. It was great, we were talking about him this week in our home group. 1912, he's on his way with his six-year-old daughter to Chicago to speak at the famous Moody Church.

Now it was rumored that he went, they invited him to speak because they had him down as being their next minister. Now that's a wonderful life opportunity, that is a wonderful career progression, especially since this church had just experienced a time of great revival.

And in April 1912, they set sail for America along with thousands of others on board the Titanic. The iceberg hits and John Harper's first thought is not, what of my job, his first thought is what of these people on this boat who do not know Jesus Christ as the Lord, King and Saviour.

Sees his daughter onto the lifeboat, makes sure that she's safe. Then not only does he not get on the lifeboat, but he takes off his life jacket and he hands it to someone else, saying, you need this more than me.

[25 : 49] And the ship goes down, he finds himself in icy waters and he comes across this young man. Do you know Jesus, young man? He says. And I don't, replies the man. And they drift apart.

A little while later, they drift together again. Do you know Jesus yet? Says John Harper to this young man. No, I don't, says this man. John Harper sinks to his death. Now, incredibly, seven people were hauled from the icy waters that night, including Anguilla Webb, the young man that John Harper had spoken to in the icy waters.

So he stands up in his church at home and he makes this confession. He says, there alone in the night and with two miles of water underneath me, I first believed.

And I am John Harper's last convert. So in the face of death and drowning, there is a man who is concerned for Jesus' kingdom, not his own career.

There is a man who, despite the fact that he was about to lose everything, said that in Jesus, I have everything. two confessions of a humble heart.

[26 : 55] Jesus, you're right and I'm wrong. Jesus, you're first and I'm last. Humility is at the heart of the kingdom. Just as we close and just before we move on with the rest of our service, why don't we just pause and let's have a moment of reflection and then I'll close in prayer.

and maybe there's someone here for the first time this morning convicted that you need to say in your own life, Jesus, you're right and I'm wrong.

and so Father, we thank you for your word this morning.

We ask, dear God, that you would help us by your spirit to take our eyes off of ourselves and by your spirit help us this week to place them and affix them on your son, Jesus Christ.

Would you help us to be humble like him? And so this is our prayer, dear Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.