

I. Intro

A. Have you ever tried to convince someone of something that you know will be so good for them...so many times?

1. And they just don't listen to you? We've all experienced this.

- i) What's that like for you?
- ii) How does that make you feel?
- iii) Is it frustrating?

B. This kind of experience sets us up for our journey today as we continue in our study of the book of Luke.

1. The title of this sermon is "The Great Obstacle to the Kingdom of God".

2. I've given this title because we are going to come across Jesus' teaching in these parables that I believe shows us the heart of Jesus most clearly - perhaps the most of any of his other parables.

3. As we've been studying Luke's account, we have seen that the closer Jesus gets to Jerusalem, the more focused His teachings seem to get. The more urgency we find in Jesus' word about the kingdom of God and salvation.

4. But we also find a great obstacle to Jesus' teaching.

- a) What is the great obstacle to entering the kingdom of God? Perhaps the answer comes immediately to you - perhaps it doesn't.
- b) I believe we discover the answer to this question all over the text today.
- c) I invite you to be thinking about what the answer to this question as we read and study the text today.
- d) We have a lot of ground to cover today... We begin in Luke 13:31 :

31 At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." 32 And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. 33 Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' 34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

5. **Jesus is confronting an obstacle to this mission.**

[Reminder: What is the obstacle to the kingdom of God?]

6. Luke shows us how Jesus longs for His people to live in the kingdom of God...

7. **But what is the kingdom of God that Jesus is wanting people to come into?**

- a) In Acts 1:6–8, right before Jesus ascends into Heaven, we see the disciples ask him this very question:

[6] So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [7] He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

(1) The kingdom of God is a spiritual and a physical kingdom and Jesus is the king. Jesus inaugurated his kingdom when he came which is why you see him speak of the kingdom of God now being here. But it's also not fully here. We see this reality in praying the Lord's prayer - “Your kingdom come...”

(2) So, the kingdom of God is being made known wherever there are God's people. The Great Commission is a call to advance the kingdom of God as Jesus is our king.

- b) So we find Jesus in this light...Longing for Jerusalem, His chosen people to put their faith in Him and their savior and king. This singular mission is what will propel us into the main part of our time today...**

II. Let's look at the first part of our text:

1. The text shows us the Pharisees - leaders here warning Jesus - is this a kind and caring gesture to protect Jesus?

a) We see elsewhere they always seem bent on trying to trap Jesus.

b) Whether or not this is their intention here, Luke doesn't say, but we see elsewhere they are not sympathetic to Jesus or his teachings.

2. I love this response to their warning. Jesus calls Herod a fox which could have been a jab at him meaning he has little significance or that he was a deceiver or a destroyer.

(a) Both could be in view here.

(b) Either way Jesus is going to Jerusalem. He is not worried about king Herod.

i) **An earthly king is NOT the great obstacle to kingdom of God.**

ii) Jesus knows without a shadow of a doubt that His purpose is to die on the cross for the sins of the world.

iii) and He is committed to this singular goal - salvation for humanity.

iv) Jesus is going to continue to perform healings and casting out of demons, in fact, Jesus tells them his specific mission.

3. But we should take note of something too. We see frustration in Jesus. What's he frustrated at?

(1) He, just like the prophets in the OT, shows God's deep care, love, and intimate desire for His people. But just like the prophets, the nation of Israel, did not respond.

(2) There is an obstacle to the kingdom of God. And this is why Jesus is frustrated.

(a) In fact, we will again see Jesus in Luke 19, not just frustrated, but weeping due to the painful reality of the people's rejection of His invitation to the kingdom of God.

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

4. Yet, Jesus is resolved. Jesus will not be deterred by the obstacle that keeps people from His kingdom. The mission continues...

5. Let's continue following Jesus on his mission in chapter 14:1-11...

1 One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. 2 And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. 3 And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" 4 But

they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. 5 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?" 6 And they could not reply to these things.

7 Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, 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, 9 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. 10 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. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

III. The obstacle shows itself again...

- A. So we see Jesus healing on a man on the sabbath and then teaching a parable about a Wedding Feast.
- B. First we look at the healing. Now, the Pharisees aren't an enigma to Jesus here. He knows their strategy.
 - 1. look at the end of v.1 - They were watching him closely.
 - 2. Jesus is trying to convince people to change their perspectives about him.
 - 3. Pharisee's home - take note that Jesus is eating a meal with those who are typically seeking to catch him and discredit him.
 - a) It also shows the compelling nature of Jesus - he had their attention (for better and for worse). He was a powerful force.
 - 4. They want to catch him - they're almost frothing at the mouth knowing that he's "probably going to do something controversial" and they'd be there to call it out!
 - 5. There was a man there who had dropsy.
 - a) Why is he here?

- (1) Is he a pawn in the Pharisees game?
 - (2) Was he invited?
 - b) Behold presents us with a clue that this was man was a setup - look at the cruel intentions of these people.
 - (1) Dropsy is likened to a shameful condition that some note in that time.
 - (2) symptoms would have been swollen limbs and tissue due to excess fluids - some rabbis at the time believed it was a result of some type of sexual offense.
 - (3) Regardless of the cause it was viewed as God's judgement for sin or uncleanness.
6. The trap is set. How is this going to play out?
- a) Jesus makes the first move.
 - b) He asks them a question. Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"
 - c) Their move: Silence.
 - (1) What's their motive?
 - d) Jesus' move: He acts, he heals.
 - (1) Notice the word here: he TOOK him.
 - (a) This word (TOOK) means to embrace him, physical contact occurs with this "unclean" man.
 - (b) The word is used elsewhere to when speaking of arresting or seizing someone!
- C. The problem here is the same problem that Jesus is confronting in this whole section... the obstacle is formidable.
- 1. Jesus confronts the obstacle but nothing changes.
 - 2. The Pharisees remain silent betraying - once again - the obstacle to the kingdom of God.
 - 3. Even a miracle of healing in front of peoples' very eyes doesn't overcome the obstacle. **It only proves it further.**
 - 4. Nevertheless, this obstacle will not deter Jesus.
 - 5. He confronts the obstacle in a different light in the parable of the wedding feast...

D. Jesus is observing how we behave.

1. Note the frenetic energy to get what is best for ourselves.
2. He simply observes it!
3. Jesus is always observing, paying attention (to how we interact w/ him and others)

E. What is it he's observing/pointing out?

1. We choose what is best for ourselves.
2. Customary in this time and in later Judaism - there would be U-shaped table...
 - a) Seats of honor were to the left and right of the host.
 - b) Imagine this guy at a party...
 - c) "Hey, was just noticing some things..."
 - (1) you're selfish.
 - (2) and you're exclusive.
 - d) See this idea of inclusivity and outward focus at a feast is all over Bible Isa 25, the gospels, Revelation...
 - (1) And the Lord of Hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow ... He will swallow up death for all time ... and wipe tears away from all faces."
 - (2) Jesus is pointing out to those there two things:
 - (a) Don't be self-serving in your invitations...
 - i) You know you'll get something back from the rich and those you're friends with. They'll validate you financially or affirm your statue in some way.
 - ii) Instead, invite those who have nothing to offer you or repay you. Who can't make you look good socially or status-wise...
 - (3) Imagine Jesus as a guest at your party telling you this...
 - (4) Let's move to Great Banquet - verses 12-24

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!" 16 But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. 17 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.' 18 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.' 19 And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' 20 And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' 21 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.' 22 And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' 23 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. 24 For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.' "

A. Notice these things:

1. I love this.
2. This guy all of sudden gets something right in Jesus' teaching.
 - a) These are contentious moments - and then I like to think - a moment of unintentional levity perhaps - Jesus, "You're NOT WRONG!"
3. Banquet is ready
 - a) meant preparations had all been made
 - b) invitations already had been RSVP'd.
4. But excuses...
 - a) Bought a field. (Got some property!) - more important.
 - b) Bought some oxen. (Got some stuff!) - more important.

- c) Got married. (Got a relationship!) - more important.
- 5. Pay attention to Jesus' voice
 - a) Jesus has joy in his voice...v.17 (Come, for everything is now ready.)
 - b) Jesus has sadness in voice...v.18 {But they all alike began to make excuses}
 - c) Do you hear the longing...v.23 (Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.)
- 6. What is keeping these people from coming to the banquet?
 - a) This points us back to the main question we've been seeking to answer...

IV. What is the great obstacle to the kingdom of God?

A. It's Ourselves. Self. Me, you, all of us. Our hearts really aren't after God.

1. See we really base our decisions about life, religion, everything (including God!), on our own opinions. Our way.
2. You hear Sinatra's voice, singing right? "I did it MY WAY!!!!"
3. Jesus is constantly confronting the reality that we aren't interested in what God thinks or wants.
4. We care most about what WE think and want.

B. Where do we see this?

1. We see it in the parable of the Sabbath healing 14:1-6

- a) **Healing the man with dropsy on the Sabbath was an attempt to break the obstacle of self - appealing for COMPASSION.**
- b) But what were the Pharisees concerned with?
 - (1) THEY were concerned with what they thought, what they wanted.
 - (a) They knew what was best concerning the kingdom of God.
 - (b) THEIR view of the Sabbath.
 - (c) NOT God's.
 - (d) Their own hearts are the obstacle to God's kingdom. Their own lack of compassion magnifies what is already true.

- (2) See Jesus knows that compassion requires humility. A heart looking to the interests of others. Curious to what is going and how might they help?
- (3) Compassion requires genuine care for someone else.
 - (a) Above even our own thoughts, preconceived notions, and desires.
 - (b) See the man with dropsy,
 - i) the woman with a disabling spirit,
 - ii) a man with a withered hand,
 - iii) all of these were questions of the heart - **whom do you serve?**
 - (c) See - Jesus, himself, AFTER performing a miracle in front of their very eyes - tells them "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath".
 - (d) But they did not care about what God wanted. They cared about what they wanted. Their own hearts were the obstacle.

2. We see it in the parable of the wedding feast 14:7-11:

- a) We care most about what is best for us.
- b) That's the kingdom of self we see at work all around us. Today, just as it was then.
- c) Not only was Jesus pointing out a lack of compassion he was pointing out that the wedding feast is open to everyone. Not just those who can repay us.
- d) The poor, the crippled, the lame...they are to be invited in. They can't repay someone for this kind of invitation!
- e) That's Jesus' point. Their invitation to the feast has nothing to do with what we get - if we're looking for repayment in any form we've missed the whole point.
- f) Jesus promises this kind of invitation to others - especially those who are need - will be repaid in the resurrection.
- g) God will honor. God is the source of the reward Jesus speaks to for this graciousness.
- h) Jesus tells is what it looks like in God's kingdom. All his teaching is aimed in this way:**
 - (1) Blessed who are meek, the gentle, the lowly.
 - (2) Blessed are the merciful - compassion, right?

(3) Blessed are the poor in spirit.

i) Contrast that with the kingdom of the world and self.

(1) Blessed are those who think highly of themselves.

(2) Blessed are those who take first for themselves at the expense of others.

(3) Blessed are the sure...those who know everything.

(4) Blessed are those who always argue THEIR perspective and NEVER seek to understand someone they disagree with.

(5) This kingdom affirms as good a straining and striving for power, comfort, and well-being of SELF.

3. This is the obstacle. Ourselves, our sin puts us in the center.

a) We are saying to Jesus...

b) LOOK Jesus - this is the way!!

c) Listen to my sermon about the kingdom I long for...and so, we, just like the invited guests to the wedding, take the places of honor for ourselves. We invite those who can repay us. Invite us in return, give us something back...

d) Maybe not all the time but it's there in our heart. (We don't have to look very far to see where that comes out in us).

(1) Why didn't I get recognized.

(2) Why didn't I get that.

(3) Why didn't I...

(4) I deserve...

4. We see it in the parable of the Great Banquet in 14:15-24:

a) Look at the excuses made for what is really important to us.

(1) i have land i need to go to

(2) I have oxen to tend to that i just bought

(3) I just got married

b) Know what these are? Excuses, yes. But lies also.

(1) I bought land in our day is like being invited to someone's house and then 30 minutes before calling and saying, "sorry, I just bought a house and need to go see it for the first time." What?

(2) Or, like the rich person who bought the yoke of oxen, in our day would be like saying we bought a used car but now need to go see if it actually runs. No, not likely.

- (3) Deut 24:5 shows a Jewish custom of marriage making one free from major responsibilities for a year.
 - (a) When a man is newly married, he shall not go out with the army or be liable for any other public duty. He shall be free at home one year to be happy with his wife whom he has taken.
- (4) This guy has got all the time in the world to come the banquet he was invited to but makes an excuse.

V. So, I ask you again, have you tried to convince someone of something that is good for them and they don't listen to you?

A. Here it is for Jesus. And here it is for us. We are confronted with ourselves.

1. So, as we begin to wrap up our time, I want us to do some reflection and think about the excuses we have just seen in this last section. Where might you be in relation to God - do you know Him?
 - a) Might you be making excuses for why you don't fully follow Him or submit to His ways?

B. Jesus knows our excuses conceal a more fundamental problem.

1. The real reason we don't follow Him is often buried underneath our excuses for why we (like those in the parable) won't come into the feast.

C. Reflection time

1. Now many genuinely have struggles with things like, the veracity of Scripture, is God real, the problem of evil, etc...I get it - those are real struggles.
2. BUT, there are also those of us who just don't like what it would mean to follow Jesus because it's costly to us. It would mean a change in how we live our lives.
3. So we don't really take the invitation to go into God's banquet and we make up excuses...

a) - **Now, we'd never say these things out loud but we believe them in our hearts...so we make some sort of excuse that may go like:**

(1) Thanks for the invite but...I have some "intellectual and philosophical" challenges with Jesus - like, He was a great teacher....

(a) But we are really saying, "I don't want to even think about dealing with a reality where I have to answer to God in any way, shape, or form. Please excuse me!"

(2) Thanks for the invite but...and "I love Jesus and what He has to say, and I even quote the Bible"...

(a) but when it comes to actually living out or actually submitting the authority of Jesus and His Scripture - you really have no intention of living with Jesus as your king. Please excuse me!

(3) or Thanks for the invite but "I just can't reconcile the problem of evil and pain with a good, loving God" so...please excuse me!

(a) - but in reality, what may be going on deep down is an unresolved pain of their own.

b) Or maybe it's just these thoughts that we just simply live from because it is what we think and we've made up our minds so we say in our hearts...

(1) No thanks! I don't want to give up living my life the way I want to...

(2) I don't want to change because:

- (a) It's my finances,
- (b) my sexual desires,
- (c) my pleasure,
- (d) my preferences...

(3) Here's a tough one:

(a) I choose if and when I go to church or how involved I am...because other things are equal or more important.

(b) It's my spiritual life. I decide what is best.

D. This is hard. I know it. I am convicted by Jesus' words here. I was sadly mistaken for how many times my own heart bristled at these excuses. There were times I offended myself in preparing this sermon.

E. But, if, like me, call yourself a follower of Jesus and have felt a wave of conviction in your heart here let me point out God's grace to you and me this morning:

1. The reality of many of our excuses is they point out our real loves - or as the Bible puts it our idols.

2. And this is not a surprise to God even if comes as a surprise to you.

3. Here's the grace from Jesus today...
 - a) Jesus is showing you and me that the excuses we have for not taking Jesus' invitation to come into the banquet - to enter into His kingdom - show we have misplaced our trust and security elsewhere.
 - b) And today we can confess this to God and receive His grace and forgiveness!
 - c) **We can tell him - right now - whatever our excuse is - God, I am sorry forgive me...**
 - (1) I have made too little time for you because I don't believe you when you say at your right hand are pleasures forevermore - I really believe they are found in my job, my bank account, my relationship, etc...
 - (2) I don't believe you will really provide for me...
 - (3) I don't believe you really delight in me...
 - (4) I don't believe You can pull through for me...
 - (5) I don't believe your Word is relevant for today's issues....
 - (6) I just don't trust you...
 - (7) TELL HIM...confess what is on your heart to Him...
4. For those who have never placed your faith and trust in Jesus, you too can share with God right now those very same excuses that keep you from taking Jesus' invitation into his banquet - into his kingdom...
 - (1) don't believe you will really provide for me...
 - (2) I don't believe you really delight in me...
 - (3) I don't believe You can pull through for me...
 - (4) I don't believe your Word is relevant for today's issues....
 - (5) I don't trust you...
 - (6) But I want to. I need your help to believe, I need your help to trust, I need your strength Jesus. I accept your invitation to come into your kingdom and into your banquet - because you died for my sins and excuses, and you rose again from the dead so all who trust in you my come to your table. Forgive me!

AND to each of us this day who have asked God for His forgiveness for the 10,000th time or for the 1st time ever... Hear Jesus' response...

"COME, FOR EVERYTHING IS NOW READY"

