



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

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**SERMON - 12TH PENTECOST LUKE 14:1-14**

**AUGUST 28, 2022**

**"HEAVEN, AND A GOD OF JUDGEMENT"**

Last time, we spoke of the challenge to faith posed by the church's doctrine of divine judgement - expressed in the creeds of the church which say, "Christ will come to judge the living and the dead". We heard last time, in Luke 13:24 -28 our Lord Jesus liken that day to a householder who will close the door and say to many who knock "depart from me all you evildoers", where they will go to a place where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Why ... or how, we wondered, could a God of love condemn someone to such?

The church's teaching of eternal separation, or hell, has been affirmed mostly with sobriety, not glee, save for occasional "hell fire and brimstone" preachers who use the specter of eternal punishment to attempt to evangelize- a better word might be motivate. American examples of this occurred during our nation's two 'great awakenings' in the 18th and 19th centuries -first when Pastor Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon entitled *"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"*, and later Evangelist Charles Finney employing "anxious seats" in the front row of his revival tents to bear in on the unconverted!

Many earnest, though I would add mistaken, voices in modern times have attempted to universalize salvation, either by presenting a Jesus whom everyone will eventually come to call upon and love or because of a Jesus who preemptively, and without repentance, loves everyone, or by creating "a God for all" out of strands of all the world's religions, philosophies, and cultural tastes. Either of the following statements could characterize such attempts - the first being God is too good to judge anyone, and the second, we are just too good to be judged.

The Bible supports neither of course. Our text today from Luke 14 helps us to understand that. Last time we wrestled with the notion of hell and a God of love. Our text today asks us to wrestle with the notion of heaven and God of justice. In our story today, Jesus addresses folks who believed in what might be called "particular salvation" - members of the Jewish religious party the Pharisees - who like the man in our lesson last time asked Jesus "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" were fairly certain the answer was yes, and they were among the elect through their strict adherence to God's law.

In our story today, a man is present with an obvious physical malady - dropsy, which if you haven't heard of it (or had it) is an accumulation of fluid in our body's tissue. We'll make no assumptions here, since no one says anything about him, but the common assumption in those days was this man somehow hadn't strictly followed God's law and was therefore sick. He was "a sinner." Jesus wonders what his hosts might say if he delayed the start of dinner so he could heal him. We'd read this as an example of Christ's tender mercy - his hosts heard it as Jesus doing good to a sinner - Jesus treating him as though he wasn't a sinner. Imagine that!

Their concern was that Jesus would bring a sinner into the kingdom of the elect. That is when and why our Lord latches onto the wisdom of Proverbs - our first lesson today - to teach about who enters the kingdom, and how. And all he must do is look around at how people are - the lot of us - seeking the best for ourselves! If, as C.S. Lewis said, *'Hell is the greatest monument to human freedom'*, and *"Inside each of us there is something growing, that will be hell if it is not nipped in the bud"*, our story today affirms this.

Folks were picking *"the places of honor at the table."* Rather, "guests" were picking those places. Hell, whatever it may be, is chosen, not assigned, by those who come to think it is a better option, even a place of honor, a reward for self-assurance. The *"wedding feast of the Lamb"* - heaven, is by contrast, by invitation only. The only people there are guests. It is no coincidence our Lord told this story with his eyes fixed on a host of the dinner Jesus was attending, who didn't think someone else belonged.

Unlike hell, completely unlike it by the way, heaven is for those whom the host chooses to honor. Heaven may be the uniting of all people, the reconciling of sinners to one another, but it is above all where sinners are reconciled to God - the spiritually blind, lame, crippled and poor invited to places of honor, the resurrection of those whose righteousness is Christ. It is for those C.S. Lewis said, *"love God for his own sake"* because they are loved by God for Jesus' sake.

Hell belongs to those who try to make themselves happy- it becomes hell of course, because as Lewis says, *"human beings can't make (ourselves) or one another happy for very long."* Heaven is for those who know, by faith, that there is only one good thing - Jesus Christ. In Luke 9:47, at another dinner party hosted by a Pharisee where, as luck would have it, a "sinful woman" showed up and anointed Jesus' feet with her tears. Just prior to being evicted from the party, Jesus commended her, saying *"those who have been forgiven much, love much."*

Reconciling hell, and a God of love is not an easy task. Far better we devote ourselves to an equally confounding, but supremely beautiful thought - heaven and God of justice. *Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us*, we pray. Of this petition Luther reminded us we sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment. So after we pray this today, we sinners will gather, adorning our time with confession, songs of praise, and finally hands extended to a particularly gracious host, who says *"come up here to a better place, to the altar where I will give you my very body and blood."* We deserve little... yet we receive much.

Therefore, while I know it is not our custom, and I know you folks who routinely sit in the middle won't notice a thing, I am today going to ask that when we come to the communion table, we start with those of you in the back rows and work our way forward! It just seems fitting in respect of a Savior and host who said the last shall be first and first last, who takes those in low places and exalts them, who has chosen you for a place of honor in the resurrection of the righteous. Think on that when you come. AMEN