

How are we. Not a lot to do today, but there's some weight to it. Let's go to Luke 14. Here's the thing that makes Jesus difficult. He's going to go after your heart. He is going to ruthlessly and aggressively pursue your heart, and most of us do not want that. What we want is to work for Him. That's what we want. "I'll work for You. I'll open up my home for home group, I won't watch this type of movie, I won't do this, I will do this, I'll go to this, I won't go to this. Just leave my heart alone." So we want to work for Him, but we don't want Him pressing on our hearts. We don't want Him digging around for core issues. We don't want Him engaging us at some real deep, personal level. We simply want to be good people and do good things as we define that, which is usually slightly better than the jerks we know, and then leave us alone. So we almost develop this relationship with God that looks something like this: "I'll do the things You ask me to do that are surface level things, and I'd rather not talk about anything else." And so we set out doing religious things, going to church, joining a Beth Moore Bible study. God knows you can not love Jesus in the Bible Belt without going to one of those if you're a woman. We do these things, but we want God to leave our hearts alone. The problem with this is over and over again God attacks right action that doesn't have a right heart to it. So right action without the right heart is in no way pleasing to God. Like in the book of Isaiah, God commands the people of Israel to have a day of fasting and worship, they all show up in fasting and worship and God says, "I hate your fasts." "Well wait a minute, I would rather eat. What are we doing here then? I'm here because You said fast and come sing. And then I get here and You're like, 'I hate your songs, and I hate you fasting.'" It's a little confusing, isn't it? Do you remember the accusation why? God says, "Because your hearts aren't here. You do not esteem Me. You have even taken this and made it about you."

I get in a lot of trouble here. I'm constantly getting e-mails because I mock and make fun of a lot of Evangelicalism. People are like, "That's just a reverse form of pride." No it's not. Where something has distinctively left biblical Christianity, it needs to be pointed out. And I just prefer to use satire. It's not reverse pride, it's what historically has been called heresy or unorthodoxy. And as far as satire goes, it's all over the Bible. For instance, Elijah and the prophets of Baal do a little duel up on the mountain. And the game is "Let's throw a sacrifice up on the altar and back away. You say a prayer and I'll say a prayer, and we'll see which God throws a fire out of the sky to ignite the altar." The prophets of Baal were like, "Bring it." So they went up there and they're praying and praying and praying, they're cutting themselves and praying to a god that doesn't exist to ignite this fire. Do you remember what Elijah asks them? "Uh, maybe he's taking a nap or something. Maybe he ran to the store." It was satire. It was mockery of what was false. Wherever you preach and teach that right action gets you right standing before God, you are unorthodox. You have strayed from what is biblical Christianity. Because Jesus is after the heart. And right action without a transformed heart lacks joy and it lacks worship. You were created for ever increasing joy and worship. So right action without a transformed heart still has you outside what God created you to be.

So what I want to do in Luke 14 is to show you how aggressively God goes after the heart, how aggressively Jesus goes after the heart, and I want to show you a pretty common response to it. Starting in verse 1, "One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees,..." So not just a Pharisee but the ruler of the Pharisees. "...he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully." That's a little awkward lunch, isn't it? If you're at lunch and everyone at the table is watching you carefully, that's awkward. Now let me show you why they're watching Him carefully. Look at verse 2. "And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy." Dropsy is a disorder where either your heart or liver is malfunctioning in such a way that your body begins to take on fluid and you begin to swell until you're disfigured. It was a disease that would have been marked as unclean. He would have been considered

outside the will of God, prohibited from the temple, prohibited from the teaching of the Torah. And yet this guy with dropsy, a guy who is viewed as culturally unclean just happens to show up at lunch at a ruling Pharisee's house who would have considered him unclean? Something reeks in all of this. Does this smell shady to anyone else? They're trying to trap Jesus here. Here's the thing about trapping Jesus though. It's really hard because He's God. So it's like if you ever had a group of 5th graders try to play a prank on you. The plan's just intrinsically flawed from the beginning. They're all dressed like ninjas, but it's 2:00 in the afternoon. It's just intrinsically flawed, not well thought out, impossible. So here's the trap, it's a dumb trap. Jesus has already healed seven men to this point; this will be number eight. He has healed seven men and women on the Sabbath, and yet their plan is to try it again. Here's the trap: Set up a lunch, invite Jesus, bring in the man with dropsy, if Jesus heals him, He's broken the law, and if Jesus doesn't heal him, He's able to and he lacks mercy and compassion. There's the trap. No matter what He does, they've got Him. No matter what He does here, they've got Him cornered, except for the whole "I'm God" thing. Verse 3, "And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?'" But they remained silent." By asking this question, He takes the trap off of Himself and springs it on them. Because if they say, "Yes, you can heal on the Sabbath," they've divided their own ranks and now they're the law breakers. And if they say, "No, it's not lawful to heal on the Sabbath," having Jesus there but forbidding Him to heal is them lacking compassion and mercy. "...they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, 'Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?'" And they could not reply to these things." It's not about the Sabbath at all, it's about the state of their heart. And here's what He just exposed in this question. "If it were your son, if it was someone you loved and cared for, you wouldn't follow so closely the letter of the law or build extra laws on a law. I'll take it a step farther. If it was your ox, if it was just one of your cattle by which you survive and make money, if it attacked your ability for gain, you would forsake the law in a heartbeat. But because you lack compassion, because you love nothing but what makes much of you, you harm and belittle people. You just invited a man who's spent his whole life in suffering and pain, who is unable to make ends meet, who is pretty much a beggar and an outcast and you tried to use him to trap Me. You lack compassion. You have a wicked, filthy heart." See, He's not talking about Sabbath. He's saying, "There's a way of the heart that will treat the Sabbath properly or improperly, so I don't want to talk to you about the Sabbath, I want to talk to you about your heart. Let Me expose something about your heart. It's wicked."

Alright, look where He goes next. Verse 7, "Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor..." I don't think we have a lot of cultural comparisons to this. In the 1st century, at a meal like this the table would have been shaped like a U. The host would have sat at the bottom of the U. The position of honor was on the left or the right of the host. So if you sat on the left or the right, you were socially up there on the ladder. And the farther away from the center seat you got, the more you were not that guy. So Jesus walks into lunch, and He just stands back and watches and all of these men are jostling for position. Like the first guy comes in, he writes his name on his cup and sets it right there on the left. The next guy comes in and licks the fork to the right and sets it back down. The next guy moves the cup to the next seat and sits down. There's this jostling for the positions of honor, so Jesus gets into a parable. Look at this. Verse 8, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Now again, this is not a bout seats. I do not think that the triune God is going, "That seat right there, that's the holy seat." Nor is this some sort of manipulative way of doing things so you act lowly so you might be exalted. That's not what this is. What Jesus is doing once again is getting to the core of their hearts. And it is that not only do they lack compassion but also they are apt to walking in a room, looking around and thinking that everyone else in there is subservient to them and exist to make much of them. He's onto these men because they walk in such an arrogant pride that they walk into a room and go, "There's no one in here greater than I. If

there's anyone in here who needs to be served, anyone who needs to be exalted, anyone in here who needs to be made much of, it's me. I'll take the seat to the right." He's after the heart. It doesn't have anything to do with chairs.

And these guys are like gluttons for punishment, because it doesn't read like anyone leaves. They just keep staying. And so Jesus isn't going to let it go. He just rolls right into another story. Now this one's painful. Luke 14:12, "He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." Now if you go to the book of Ecclesiastes, there are multiple commands to feast, to have dinner with your friends, your relatives and your neighbors. So what do we do when the Bible commands us both to and to not? You just pick whichever one you want, right? That's the wrong answer. Scripture interprets Scripture. It's the first rule of the Bible. So you've got to take these two and go, "What's going on here?" I'll contend the same thing I have since I started this sermon. This isn't about who comes and who doesn't come to the party. He is attacking a part of the heart. He's saying, "Here's who you guys are. Everyone you invite and everyone you run with and everyone you do life with and everyone you'll have in your home and everyone you extend mercy to, you only extend it to them because later they can make much of you. You have a wicked, evil heart." So this is what He does. Do you see that it's not so much external action as it is this root issue of the heart that's leading to these actions?

Now here's why most of us don't have problems with these kinds of texts. We don't think He's talking to us. We think that if we were back in these days, we'd be standing right next to Jesus going, "Mm hmm! I told them, Jesus, right before you got here. I said, 'You lack humility and you lack compassion, and woe to you!' And they wouldn't listen to me. You're listening to JC now, aren't you? I told you." And for some reason, we've got this thing in our mind that texts like this have nothing to do with us. No, we're the good guys. We're on Jesus' team. We're with Him going, "Woe to you guys. You're bad. You're naughty. We're on the Jesus team." Okay, well let's see. Do you see people? Let me ask you a better way. Do other people that you see have souls? Does the waitress that serves you at the restaurant have a soul? Is she human? Or does she only exist to take care of you? Your children's teachers, do they have souls? Your neighbors, your boss, your coworkers, the girl at the gym that slides your card, do these people have souls? The checkout lady at the grocery store, are these people human beings? Do you try to take the position of honor? I'll give you a better example, because we're worse than the Pharisees. The Pharisees would take social status by where you sat at dinner. Let me tell you where we take it. We take something that's just a necessity for life and we stylize it and turn it into levels of coolness. So we take something basic, like shoes, and we go, "No, no, no. Let's make \$400-500 shoes, and let's feel better about ourselves over others because we can afford (or not afford but get into debt on) \$500 shoes." So it's not the dinner table to us, it's pants, which is far stupider. Tell me that's not dumb. Tell me we don't set ourselves above others with things like cars, homes and dress. And we're trying to convince ourselves that we're on the JC team? It is my belief that the bulk of us see the world through lenses like the whole thing is a movie about us and everyone in it is a bit player placed there to make us better. And when it doesn't happen, we get angry. Where it doesn't happen, we feel disrespected. Where it doesn't happen, we get frustrated. "Everybody exists to make much of me, to serve me, to provide for me, to honor me, to exalt me. And where it doesn't happen, I feel disrespected and angry. Nobody else has a soul but me. Nobody else has emotion but me. Nobody else can be wounded but me. No one else can have a bad day but me. No one else can struggle but me. No one else has a soul but me." The reason this text doesn't bother us is because we don't think He's talking to us...but oh, He's talking to us.

And so when this happens, when Jesus starts to go after the heart, there's this reaction that happens. We don't want that. We really don't want that. Like I don't want Him to point out my lack of humility, my lack of compassion, my laziness, the fact that I think I'm god at some level. I don't want that.

How about this. How about I just lead a Bible study for you. And so let me show you what happens as he does this. And by the way, just to prove the point most people don't get it when Jesus talks, look at verse 15. Jesus just went after these guys ruthlessly, about their heart, about their lack of humility, about their lack of compassion. He's just on them. Now look at verse 15. "When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" If Jesus could get confused, that would have done it. Jesus is like, "You have evil, wretched hearts." This guy's like, "Yeah!" Now look at how they respond as Jesus exposed their hearts. This is such the game that most of us play. "But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'" So we hear the gospel, at some place, at some level, our hearts become awakened to it and we immediately set out to do what is right and avoid what is wrong, correct? And that works for us. We actually start feeling this "God is good, He's gracious, He's all..." And then what happens? In the middle of "I'm going to do right and I'm going to avoid doing what's wrong," God identifies this area of our heart and He starts to ask about it, "Hey, what is this?" And what happens in that moment is we go, "Oh yeah, I don't want to talk about that. I don't want to deal with that. How about this, how about I do this, this and this and then You just leave that alone and I'll give you this instead? How about instead of dealing with that, instead of confessing that, instead of dealing with that, instead of coming clean with that, how about instead I just teach a small group or I'll memorize Scripture? I'll memorize Scripture and You leave that alone." And Jesus goes, "No, I want that." And so what we do is busy ourselves with religious, right moral action in an attempt to run from God penetrating the heart. And this is why you get a weak, retarded version of Christianity. Because you've got people who are all busy doing things but don't have a heart transformed. So you don't have worship, you don't have joy. You just have things to do. And if you do them well, then you get to look at other people who aren't doing those things well and feel superior. All the while Jesus goes after the heart. Isn't it funny that you can use religion to run from Him?

So it's hard to know what's really going on inside you. I mean at some level, every one of us has this set of confessions that we say we believe and parts of our lives that don't line up to it. Can we agree on that? Let's say it like this. We're all at some level hypocrites. I don't care, religious or irreligious. When irreligious people go, "The church is filled with hypocrites," our response should be, "Absolutely it is. How crazy is it that God loves them?" Now because the heart is deceitful and you can never really figure out what's actually going on in there, the Scriptures really lay out a way to see what's going on in your heart. So you can get out of just the intellectual exercise, which is a necessity. You shouldn't shut off your mind to love the Lord. Your mind should very much be a part of you loving the Lord, but there are ways the intellect can deceive you and there ways your emotions and your heart can deceive you. So God's saying, "Watch these areas, watch these areas. If you watch these areas, they'll show you exactly what's going on in your heart." Let me give you the three that I know of in Scripture. The first one is affection for God. Do you have any? I don't care if you come to church or not. I don't care if you don't cuss in front of your kids. I don't care if you don't watch rated- R movies unless they're about Jesus. Do you have any real affection for God? I don't care if you drink or don't drink. Those are dumb old debates. I don't care how you dress. Do you have any real affection for God? The other one's more painful. It's one of the ones Jesus lines up most often. How do you spend your money? The Scriptures say that how you spend your money will show you what you really worship and what you really value. In the end, that reveals something about where your heart really is. So you can say whatever you want with your mind, you can know all the right answers with your mind, but

your checkbook and your affection will reveal whether or not you're a liar. And then the third one is found in 1 John 2. "No man can love the Father who hates his brother." How do you see, how do you treat people? You see, we get so busy with right action that we try to use it in a way to hide our hearts from God. Can we go back to Josh Patterson's video? God pressed on his heart that what was in his heart was wicked. Where did he run to? Church. And he got super busy in all these Christian activities, but they don't bring life. And Jesus wouldn't let his heart alone. That's the thing about the Holy Spirit - once you let Him in, you're in a whole lot of trouble. And when did healing, when did transformation take place?

Let me tell you why in that moment where God reveals how wicked your heart really is you're so, so, so close to the banquet table. The last six years have been a lot of fun for me. There have been a lot of people who have come to know the Lord. There have been a lot of people who were just not Christian, no church background, who have come to know the Lord in really powerful ways. And some of my favorite things is watching the process and trying to figure out what exactly is going on from a guy who got invited by a neighbor and is just kind of mad about it. And I can see you react when I say certain things. And then all of a sudden it becomes "Hey, that's peculiar. I don't quite understand that. Let me listen to that a little bit better." And now all of a sudden there's inquiry. And some of my favorite e-mails are the ones that I get that are like, "Hey, I've been coming to the Village for about a year. I'm not a believer. I have no intention of becoming a believer. There's just something about what you're saying that I'm interested in." and I just kind of giggle and I'm like, "Just a matter of time, sucker." Because the Bible says when it comes to the gospel, it's going to be the stench of death or the aroma of life. If you're not a believer and you just keep coming back, that's God hunting you down. And so watch that turn from anger to "Wait a minute..." And there seems to be this moment where there's a breaking of the spirit. And then after that spirit is broken, then all of a sudden a guy becomes a worshiper. Do you know how weird it is to watch a guy in six months go from folded arms angry to crying while you sing? And the guy I'm thinking of in particular is a PhD. He's not just a guy who's like, "I just want to feel." He's not that guy. What happened?

Let me tell you what I mean when I say when God comes after your heart and reveals to you its wickedness, that's His great mercy. In that moment, when you see yourself as you are, not the play pretend little guy that you designed, this little group of good friends to be around who go, "Look, aren't we better than average? Aren't we slightly better than the jerks that we know?" But when God really shows you your heart at the deepest level and it's dark and it's ugly and it's wicked and it's self-exalting and it sees everyone else as a slave to your pleasure, in that moment when you see how dark you are and you go, "There's no way God can love me," in that moment when you hear the Spirit whisper, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him," in that moment when you're darkest, when the Spirit bears down on your heart and in an instant you understand that the trade is your sin on Jesus on the cross for Christ's righteousness in you, and in an instant, because of no merit of your own, you have right standing before the God of the universe because of the agony and blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, that produces worship, that produces joy. And then there's transformation of the moral order, not to appease God but because God has been appeased. That's why anything that teaches "morality gets you to God" has to be mocked. Because it's a lie. It's a ridiculous lie that preys on the guilt and shame in people's hearts in order to grow a place numerically or make a guy a lot of money.

Okay, so what's really going on in your heart? That's the question, isn't it? If Jesus is after your heart, I don't want to talk about how well you're doing or not, I don't want to talk about whether you have a quiet time or not. How do you see the world? Does everyone exist for you? Does your wife exist for you, to make you happy, to make much of you? Does your husband exist to make much of you, to make you happy? Does everyone in the world to make much of you? Do you feel anger rising up in your heart towards those close to you when they don't use their lives to make much of you? Is that how you see the world? You have to answer that question. Do you have any real affection for God at all, or are you just trying to barter with Him, that by coming here on the weekends, somehow you're good with each other? Do you have any legitimate affection for God? How do you see the world? Is there anything in how you spend that would say you

understand eternity, or would how you spend your money reveal that you're looking for a position of honor? Come on, what's going on in there? You can run from it right now, you really can. It's easy. Even Jesus includes that at the end of this thing, "Somebody's going to say, 'Oh, I've got an ox to take care of' or 'Oh, I've got a field to take care of.'" You can run from this, but to be at the banqueting table, that place of ever increasing joy, it requires us to take the journey in. It's why the apostle Paul said, "No man can overlook the painful work of self-examination." Is there any real affection in you? Do you see people? Is there any bit of your finances that reveals that you're not simply trying to climb up some social cool ladder? Come on, this isn't religion. This is what's really going on in your heart. This is the thing Jesus is really after. If you take care of symptoms without taking care of what's diseased, you never get better, the symptoms just come out in another way. It's why He goes after the heart. He's not after healing symptoms. He's going to heal the heart, and then everything else will progress, as the old saints used to say. Okay, so let's not be liars and lie to ourselves. There are some things that need to be confessed here, some things that need to be wrestled with here, some things that need to be admitted and confessed to. Is there this area of your life that the Lord wants to deal with and you're going, "Oh no no no, I'm not confessing that, I'm not getting help for that. I'm just going to hide that and replace it with this?" He's not going to stop haunting you about it, and in the end, if He does, that's far more terrifying in regards to what the implications of that are. He's after the heart. That's what makes Him so difficult. If He lives in you, you will not out run Him.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women. I thank You for the chance to just open up the word and be read by it and have it press on us. I pray that in Your mercy You'd come after our hearts this morning. I pray that in Your mercy You would expose the deeper things and not just the surface level things. I pray that You would expose the things that time and time again we would say, 'Oh, I'll memorize more Scripture or I'll get more involved or I'll do this or I'll do that' vs. letting you work and walking in confession and openness. I pray that begrudging submission would be replaced by worship and ever increasing joy. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."