

The Lost Great Commission: Luke 13:10–17:10

By Rev. Dan'l Markham

The Great Gospel Debate

Luke 14 must be considered within the wider context of Luke 13:22–17:10. A. T. Robertson in *A Harmony of the Gospels* calls this season in Christ's ministry "The Later Perea Ministry." Luke 17:10 notes the close of the first phase of the Later Perea Ministry as Jesus crossed over the Jordan back westward to Ephraim or perhaps to Northern Judea,¹ only to return to Perea again through southern Galilee in his final trek to Jerusalem; thus, he completed the second and final phase of the Later Perea Ministry.

His time in Perea was on the cusp of what is called "The Later Judean Ministry." About A.D. 30, this tour into Perea was an approximately three and a half month ministry to the far rural eastern edge of Israel. Clearly Jesus was withdrawing from Jerusalem to the east because of the growing fury of those whom he both unintentionally offended and sometimes purposely confronted—the religious leaders of Judea and Jerusalem. These confrontations more often than not resulted in an embarrassment to the rulers of the synagogues, the priests, and the Pharisees. Sometimes they were completely humiliated.

In John 10 we read of this confrontation motivating Christ's move to Perea:

"... do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand. And He went away again beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first, and there He stayed. Then many came to Him and said, "John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true." And many believed in Him there. (John 10:36–42 NKJV)

Scripture tells us that after the common folks of Perea heard Jesus tell the Parable of the Great Banquet, "many believed in him there." He didn't simply have a standard marketing plan to minister in large, urban areas such as Jerusalem, but went into the "villages," to the common country folk. It is here that Jesus also commands us to minister—"go out to the roads and country lanes" (Lk. 14:23). No community—and no person—is too small or insignificant for the ministry of the Great Physician.

While I agree with A. T. Robertson that the geographic and chronological context here is the Perea Ministry, I contend there is a more important thematic context: that of Christ's interaction with others. It is the growing conflict between Christ and Israel's religious ruling elite. Christ's teaching in the Luke 14 passage is an impassioned response to the conflict between the religious spirit of the day and the working of the Holy Spirit; a clash of two kingdoms, of two spirits—a religious spirit and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' teaching in Luke 14:1–24 climaxes with a running debate between Jesus and Israel's religious leaders, revealing their increasing jealousy and hatred for him. This passage clearly highlights two kingdoms in conflict. The first kingdom is religious, i.e. self-serving, legalistic, judgmental, power hungry, money hungry, and insensitive to human need. The other is the Kingdom of God, guided by mercy, justice, faith, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17, Matt. 23:23). The beginning of this conflict of kingdoms is paralleled in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark (Matt. 12:10, Mk. 3:2). In his book *Simply Christian*, Bishop N.T. Wright offers this insight:

God was about to act to bring in the kingdom, but in a way that none of Jesus' followers (despite his attempts to tell them) had anticipated. He would fight the messianic battle by losing it. The real enemy, after all, was not Rome, but the powers of evil that stood behind human arrogance and violence, powers of evil with which Israel's leaders had fatally colluded. It was time for the evil which had dogged Jesus' footsteps throughout his career—the shrieking maniacs, the conspiring Herodians, the carping Pharisees, the plotting chief priests, the betrayer among his own disciples, the whispering voices within his own soul—to gather into one great tidal wave of evil that would crash with full force over his head.²

The bodacious works of Jesus such as his performing several healings on the Sabbath, upset the apple cart of the legalistic leaders of Judaism. These incensed, self-righteous and spiritually-hardened men harbored a growing hatred for Jesus. It should be noted that this rising hatred for him was not only about acts of healing on the Sabbath or Jesus' meteoric popularity with the masses. At the center it was about his proclaiming to be the Son of God (God himself—John 10:33); and indeed he was and is.

This particular series of debates or conflicts eventually ends with a sequence of parables through Luke 16. “Therefore, the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath [by healing on the Sabbath], but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18 NKJV). However, there were some members of the Jewish elite who didn't cling to their religiosity and came to believe in Jesus as the Christ (see John 3:1–15; 7:50; 13:42 and 19:39).

So the full contextual framework of Luke 14:1–24 is revealed in Luke 13:10–17:10. It's a conflict of kingdoms—with the kingdom of darkness attempting to thwart God's intent for humankind. This involves two deeply integrated topics: 1) God's people seeing the full harvest field as God sees it; 2) The redemption of all who make up that harvest field. Most of this theme of redemption is played out in these nine parables:

1. The Parable of the Mustard Seed, 13:18–19
2. The Parable of the Yeast, 13:20–21
3. The Parable of the Narrow Door, 13:22–30
4. The Parable of the Great Banquet Feast, 14:15–24
5. The Parable of the Lost Sheep, 15:1–7
6. The Parable of the Lost Coin, 15:8–10
7. The Parable of the Lost Son, 15:11–31
8. The Parable of the Shrewd Manager, 16:11–15
9. The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, 16:19–31

The ultimate prize of the two kingdoms in conflict is the number of souls whose destiny becomes eternally entwined with Christ the King.

God Is the Life of the Party

Now it happened, as he went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

But they kept silent. And he took him and healed him, and let him go. Then he answered them, saying, “Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” And they could not answer him regarding these things.

So he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: “When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Then he also said to him who invited him, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Now when one of those who sat at the table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

Then he said to him, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.’” (Luke 14:1–24, NKJV)

Business of the highest order occurs at feasts centered on Christ—deep, meaningful, and necessary fellowship. It is a wonder to peek into what the Scriptures say of the great final banquet feast. I believe the “end times” banquet described by the prophet Isaiah is the same banquet Jesus spoke of in Luke 14.

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6–8)

In Luke 14:13 and Luke 5:29, we find the Greek word *dochē*, which literally means “entertainment, festivities, or wine-drinking.” In the Song of Solomon “he brought me to his banqueting house” (2:4 NKJV), reads in Hebrew “he brought me into the house of wine,” thus a place of plenty, a place of joy of the presence of the Holy Spirit; “for the kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rm. 14:17). “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18 NKJV). Wine throughout the Bible represents abundance, blessing, and joy which result from the ministry of God the Holy Spirit to us. “Wine-drinking” isn’t an invitation to drunkenness, but a celebration of joy while feasting and drinking the fruit of the vine at the time of harvest and plenty, while enjoying God’s blessings. At the time of harvest in ancient Israel (July through September) the choicest fruit of the vine was the freshest of the juice, before it began rapidly fermenting, which was within 24 hours after pressing the grapes.

God wants the feasts with which he has chosen to bless us, to go VERY well—the finest of feasts; and as far as it goes with God, “the more the merrier.” In verse 23 we see that God commands us to reach these beloved people for him so his “house will be full.”

So the banquet Luke 14 speaks about will never find its equal this side of heaven. However, we can get a taste of heaven as we bring the poor and those affected by disability into the life of God’s house by going out and compelling them to come into the church.

In fact, some Joni and Friends Field Ministries along with local churches literally host Luke 14 Banquets—inviting the poor and disabled into the church where they honor them and provide a first-rate feast for all. It’s an incredible celebration, yet a mere foretaste of what is to come.

I have been privileged to minister the Gospel in several nations, from Russia to Guatemala. Never have I seen such sweetness in the Holy Spirit, such fellowship divine, such a foretaste of family in heaven as when I am privileged to serve the poor and those affected by disabilities. I’ve traveled from Krasnodar and Krasnoyarsk, Russia, to a garbage heap village in Nicaragua and to Joni and Friends Family Retreats in Middle America. I’ve witnessed circumstances in which God’s love was so thick you tingled from his near corporeal presence; where joy was so profound you wept, where worship so divine you wanted to do nothing else.

Isaiah describes it like this:

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’” (Isaiah 58:6–9 NKJV)

Jesus described the same scenario this way:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” (Matt. 25:31–40 NKJV)

The point is that Christ is powerfully present when we minister to those in need, especially to the neediest of all—the sick, the hungry, the imprisoned, and the oppressed. As the renowned British Bible scholar Matthew Henry said of this text in Matthew: “Christ is among us more than we think.” I urge you to experience Christ in the face of the poor and in the pain of the afflicted. He will surprise you with his presence when you minister for and to him in these places of suffering. He will pleasantly surprise you when it is you who are ministered to by Christ through those whom you went to serve.

The ancient Scottish monk Angus recorded his thoughts and impressions after beholding a breathtaking high valley in Scotland, calling it “a thin place.” He meant it was a place where heaven and earth intersect or a place where one senses he or she is very close to heaven. Such is ministry to the marginalized—“thin places.”

Henry Blackaby in his famous book *Experiencing God* brings out a powerful ministry principle which essentially says “figure out where God is working and join him there.” Friends, God has flashing red arrows with reverberating sound effects pointing toward the poor and the disabled. Experience God as never before in the face of the poor and in the presence of those affected by disabilities. Endless fields of souls are ready for harvest—myriads upon myriads wait with receptive hearts to hear the Gospel, to experience the light shining in their dark places; they wait to become your brothers and sisters in Christ.

In Luke 14 Jesus attends a feast put on by a “prominent Pharisee” (vs. 1). In the “Parable of the Great Banquet” (vs.15–24) God the Father invites all, but especially the poor and those affected by disability (vs. 13, 21, 23). He tells his servants that he is “angry” that his banquet house is not filled with such people and urges them with passion “go out quickly” and “compel them” (literally, “make them” or “hook them by the arm” and pull them along) to come “into my house.”

It is plain from this parable that those who were “well-to-do” were not inclined to answer God’s invitation. However, those in need were more inclined to do so. Those in need, or who see their need, have greater appreciation for what God has to offer. Unless we have a deep understanding of the ruthless destruction of our sin and the grievous displeasure it brings to God we will never have need of the Great Physician to heal us from the greatest debilitating power on Earth—sin and the deadly eternal consequences it brings. We will never partake of a foretaste of the Great Banquet Feast or experience a down payment of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14–8), unless we seek healing from our sin.

As Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mark 2:17 NKJV).

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture is taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture marked NKJV is taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Notes

1. Luke 17:11; John 11:54

2. N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 110.

About the Author

Dan'l Markham's life focus has been serving Christ by developing Christian programs and organizations that focus ministry to those on the margins of society. He serves as the Partnerships Director for the Everett Gospel Mission. Dan'l has worked as a county commissioner, founding and senior pastor, and Managing Director of U.S. Operations at Joni and Friends. He's generated numerous articles including a contributing writer for Disability Advocacy Among Religious Organizations. Dan'l is author of *Contagious Love* regarding Christ's call to those affected by disabilities and *The Cultic Phenomenon: A Revealing Look at Ourselves*, dealing with abusive churches and religions. He writes and produces his radio Gospel cowboy yarns called CountryUp.org. A cast member of the Long Ride Home Christian-biker reality TV show, he loves to laugh and make people laugh. He holds a bachelor's degree in biblical studies and has taken course work at Reformed Theological Seminary.