

# Preparing for Harvest II: Long Term Investment

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*Luke 14:13-14 "but when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot pay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"*

## Background

In the middle of Jesus' ministry there was a mix of people following him for various reasons. Some wanted to really hear what he had to say. Others were pleased to be part of the crowd that followed him while he was popular, and others were looking for any opportunity to catch him in a fault. When Jesus showed up to the house of a prominent Pharisee for lunch, there were people from each part of the mix there. While in the context of the meal and Jesus healing a man with no response from the religious leaders, Jesus noticed that they were more concerned with occupying the primary spots at the table than they were with the weightier matters of life: justice, healing, restoration. As Jesus began to address this, he was met with a seemingly emotional response from one of the participants:

*Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God – Luke 14:15b*

While the man's statement was true, it did not offer the full path to the truth. Jesus then began to expand the reality that most people would experience, and give them the perspective they would need to be able to not only embrace the truth, but to receive the blessing promised in the end.

## Last Things First

*When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, 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 man your seat." Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place – Luke 14:8-9*

Imagine arriving at a concert, movie premier or Apple store unveiling, walking past all of the people in line and placing yourself right at the door. *If you survived*, you would surely be hated by all those that had spent their time in line, but no matter: you would feel good about yourself. Special. Honored. That is, until the security or owner came to you and told you that you didn't have a right to that place. You then would need to take the walk of shame to the back of the line. ***You didn't do what was required to earn that place in line, whatever it was.***

Jesus' lesson was exactly this, and it applies to the harvests we expect in our lives. Many times, we approach the harvests with ***an attitude of right***, that we can simply walk up to our harvest and begin reaping, only to find that we get *turned away* and have to face the shame of not being able to do what we expected to do:

- We attempt to convert our friend or family member by giving them the clear, concise argument that Jesus is Lord and that they need to accept Him to get to heaven, but they don't budge
- We "believe" that God is going to provide the job, the mate, the promise because of a single scripture we read, but don't take the time to get God's clear meaning. Then we have to try to reconcile our confession with the fact that it did not happen how we thought
- We make a declaration that we will read the Bible in a year without looking at the changes needed in our schedule, then get down on ourselves for not getting it done.

The list goes on, and we haven't really even gotten to the promises of God, the life of the Kingdom, or the abundant living that we are to experience here on the earth, not to mention the life after.

Those that were at the lunch were focused on their importance, and not on the importance of anyone else in attendance. In Jesus' example, those that were looking for the right seat were more concerned with ***position and perception*** than they were with the real purpose for being there (the wedding). Similarly, when we become so consumed with who we think we are in the kingdom, we lose sight of what we should be focusing on, the harvest.

## I Would Love To... But...

After the man's outburst, Jesus gave some examples, all showing the same result: we all have great intentions when it comes to following God and getting to the harvest he has, but there are competing priorities in our lives. Those priorities are not bad things, but in the case of what God has for us, we need to be willing to do the hard thing to get to the real prize.

### Valid excuses

*I just bought five yoke of oxen...*

*I just got married...*

*I have just bought a field...*

What Jesus is demonstrating is that while the original commitment may have been there, and the desire, as the man said, to "eat at the feast in the kingdom of God", if we are not truly focused on the goal the entire time other things can come up and divert our attention away from the harvest.

*Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil.*

*It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times. – Mark 4:3-8*

Like the parable of the sower, Jesus showed just how extensive the harvest was, and how much those that had been invited were missing out on (“*there is still room*”). Notice in the parable, while there was growth in most of the seed, only one produced. The growth is like the importance we place on ourselves, or our emotional response to the potential promise – it looks good and impressive, but quickly caves under the pressure of life or things that grow up alongside it that can choke out its life.

## Going to the Moon

*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go **and bear fruit – fruit that will last** – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. – John 15:16*

Jesus was not interested in simply having people who intended to follow him. While He knew that the reward, the harvest at the end of this road was wonderful, he also knew that it was going to take work to get there, just like with any harvest. He wanted his followers to commit to the long haul. To give themselves to what it would take to get to the harvest. To get to the point of not only bearing fruit, but bearing fruit that would last

September 12, 1962, President Kennedy stood before the nation at Rice University, and issued a declaration that we would conquer space and place a man on the moon. As to his reasoning, he said:

We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others too.

President Kennedy recognized that his harvest was not easy, but for all the reasons he stated, was worthwhile. That it was something that he was unwilling to postpone. It had to be done and the other things, as good and as worthwhile as they were, would not deter him (or us) from reaching the goal.

Jesus was just as pointed in *his* examples:

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple. – Luke 14:26*

Wow! Why such strong words? How could Jesus be so dogmatic, so exclusionary, so harsh? **Because he knew that the only way to complete the journey, to get to the harvest, is to place it primary. To make that the only thing that mattered. If not, we might start out well, but never get to experience that feast in the Kingdom.**

*I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. – I Corinthians 9:27*

Paul knew the importance of the prize, and compared himself to an athlete who disciplines his body to make sure that he wins and does so correctly. Jesus calls us to that same level of commitment:

**Whatever it takes, make the investment to get to the harvest**

## Prime the Pump

Jesus issued a challenge to the host of the lunch. This challenge flew in the face of convention, because it not only threatened his livelihood, but also his overall social standing.

*...do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives or your rich neighbors. If you do, they might invite you back and so you will be repaid... - Luke 14:12*

By inviting those that could not pay, the man would have to make the decision to not invest in himself, but in those that he invited. To invest in a future payback rather than a current one. To give up his own pleasure for the sake of a greater pleasure later. This is hard. It's hard to commit to, but it is the life of the Kingdom. It is getting in with people when it is not easy. It is loving through the hurt. It is praying when it is not convenient. It is having that extra conversation because they need it, not because it benefits you.

There is a popular inspirational story about a man at the point of dehydration and death, coming across a jug of water attached to a pump. On the jug were instructions: "do not drink the water. Use it to prime the pump. Then you will have all the water you need. Just fill up the jug when you are done for the next person". The man had a choice to make. He could satisfy his thirst and survive by drinking the water, or he could make the investment, not knowing what the result would be. He chose the latter, pouring out the only hope he had of survival on to the pump and began to work the handle. At first, nothing, but then to his surprise and delight, water began to pour out of the pump. More water than he needed, to the point he could satisfy his thirst, and fill up the jug for the next person.

The harvests Jesus has for us are much like this. Initially, the process may seem like loss, or may seem too hard to complete, but if we stick with the commitment, if we follow Him to the end, He will prove that the harvest is more than we can imagine.