

Luke Chapter 14 – John Karmelich

1. I call this chapter "invitation", as every story in this chapter involves either Jesus being given an invitation to join in a meal, or Jesus telling a story about being invited to a banquet or in the case of the final story, it's Jesus giving an invitation to accept the Gospel story. My goal in this lesson is to show us why we should care about these invitations and how they apply to us. To explain, let me fairly quickly explain the stories here and then hopefully tie all of them together to show us we should care about these invitations.
 - a) The first story is about Jesus being invited to the home of a prominent Pharisee for a meal. Notice that Jesus doesn't turn down the opportunity to eat with someone even though the person who invited Jesus does not believe in Him as the Messiah. In this story Jesus heals a man of dropsy, which is when your body retains way too much fluid, often due to such issues as liver or kidney problems. What is not stated, but implied is that the cured that was cured had "sin issues" and that is why he had that condition in the first place.
 - i) Jesus is then accused of violating the Sabbath in order to help that man. Jesus then points out if a religious Jewish person had a son or an animal that accidentally fell into a well, that religious man would still pull them out of the well. I can't help but notice the connection between curing a man of retaining too much water and Jesus talking about helping someone or something who fell into a bunch of water.
 - ii) The point of this story is that yes, God wants us to take one day a week to rest, but not at the expense of helping people in need. Of course we all need to rest, but the greater commandment is to care about others more than we care about ourselves.
 - b) That leads to the next story of Jesus making up a parable. In this story, Jesus talks about if we are invited (there's that word again) to a big wedding, it's better to sit way in the back of the hall instead of a prominent seat up front. The issue is about embarrassment. In the Middle East culture, prominence, stature, and positions of power are valued then as they are valued today. In this example, Jesus is saying it's better to sit in the back of that large gathering and if we're a valued guest, we'll be invited up front by the host, then it is to sit in the front and be embarrassed if we're asked to move to the back. His point is that if we want to be considered great by God, we don't assume our position of prominence, but we have to be invited there. What Jesus is getting at is God deciding who'll be prominent in heaven, not us based on our perceived stature in life.
 - c) The good news is that someone listening to Jesus tell this parable realizes that He's talking about one's place in heaven. This leads to the third "invitation" of this chapter: Jesus tells of a great banquet and people making lame excuses why they can't come. Jesus then says that God will ask those who can't possibly ever repay their gratitude for that invitation to come to that banquet. The underlying point of this invitation is God requires us to come to Him on His terms, which simply means trusting in Him for the forgiveness of our sins as opposed to trusting in our own "goodness" in order to be saved.
 - d) That leads us to the final invitation of this chapter: The short version is that Jesus gives an invitation to be saved. The difficult aspect of that invitation is that Jesus says unless we're willing to love Him more than our own family we can't be saved. The next point is about not having enough money to finish a big project or enough soldiers to win a war. In both cases, the idea is we can never be good enough to please God based on our works. In the final part of this story, Jesus compares people to salt, as it was used as a preservative. The point of this invitation to salvation, is effectively, "Are we willing to trust God to the point where nothing else matters as much as our relationship with Him, are we willing to give up all to follow Him and do we trust in Him to preserve our lives based on that level of trust? That's a tough invitation to accept, but that is what Jesus desires of each of us.

2. All of that leads back to my opening questions: Why does Jesus accept and give the invitations as stated in this chapter and why should we care? To answer, let's remember where we last left off in the previous chapter: In that chapter, Jesus is discussing the idea of who was saved. There is a term Luke uses a lot in his gospel, "The Kingdom of God". That refers to everyone who's trusting in Jesus as God. That leads to the logical question of how does one get invited to be a part of that kingdom? Chapter 14 answers that question. The invitations given in this chapter show us what kind of attitude we should have as Christians (being humble, putting other's needs as higher than our own and putting God as priority over all things in order to be used by Him).
3. In those moments where we can learn to think of God in those terms, then and only then can we be used by Him to make a difference in the world around us. That's the invitation of this chapter: It isn't just about being saved, but what it really means to be saved and what type of attitude is needed in order not only to get into heaven but to make a difference for God in the world around us. Bottom line, think of ourselves as being fully dependent upon God. Then and only then can we be used by Him to make a difference for Him in the world around us. With that stated, let's start on the verse by verse commentary on this chapter:
4. Chapter 14 Verse 1: One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ² There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. ³ Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" ⁴ But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away.
 - a) Whenever I'm not sure how to start the text, I usually think, "Back up and see where you left off." As I said earlier, Chapter 13 focused on who is and isn't saved. Remember Jesus is still traveling from town to town. He's now probably a few months away from the cross itself. Here at one of those towns, we find Jesus having a meal with a prominent Pharisee. That just means the host is either well known in that town as being a very devout Jew, or maybe he's even known as a religious leader in Israel itself. Looking at Verse 3, it appears that there were a number of Pharisees and bible experts at this gathering.
 - b) Most of us are familiar with the idea that sometimes were invited to dinner to be a guest and other times we're invited to be the main course. That's how I see Jesus being treated at this gathering. As we'll read, Jesus was not respected, as He was not "one of them", so the religious people present looked for a reason that they can accuse Jesus of breaking the Jewish laws.
 - c) With that background stated, in the room was a man who had dropsy. For those of us not familiar with that term, it refers to significant water retention in our bodies, usually due to liver or kidney problems. An underlying point is one who has that problem was thought of a "sinner", as drinking too much alcohol can cause dropsy. The point was, if this man is associated with sin, I suspect the religious leaders in the room had the man there to see if Jesus would help him in that condition. Also note that this gathering was a "post-church" meal the same way we may have a large gathering after a church service.
 - d) Now that I've set the scene, the key point here is that Jesus saw the man with dropsy and instantly cured him by taking hold of him. After he was cured, Jesus sent him on his way. I get the impression the man who had dropsy wanted to leave as soon as he could, maybe so he could tell his family or friends of the miracle.
 - e) The real point of the story is whether or not it was lawful to perform this miracle on the Sabbath. One of the 10 commandments is about not doing any work on the Sabbath. Yet Jesus sees this man with a health issue and thinks nothing of helping him. This leads to the classic debate of what is and is not proper to do on that day of rest.
 - f) Before I get into that debate, let me quickly talk about why this text is here. Obvious most of us Christians don't fret over this type of stuff. If we see a need, no matter what day of the week it is, we deal with it. The underlying issue is the danger of thinking "we have to act a certain way" in order to be Christian. Jesus shows us here is that to care about others takes priority over thinking about how we should act in any given situation.

- g) With that said, Jesus responds in the next two verses about what is and is not proper to do on that day of the week. I suppose the underlying question is, "Are Christians required to keep that commandment and how do we do it properly?" The way I view the idea of rest is to cease from what one normally does one day a week. To use one of my oldest jokes, is it proper to mow the lawn on a Sunday? It depends on whether or not one makes a living as a gardener. The point of weekly rest, isn't about keeping a detailed set of specific rules of what to do or not do to honor God. It's simply about taking some time away from one's normal routine in order to show honor to Him. To say that Christians shouldn't do this or that on say, Sunday makes us into Pharisee's ourselves. Speaking of avoiding that type of works oriented attitude, I present Verses 5 and 6:
5. Verse 5: Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?"⁶ And they had nothing to say.
- a) Before I discuss "Sabbath rules", some of the early manuscripts we have say "donkey" and not the word "son" in Verse 5. Personally, that debate is pretty meaningless as either way the point is the same. The point is that these religious leaders would go out of their way to help something they care about in need on this day of the week. Visualize a well as a hole in the ground with water at the bottom. A reason to pull out whatever or whoever is in that well is to prevent them from drowning. I admit I love the irony here. Jesus helped a man who was full of water (dropsy) and Jesus uses an illustration of being helpful for an animal that may also be "full of water".
- b) OK John, this is a cute story. However, I've never had to pull animals or children out of a well, so how do I relate to this story? The point is we as believing Christians tend to think we have to act a certain way because we're going to church or having a meal with others who go to church also. God wants our behavior consistent at all times. It's about having a priority to care for the needs of others more than caring for our own needs. That's what Jesus did by helping that man in this story and that's why He's lecturing them and us to have a heart for others as being a priority over resting on one day of the week.
- c) The related point is that not all of God's laws are equal. Yes God wants us to rest one day of the week, but not to a level where we ignore an obvious need around us. The religious Jewish leaders at this meal were putting their own customs as greater weight than caring about others. That's the danger each of us as Christians face as well. We worry that we're supposed to act a certain way in certain situations to a point of ignoring any obvious need around us. Now that I've pounded that point into all of our heads, we can move on.
6. Verse 7: When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable:⁸ "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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ But when you are 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 honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."
- a) In these verses we move from an actual invitation for Jesus to share a meal to a made up invitation to go to a large wedding feast. To understand this parable, we first have to get into the topic of honor. In the Middle East culture as well as much of the world, the idea of honor is important. Unfortunately there are many people, especially from the political world who assume a place of honor. Of all things, I was talking to a friend about boxing matches and the politics of who gets to sit up front to be seen on camera (same idea).
- b) Jesus point here is that it is better in life to take a seat in the back of a large event than it is to be "dishonored" to go have to move in the back. The reason Jesus gave this lecture was at the same big meal he was eating at in the first few verses, Jesus noticed who picked out the prime seats in order to have honor.

- c) The underlying point of this parable is that honor in God's eyes has to be earned based on our trust in Him, and not how we live our lives. The religious Jewish people at this meal picked the best seats because they assumed they are important based on how they have lived out their lives. Jesus is trying to convey the idea that honor before God is based on how we treat others more than our "religious acts". So if we can't be special in God's eyes based on how we act, how do we please Him? By humbling ourselves before Him. By seeing ourselves as needing Him in order to make a difference in the world. By thinking we can only make a difference for Him by His power and not based on how others see us.
 - d) That's how this parable ties to the opening invitation to the meal. In the meal as stated in the opening verses, the religious leaders thought they deserved the best seats at that meal based on their status as "religious leaders". When I go to large weddings, I usually either sit where I'm told to sit or go in the back somewhere. I don't think the underlying point has to do with weddings or big events, but simply realizing that God desires to guide our lives for His glory. In order for God to guide us, we have to be willing to want to be lead. In order to be used that way, we need to humble ourselves to get our ego's out of the way.
 - e) It's really a simple point, but let's face it, our ego's constantly get in the way of how God wants to use us in any situation. That's one reason why we need the regular reminder of having to humble ourselves in public gatherings so that we can be used by Him.
 - f) With that said, notice Verse 11 again: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." This verse holds a promise given to us by God. If we are willing to humble ourselves before Him, He promises we will be exalted. Does that mean for example, at every event we go to, if we sit in the back, we'll be picked to go move up front? Of course not. This is about eternal rewards based on a willingness to put other's needs before our own. If we can develop that type of attitude of putting the needs of others before our own, then and only then can be used by God greatly.
 - g) With that said, we're ready for the next invitation of this chapter:
7. Verse 12: Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."
- a) The first thing to catch in Verse 12 is Jesus is still at the same meal that he was in Verse 1. Instead of describing an invitation to a wedding, Jesus is now describing an invitation to a big banquet. There's a view in society that one only invites to a banquet those who could return the favor. That's why the text mentions the invitee's as including rich neighbors or one's extended family. We would invite them as we then expect them to return the favor one day. Jesus then goes on to make the statement that when we do put on a big feast, we should invite those who can never repay us.
 - b) Occasionally my wife and I do have guests over that probably couldn't "in kind" repay us for our hospitality. The point Jesus is making is a way we can be a good witness to others is by showing kindness in ways that can't be repaid in kind.
 - c) Then Verse 14 says that we will be repaid at "the resurrection of the righteous." Compare that to Verse 11 that reads, "He who humbles himself will be exalted". In both cases Jesus is saying there are rewards in heaven based on how we act now. The point is we should humble ourselves compared to how we may view ourselves in society. Consider that He said effectively to sit in the back at big gatherings and here He says that we should invite people to our functions who we shouldn't expect repayment. In both of these cases, the issue comes back to be willing to humble ourselves before God so that He can use us to make a difference in the world.
 - i) This is one of those issues that is a constant challenge to do, as our ego's want to be in a place of prominence or do things that have rewards in this lifetime.

- d) In effect, Jesus is saying yes our actions can cause us to have rewards. The question is, do we want our rewards in this lifetime or in the eternal? To "sit up front" or to invite guests who are prominent can give us blessings in this lifetime. The question becomes, what are we living for? I admit it's tough to think in those terms, but if we accept an eternity exists, I suspect the rewards at that time far outweigh whatever rewards we can choose to have in this lifetime. It's worth the risk of willing to bet on eternity and it's rewards than to just live to reward us in this lifetime.
 - e) The good news is that someone in the crowd at this meal did catch that concept:
8. Verse 15: When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."
- a) I picture Jesus telling a story to a crowd, and all of sudden someone interrupts the story in order to proclaim this message as stated here in Verse 15. It's a little like someone giving a sermon, and that sermon is interrupted by someone in the crowd yelling out something. I mention all of that as it doesn't even break Jesus "stride". Beginning in the next verse, He just goes on with His point about what it takes to be saved by describing who is and who isn't a part of God's eternal kingdom.
 - b) My point is Jesus takes this one verse interruption as a question to be answered. Whoever made this statement did realize that the last parable is about being invited to be with God forever in heaven. That's why this unnamed man made this statement.
 - c) Now let me describe why Luke records this moment: The view in Judaism, is that if one is a devoutly religious Jew like the Pharisee's who Jesus is dining with at the moment, to get into heaven is automatic. Stop and consider the fact that you never once read of Jesus saying anything like, "Hey, my fellow religious Jew, I'm so proud of how you are acting at the present moment, you are saved because you try so hard to be religious." On that note, consider that most religions require you to act a certain way on the hope that one is saved for all of eternity if we act that way. One of the reasons Jesus performs all of the miracles He did was to show that His way is the correct way. Just trying hard to be a good person may make us a moral, but one can never be perfect. What Jesus essentially came to teach us is that living out a moral life may be the best way to live, but it isn't good enough to please God based on our efforts. That is what Jesus is trying to get across to this crowd.
 - i) So if living a moral life isn't good enough, why are there hundreds of laws in the Old Testament teaching us how to live? The answer is that there are two different issues in play here: One is the best way to live out our lives and the other is what do I have to do to be saved. The bible teaches both. All of those laws are designed to help us live a life pleasing to God, but they don't in a sense teach salvation. To trust God to guide our lives is what salvation is all about. Living a moral life may be the best way to live as Solomon figured out in the book of Ecclesiastes, but he also concluded at the end of the book that the purpose of life is to trust God and go obey His commandments. That's what I'm preaching here. Trust in God to guide our lives and by His power obey His laws as that is the best way to live.
 - ii) Final thing on this and then I'll get back to the text. So if we just need to trust God to guide our lives, why did Jesus have to die for our sins? It's to get the idea that God Himself pays the price for our sins so we don't have to. We are now free to live however we want now that the price is paid. The way we should choose to live is out of gratitude for what God has done for us is to live a moral life not to prove our worth to Him, but again out of gratitude for what He's done for us.
 - d) Believe it or not, all of this leads me back to Verse 15. The person who interrupted Jesus thought he was saved because he was devoutly religious. Notice this person was keenly aware of the concept of eating in heaven. Christians tend to think of eating with Jesus as being a New Testament concept as taught in Revelation 20. Yet here a religious Jewish person got that concept. With that said, let's read Jesus' response to this interruption:

9. Verse 16: Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.
¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'
- a) It's almost as if Jesus is thinking, "OK, you want to talk about dining with God, let me tell all of you a story about a great banquet." By the time we get to Verse 24 at the end of this story, it will become pretty obvious that Jesus is responding to that interruption in the last verse about who is and who isn't invited to be with God based on the Verse 15 question. So if this parable is about dining with God in heaven, why doesn't Jesus just say so here in these verses? Why use a parable as an illustration? Probably to expand the mind of those dining with Jesus to get them out of their mindset of who is and isn't invited to this meal.
 - b) Before I get into all of that, let me ask the question, why have a meal with God in heaven anyway? Why do we require food in heaven and why would God require food? I suspect that somehow food digestion is different in heaven than it is here. I don't think there's say a working plumbing system to get rid of food. I suspect we just eat it and somehow it just disappears within us. The best answer I can figure is that it is something all societies have grown accustom to, as a way to start a marriage. In every culture that I am aware of when a marriage begins, there is a dining feast to go with that marriage ceremony. Therefore as we start our new eternal relationship as being one (as in married to) Jesus, we commence that relationship with a meal. In Jewish culture, to eat with someone is to be one with that person as they often dipped bread in the same bowls together. My point here is simply to get across the idea that the Jewish people Jesus was currently dining with, did get the idea that we commence our eternal relationship with God with a meal. What we do after that in heaven is in effect God's problem, but I suspect whatever we do, it won't be boring.
 - c) With that speech out of my system, we can now talk about Jesus parable about preparing for a large banquet. We don't know who this unnamed man is who gives the banquet, but whoever he is, we assume he's wealthy enough to throw this big party. What's a normal custom is to invite people well in advance of the actual or approximate date of the party, and then when everything's ready, a second short invitation is sent to come on over. It's a little like when people throw a wedding and there are a lot of guests staying say at a hotel until it's time to start and then someone calls the hotel and says "OK, come on over now as we're ready to begin." My simple point is a big function often has a double invitation: the first is to reserve the date and the second short notice is to get started. Jesus point is at the banquet being described here, the second invitation is now being sent.
 - d) Before I move on, stop and consider our own lives and this double invitation. Most of us from an early age are taught of the idea of an eternity and living for eternity. In a sense, we all get this first invitation. What none of us know is how long we get to live and when we are called to go to heaven for that second invitation. The way we respond to that large banquet is to trust that God Himself did pay for our sins so we don't have to try to please Him based on how we live out our lives. However, we still have to strive to be invited to that party by using our lives to make a difference for Jesus. That's the "striving to enter by way of the narrow door" that Jesus stated in the last chapter. That overly long statement about the second invitation leads well to the rest of the parable. Speaking of which:
10. Verse 18: "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'¹⁹ "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'²⁰ "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'
- a) What we have in these verses is a bunch of excuses why someone can't come to this large banquet being prepared. If you think about it, these excuses are pretty lame. If someone has just bought a field, can't they see it before or after the party? After all, if it's just dirt, it is not going anywhere. Besides, who buys real estate without seeing it first anyway! Next we have the excuse of trying out oxen. So, go to party of test oxen, what do you choose?

- b) I have to admit as I studied these excuses, I loved John MacArthur's commentary on them. He stated the only excuse that any of us can relate to is the idea of our wife saying no. As John put it, "The wife slammed down her sandal and said we're not going and that's that." However, I suspect if a man were married, his wife would be invited to this party as well.
- i) The point of the excuses is that anyone listening would obviously realize those are cheap excuses. Even the one about just being married would probably get a laugh from a room full of guys. Remember that this story was used because someone in the crowd asked about being invited to heaven. Here Jesus is saying, people are coming up with lame excuses why they don't want to go.
 - ii) Jesus' point is that "when push comes to shove", people don't want to go to heaven "God's way", which is about trusting in His payment for our sins and not trusting in our ability to please God based on our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds. Just as these excuses are pretty flimsy, so God will view our reasons that we think we are good people in comparison to just trusting in Him alone for salvation.
 - iii) OK then, what about the striving aspect for salvation? The striving God desires is about striving to do His will versus our will. The striving is about realizing none of us can prove our worth to God, so we strive to do His will based on the fact we can't prove our worth to Him. We strive for obedience out of gratitude as opposed to striving to prove our worth to Him.
- c) My point here is the invitation given by God simply requires acceptance that the price for our salvation is already covered. He wants us motivated by gratitude for what He's done 2,000 years ago by the cross to make a difference. If we realize we can't earn our way into heaven, then we daily learn to live for His will to make a difference for Him simply out of gratitude for what He's already done. My point is that there are rewards in this life and rewards in the next life simply because we use our lives to make a difference for Him.
- d) All of that does lead us back to this story. Jesus is saying to be invited to heaven gets into the idea that we are chosen by God. How do we know if we are chosen? Simple. If we've accepted the idea that we believe God died for our sins and desire to please Him, then we do know have been chosen. The free will aspect of our salvation depends on our desire to use our lives to make that difference for Him. Bottom line: We need to avoid these flimsy excuses not to serve God as time is the most valuable thing we own. Meanwhile, back to Jesus story about being invited to be with God forever:
11. Verse 21: "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'
- a) In this story, those who are "poor, crippled, blind and the lame" would realize they could never repay in kind if they are invited to a fancy banquet. That's the point. God doesn't want those who can say, "I deserve to be here because I'm a good person". God's looking for those who want to say to Him, "I'm only here because I'm invited and I'll be eternally grateful for that invitation." My point is effectively, the saved are the poor, crippled, the blind and the lame. If we think we're something special that we've accepted Jesus, keep in mind that Jesus sees us as these type of people who don't have any way to repay for what He's done for us. That's our invitation. The way we accept that invitation is not to try to prove our worth to God, but simply use our lives to make a difference for Him strictly out of gratitude and not because we deserve to be invited.
12. Verse 22: " 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'
²³"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' "
- a) There are two key points in these verses: The first is that there's plenty of room in heaven for those who desire to be with God. The second is the original invited, won't be there.

- b) Let me start with the second one: Who is Jesus talking about when He says nobody who was invited will be in heaven? Does that mean nobody from a Jewish background will be in heaven? Hardly as the disciples themselves were Jewish. I think it simply refers to the idea that nobody who wants to prove their value to God will be admitted. I remember a long time ago, I heard a famous rock star say, "When I get to heaven, I want to say to God, don't you know who I am and what I've accomplished?" That's the type of attitude where God will say effectively I don't care what you've done as you haven't used the time I have given you to make a difference for Me. My point is God isn't impressed with what we've accomplished be it good or bad, be it moral or immoral. What impressed God is if we are willing to say in effect, "I give up. I can't please You based on what I do, therefore use my life for Your glory as You are in charge of my life." That give up type of attitude is what God is always looking for so we can use our lives for His glory.
- c) But if we "give up", how do we earn a living or support our families? The bible does not teach us to abandon those we are called to serve. If anything we use our time to make a difference for God by letting go of our desires to put ourselves first and put the needs of others as priority over our own needs. That's what "giving up" is all about. Keep in mind that God's well aware of the fact of whatever needs we require to survive. To quote Jesus, He said, "It's God's good pleasure to care for us and give us what we need so we can use our lives to make a difference for Him". (My paraphrase of Luke 12:32.)
- d) My point here is simply that Jesus is describing in these verses the idea that no one will be admitted to heaven based on being a good person. Remember that Jesus was speaking to a group of devoutly religious Jews who believed they're saved because they were moral. That's who Jesus was referring to when He says "those who were invited won't be there". God picked the Jewish nation for salvation with the desire that they learn to trust Him to guide their lives based on the gratitude for what He's already done for them as opposed to them trying to prove their worth to Him. The failure of people to see the idea that the price for salvation has already been paid is what prevents them from entering heaven to begin with.
- e) Coming back to the verses, the other idea to get out of them is that heaven is a big place. God wants heaven to be full of people willing to accept His own payment for all our sins. Jesus is saying salvation is not for Jewish people alone, which was a shocking statement at that time. Stop and consider what is God's purpose of "all of this": Why did He bother to give us a bible to begin with? Why did He bother to create us in the first place? What's in it for God? The key is to realize that if somebody has a desire to do something, then being paid for that desire is secondary. To use a simple example, if someone truly loves to play a musical instrument, one does it simply because they love to do it, even if they don't get compensated for it. If God has a built in desire to love, then He did all of "this" (create our world) out of that love.
- i) My point is that if God is perfect, He doesn't need anything. But if God is a god of love, then out of that love, He wants someone to express that love to. That's why He created us in the first place, so He can spend eternity expressing that love.
- ii) That's also why God can't violate our free will. If God forces us to love Him, like a robot, that isn't love, that's force. That's why this chapter is in effect, an invitation to be with Him forever, as expressed through illustrations of that invitation.
- iii) So if heaven is a big place, why not have life go on forever with some choosing to accept that invitation and some rejecting it? The answer is to remind us that there has to be day when God's will shut the door and say that's it. It's an incentive plan to get us to use our lives to make a difference for Him as there is an unknown time where it will be too late.
- f) Suppose we know all of this, now what? The "now what" is to daily ask God, "OK, what do you want me to do today, knowing that our time now belongs to You?"

- i) The answer to "now what" will be different for every believer. What God calls you to do is different from what God calls me to do. The secret is never to be jealous of what God has called others to do, but simply focus the best we can on what He has called us to do. Rewards in heaven are not based on say, how many people we go and save. It's based on our loyalty to what God's called us to do. If one is not sure what we're called to do, ask Him. Yes it's a moving target, and it's moving for me as well as for anyone else. I'm just saying, don't look to me as to what God's called you to do, as that "now what" answer for you is different than what it is for me.
 - ii) In the meantime, thanks for sticking around as we finish this chapter.
13. Verse 25: Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ "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. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.
- a) Since Jesus was describing who is and who isn't saved, in effect He ends this chapter with one big invitation to understand what it takes to be a disciple of Jesus and be saved. To understand Verse 26, one has to read it context. My point is Jesus is not saying that we have to have hatred of our family members, but just to love Him more than them. Let me give an example here:
 - i) Suppose we come from a family background that doesn't believe the bible is the word of God. Then we must choose to follow Jesus over say, our families desire to stick with whatever religion they belong to. Throughout the last 2,000 years, there have been many people who have had to walk away from many religious beliefs, and even abandon their own families in order to follow Jesus in the first place.
 - ii) The point is Jesus is not saying we literally have to hate our parents, siblings or say our children. The point is we put God before all of them. The wonderful news is that when we learn to think that way, we can actually love all of them more if we realize that we can use God's power to love them more than we could than by just loving them based on our own power. To use a simple example, I encourage my kids to go to church, not to force them, but I want them to learn to trust God with their own lives, and not because their parents trust God.
 - b) If putting God as a priority over one's own family is not hard enough, Jesus goes one step further and says that unless we love Him more than our own life we can't be saved. This brings us back to the idea of how much do we trust God to begin with? Are we willing to let go of our own desires so that He can guide us? Let me put it this way: He knows well what it is we desire to do with our lives. When we're willing to let that go and trust Him, He often gives us that desire His way on His timing. Are there things that I've desired but have to let go of in order to follow God? Of course, so do all of us who trust in Him. What we discover is what we get by trusting God is far greater than what we give up only when we do trust God to guide our lives. Is it easy? No. Is it worth it? Of course it is. Not just in the next life, but in this one as well.
 - c) That leads us to final point in these verses. Jesus says that in order to be His disciple then we have to take up our cross to follow Him. Understand that in that Roman world, when one is sentenced to die by the cross, one had to carry it themselves to be hanged on it. The cross is the slowest and most painful way to die that was conceived at that time. Jesus is saying that in order to follow Him, its about dying slowly and painfully to what it is we desire to do with our lives so that He can live through us to guide us to do His will.
 - d) In summary, our lives come down to a realization that time is the most valuable thing we own and that giving that time back to God for His use is the greatest purpose we can have for living our lives. It's a tough thing to accept and it's tough to let go of our own desires we have for our lives. Jesus is saying "It's worth it, trust in Me, and I'll give you live here and now and for eternity far greater than any and all things we can do without Him."

14. Verse 28: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'
- a) Here Jesus gives the first of a few more illustrations the crowd can relate to about what is the cost of being Jesus' disciple. In this particular story, the example is about building a tower. Jesus point is we can't build anything unless we have the funds to complete it in the first place. You might recall from the last lesson that Pontius Pilate took money from the Jewish temple in order to build an aqueduct. The point is not about stealing, but to realize that unless we know where our funds come from, we can't finish a project.
 - b) So does that mean we shouldn't do anything for God unless we know we have the funds to complete it? Of course not. Living the Christian life is about stepping out in faith that God will make a way to get done what He wants done. I've yet to see a church in my life that has all the funds it wants to do what it wants to accomplish. Living the Christian life is all about saying, "OK, God if this is what You want me to do, then I have to trust You to provide me the funds as well as the time to pull this off." It's usually when we're willing to take that step of faith that God provides for what we need to accomplish that goal.
 - c) So if God does take care of our needs, what about this tower illustration? The issue here is about our willingness to trust God in the first place. What Jesus is saying that if we're willing to trust Him, realize what is the cost to our lives. For many people, to become a believer means ridicule or worse from one's family. Our non-Christian friends may not want to be around us anymore. We may have to change jobs or move somewhere. That is what Jesus meant by counting the cost. I still remember when I first dedicated my life to serving God, thankfully I received this lecture about counting the cost. Little did I realize back then what the full cost was, but I was sure God was calling me to serve Him, so I was willing to take that step of faith and trust that He will guide my life. In short, the cost to follow Jesus is expensive and in effect cost us all we own, but the cost is worth it.
 - d) Speaking of giving up everything, Jesus gives us another example of this in Verses 31-33:
15. Verse 31: "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.
- a) If our leaders want to go to war with another country, wouldn't the leaders first think in terms of what will it cost us to enter that war? There's an old Middle East joke that goes, "Seeking peace with one's enemy is a stall tactic until one can defeat them." In effect, that is Jesus' point here in these verses. The issue is not about going to war. The issue is about seeking peace with God by giving up trying to please Him based on our efforts.
 - b) To sum all of this up, Jesus is not saying to abandon our families. He is not saying that we have to say abandon our careers or whatever we own. He's saying that unless we realize that God is in charge of all aspects of our lives, then all of those relationships and things are meaningless in comparison to eternity. Jesus point is that He wants to guide us how to handle those relationships and that stuff. He wants to be in charge of all those things. Then and only then we can realize that we are saved and have accepted His invitation to be with Him forever.
 - c) OK, if we think that, what do we do practically? That's when we pray for God to guide us to do His will. That's when we read our bibles regularly (not just random passages) so He can guide us as to live how He desires. The bible is a guide as to how He desires we live so we can make a difference for Him in the world. What we do over and above that, does come back to God guiding us to do His will. Often I will pray things like, "OK, God what do you want me to do now? The answer is go live and when I need you, I'll let you know.

16. Verse 34: "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?"³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.
- a) Here Jesus uses another story that the crowd can relate to. To explain, I need to discuss a little about salt. If it mixes with impurities, it can lose its salty flavor. The problem with salt is that it's hard to throw away. That's because plants can't grow in ground with a lot of salt in it. You can't even put it in a "manure pile" because the plants can't absorb that manure due to the salt being in the ground. The point is salt was used to preserve food before the days of refrigeration, and was also used in their floors, to prevent weeds from growing there. The point here is just that salt is no good if it loses its ability to be "salty" (the flavor you get when you taste it.)
 - b) OK so what? The point here comes back to the invitation for salvation. Once someone spends a lifetime rejecting Jesus' message of salvation, it is too late. That's what Jesus is warning about here: Making a decision to serve Him before it's too late. Just as salt has a moment where it's "too late", so people can have a moment when it's too late for them. So when is it too late? It's literally at the point of death which we all know, is unknown to any of us. What Jesus is driving it is make the decision to serve Him now before it's too late to do otherwise.
 - c) Let me pause for a moment and address those of us who've already dedicated their lives to serving Jesus. Why should we care about this stuff if we know it already? So glad that you asked. The hardest aspect of living the Christian life is we easily get distracted. As it is commonly said from many pulpits, "The problem with being a living sacrifice for Jesus is we constantly crawl off the altar." Think of this lesson and the invitation to serve Jesus as a reminder to keep our focus upon Him. It doesn't mean we have to think about God at every waking moment. It means we constantly make the effort to remember that we do serve Him and not vice-versa. The greatest purpose one can have for living is to use one's life to make a difference for Him. All of us need to be regularly reminded of that fact as we easily get our focus elsewhere. That's why I'm preaching to myself as well as anyone willing to read this lesson as well. With that said, I still have a half of a verse left:
17. Verse 35b: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
- a) This line has become Jesus' "tag line" associated with Him as it's used often in the Gospels as well as the book of Revelation when Jesus is speaking to believers and those interested in being one of His followers. The "what we should hear" is the invitation to regularly remind ourselves to trust God to guide our lives as our entrance ticket into heaven has already been "punched" based on His payment for our sins. If we trust in that fact, then life is about using our time to make that difference for Him as I've been preaching in the entire lesson. With that comment made, we're ready to wrap this up in prayer:
18. Heavenly Father, thank You that You've extended the invitation for us to spend eternity with You before the foundation of the world was laid. Thank You for being filled with love so that we can be the objects of that love. Help us to not waste the greatest resource You've given us, our time so that we can use it to make a difference for You. Now guide us and fill us with Your spirit so that through Your power we may have the boldness to use that time for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.