

39. The Parable of the Great Banquet

Luke 14:15-24

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Luke has been sharing with us the occasion where Pharisees and experts in the law invited Jesus to the house of a prominent Pharisee for a Sabbath lunch. Their motive was to condemn Him if He healed a man with dropsy on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1). After Jesus healed the man, He noticed that they began to jockey for position at the table. The Lord shared a few words on humility and inviting the poor and those who cannot reciprocate (Luke 14:7-14). Powerful, prideful men, such as those reclining at the table, did not enjoy having their motives brought out into the open. Those who think they have their theology all together do not have the humility to be taught how to behave. A man reclining at the table responds to Jesus by saying, “**Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God**” (Luke 14:15). Don’t you wonder what was on the mind of the man making the statement?

Perhaps, he was thinking of what Isaiah the prophet wrote about the kingdom of God:

“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. ⁷On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸he 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. ⁹In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation” (Isaiah 25:6-9).

It is difficult to judge the man’s motivation for saying such a thing. Maybe, he spoke these words to ease the tension in the air, thus hoping to change the subject to something a little more palatable for those around the table. Was it a statement designed to find out what makes a person worthy of being invited to share in the Kingdom of God? More than likely, though, he was saying, “I can’t wait for us to recline at God’s table in the coming kingdom together.” The Pharisees all considered that they would be there. After all, in their eyes, they were the only ones righteous enough to earn their place through their righteous deeds.

The Pharisees were meticulous about keeping God’s commandments, and could not conceive that there would be Gentiles in the kingdom of God, or even Jews that did not keep their view of the Law of God. Concerning the Gentiles, even Peter the Apostle needed God to speak three times through a vision before he would enter the home of a Gentile, Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, when he and his friends received the Spirit (Acts 10). Jesus shared a parable with them that would shake their thinking on just who would attend the feast in the Kingdom of God. □

The Invitation

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷At the time of the banquet he sent

his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready' (Luke 14:15-17).

In ancient times, a banquet invitation was sent out twice. The first invitation was sent to find out the level of interest and numbers for which the master of the house had to prepare. This nobleman was wealthy and generous. In a culture devoid of entertainment, e.g., no radio, no television, or movies, the highlight of the year was when someone of great means put on a lavish banquet for all in the area. To get an invitation was like being invited to a lavish ball at the White House with the president of the United States or, maybe, your own country's president and his home. It just wasn't social etiquette to turn down the invitation to the banquet of all banquets. The master of the house had to know the approximate numbers for whom he would be catering.

In a hot Middle Eastern climate, there were no cooling systems to refrigerate meat. When a cow or any animal was slaughtered, it had to be eaten the same day. The man sent his servants to tell those invited that the banquet was coming soon, but he did not stipulate the day and time. Only when everything was ready would he send out the second call to come. This man had a reputation of generosity, and this was not something to be missed. He went to the various caterers, ordering the fruit, the bread, the fish, the lambs, the beef, the turkeys, and the best wine for miles around. This would be some banquet! Each of the men reclining at the table before Jesus wondered where this story was going.

Question 1) Who does the host in the story represent? Why do you think it was a free invitation?

My favorite thing to do is to eat dinner with good friends. There is something special about a dinner with four or five courses and ten to twelve close friends, lingering and chatting together over dinner. Of course, I wish I had room in my stomach even to eat two courses now, but for most people, the food is not the big part. It's about enjoying the company of others, i.e., sharing and being part of good conversation. The passage we are studying today is about such future time, a banquet in the Kingdom of God. Jesus pictures eternal life as a banquet that we are invited to enjoy along with many others. The Book of Revelation also tells us about this banquet in heaven: "Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' And he added, 'These are the true words of God'" (Revelation 19:9). God is longing to enjoy close intimacy in eternity with those who willingly choose to know Him and love Him.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).

The passage in Revelation 3:20, speaks of those who open their heart to Christ, inviting Him in to rule and reign over their lives. It compares this eternal relationship to the closeness and intimacy of a meal. It suggests eternal bliss and satisfaction. What joy it will be to be around Jesus, to gaze upon His loveliness and laugh with Him, to see His glory and grace, and enjoy heaven with others who also love Him! How humbling it is to realize that the God of the Universe wants to enjoy our presence over a meal He has prepared.

There were no fixed-price expensive tickets to buy to get the best seats. The banquet was by free invitation only. If you are a Christian, you have come to Christ at His invitation. Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44). You have been called and invited. The very fact that you are reading this study is proof that the Spirit of God is inviting you to the spiritual banquet of new life with Christ. Some people are upset that the entrance to God's Kingdom is by a free, invitation-only ticket. People find it hard to receive grace or undeserved favor. Part of the reason is pride. They feel they must accomplish something to buy their entrance fee. This ticket, though, is free.

Jesus could be offensive to a person's pride at times. He would say things that would shake people to the core, hopefully, to get them out of their religious ruts. God will often offend the mind to reveal the heart. There is an element of humility of soul that the Lord wants to bring to the hearts of those who seek Him. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. The things of God cannot be bought or worked for, but they are humbly received. Freely, you have received, and freely you are to give.

Question 2) Is there a humbling experience through which you have gone on the road to knowing Christ?

The Excuses of the Invited.

¹⁸But 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.” ¹⁹Another said, “I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.” ²⁰Still another said, “I just got married, so I can't come” (Luke 14:18-20).

These words of Jesus must have seemed like a joke to the Pharisees as they came forth from the Lord's lips. Who would do such a thing in Israel? Each of those reclining saw this as a serious breach of social protocol, and for what reason? It seemed more fantastic because they had accepted the first invitation when it had gone out. They did not see themselves in the picture.

We are now in a day of grace when our Master has sent forth His servants, the church, to go with the Good News and call people, you and me, to come to His house and enjoy His grace and favor. Some who were invited replied with excuses. The first excuse was from a man involved in an investment. He had just bought some land and wanted to view it. I cannot believe that a farmer would purchase land without checking out the fertility of the soil first. Who today buys a car without test driving it? This man's heart was set on business deals more than on the things of God. I wonder if there was one or two sitting around the table with Jesus whose hearts were set on business. Jesus has a way of speaking words like an arrow to the heart. □

Christ's words were living and actively working to show each around the table, just what God saw in their hearts. The second excuse was also very lame. A man bought ten oxen, five pairs, and wanted to try them out. In the time of Jesus, oxen were used for plowing the ground and preparing the soil for planting. It is ridiculous to think that the man would have bought oxen before seeing how healthy they were and how much strength they had. It seems that this man just wanted to get on with his work and not care about the issues of his heart. His heart was focused on making money and being successful in his work. I wonder how many hear the call of God, yet

their business and work comes first. If you have no time for God, you are busier than you should be, with your heart set on other things than that which is most needful. God knows every heart and can see through our paper-thin excuses.

The third excuse was from a man who had just become married so that he couldn't come. So, the obvious answer is to bring his wife, too. He pretends that he cannot come, but what is really at the core of his heart is that he will not come. It is about a lack of desire on each man's part. The first two excuses are about material possessions while the third excuse is about the man's affections. Their relationship to the host was not crucial to any of them. They had no desire to get to know the banquet host on a more intimate level. This response was a deliberate snub to the host, and in those times, it could be taken as an act of war. It is possible that the individuals around the table had heard the words of John the Baptist when he called for them to be baptized and prepare their hearts. These excuses revealed the hearts of those listening to the parable. He was offending their minds to reveal their hearts. Often, we get sidetracked in our walk with Christ, and we concentrate our hearts on other things. This lesson is for us all.

An excuse is defined as the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. Often, people make an excuse by saying that they can't do something, but what they really mean is that they won't. For those of us who are Christians, we have been given the power to do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). People might say they can't get along with their spouse, when what a pastor or counselor *hears* is that they *won't* get along with their spouse. We disobey God's Word because we want to rebel, not because we can't obey. Concerning these men with excuses, the issue was not that they couldn't attend but that they wouldn't. Their will was unbending and stubborn. If one doesn't accept the invitation to the wedding of the Son of God, it is because a person chooses not to respond.

The Disrespect Shown to the Master

Let's now talk about the disrespect shown to the owner by the lame excuses:

²¹The 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." ²²"Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room" (Luke 14:21-22).

Question 3) Why did the owner of the house become angry? How does this relate to people today that make excuses and decline the invitation?

The owner of the house was angry, and He had every right to be. See what a position the house owner was put in. A massive banquet with very few guests puts a damper on the celebration. The meat was off the spits, the roast potatoes were now laid on the table, the dainty cakes were all laid out, and His servants were all ready for the party, and now the nobleman was told that those invited were not coming. He was disrespected in front of those he loved! □

He could have slammed the door in his hot anger, but no, this was a kind and generous man who wanted to exhibit his grace to all who would humble themselves to receive His kindness. Was he

foiled in His plan? No, Jesus would not become incarnate and suffer in vain. The cows, the lambs, and the rich food would not be prepared in vain. Jesus shall see of the travail of His soul (Isaiah 53:11). His sacrifice at Calvary shall yet touch many lives, even though many will refuse to come having all kinds of excuses.

The picture is of the nation of Israel. Over the centuries, God had led them, cared for them, and kept them since the days of Abraham. He had showered them with many blessings in preparing them for closeness and intimacy with Himself. They had accepted the first invitational call to covenant love at Mount Sinai when they had said, “The people all responded together, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said.’ So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD” (Exodus 19:8). Now the time had come, the Bridegroom was here to usher them into the banquet, but those who received the invitation were not willing to come and walk in intimacy and love toward Him. God’s plan shall succeed. His servants shall yet go out again to those whom many think are unworthy.

The Love of Christ Compels Us

²³Then 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” (Luke 14:23-24).

Question 4) Take a moment to think of those described as living in the streets and alleys. What do they look like today? How can we reach them with Christ’s invitation?

The servants were told to go out quickly into the streets and alleys and bring in those who were poor and disabled. The poor and disabled are those who perceive and respond out of their need. The Lord loves for people to cry out to Him in their need. One can have a big checking account, a large mansion, and drive the best BMW, but be spiritually destitute and bankrupt before the God of Heaven. The letter to the Church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation was written to a literal church, then in Asia Minor, now called Turkey. It can also be prophetic or indicative of the time in which we live, especially in the West. “You say ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17). The heartfelt response of those with real needs met by the Lord Jesus is appreciation and love. That is what the God of the Universe is seeking, i.e., a people who will love Him freely in response for all He has done for them. Repeatedly, we find that God cares for the widows and orphans, the poor and the disabled, those who are helpless. There is a sense of urgency in this passage, which becomes evident by the usage of the word “*quickly*.” It seems that the time is short and that the Master of the house wants His mansion to be full as the banquet is now ready.

Upon hearing that there was still room, the Master of the house told them to go to the roads and country lanes and **make them come in** (v. 23). In the Inquisition of the mid-thirteenth century (through the sixteenth century) centered in Italy and France, some used this passage of Scripture (to compel them v. 23)) as justification for religious persecution. Many were coerced into becoming Christians or die. There were terrible times of religious persecution for followers of Jesus. Jewish people were also much persecuted at that time. Jesus was talking about the force of

our love and passion as if we saw someone idling about on the river, not knowing that there were dangerous rapids ahead. We would all try to do something to help our fellow human beings if we knew they were heading for the rapids. It would be the same if you had a cure for cancer. Wouldn't you be passionate about making sure everybody with cancer knew how to be healed? In the same way, we are to be passionate about the life-changing message we must share.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died (2 Corinthians 5:14).

There is the story of two old friends that came across one another at a meeting of many thousands of people listening to the great English preacher George Whitefield (1714-1770). One who was a Christian asked the other what he was doing there as he knew that the man was not a believer. The other replied that he was still not a believer, but he had come to hear Whitefield preach with fervency and tears, and that it was difficult not to be convinced by Whitefield's passion. He was moved by seeing that Whitefield believed so strongly what he was preaching.

We must move people out of love and care for them. Christ's love compels us to do all in our power to see them delivered into the care of Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ exhibited this kind of love in paying the full price of substitution for our sin. He was so moved for you and me that He gave Himself on the cross as it was the only way to deliver us from Satan's power. To reach the lost at all costs should be the Christian's principal aim in life. It is challenging to move others if we are not moved. When Abraham pleaded with God to spare Sodom from judgment, he knew that his nephew Lot was living in the city. God mercifully sent two angels into the city to get Lot's family out before fire fell on the city, but even then, it was the force of the angel's passion that moved them. When Lot hesitated to leave, notice that the angels grabbed their hands and pulled them:

¹²The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, ¹³because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it." ¹⁴So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. ¹⁵With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." ¹⁶When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them (Genesis 19:12-16).

Here is a picture of passion and faith that moves people. The world system in which we are living is heading for judgment. Those we love who are not yet believers will hesitate to flee from the things of this world system. We see the angels moving Lot's family by the force of their concern and passion. We need to share that same passion for grasping the hands of our friends and loved ones and moving them toward the Lord Jesus. □

Ruthanna Metzgar had an experience with which I would like to close this study (Copyright

Ruthanna Metzgar, excerpted in *Heaven*, by Randy Alcorn). I quote Ruthanna herself:

As a professional singer, it was not unusual to be asked to sing for a wedding, but it was a bit unusual to sing for the wedding of a millionaire. I knew the wedding would be picture-perfect and was pleased to be able to participate, but when the invitation to the reception arrived I knew it would be something exceptional. The reception was held on the top two floors of Seattle's Columbia Tower, the Northwest's tallest skyscraper, and it was even more wonderful than I imagined. There were waiters wearing snappy black tuxedos who offered luscious hors d'oeuvres [appetizers] and exotic beverages for the most discriminating tastes. The atmosphere was one of grace and sophistication. After about an hour of merriment the bride and groom approached a beautiful glass and brass staircase that led to the top floor. A satin ribbon, which was draped across the bottom of the stairs, was cut and the announcement made that the wedding feast was about to begin. The bride and groom ascended the stairs and the guests followed. What a lavish event of which to be a part.

A gentleman with a lovely bound book greeted us as we reached the top of the stairs. "May I have your name please?" "I am Ruthanna Metzgar and this is my husband, Roy Metzgar," I replied. The gentleman searched the Ms. "I'm not finding it. Would you spell it please?" I spelled it slowly and clearly. After searching throughout the book the gentleman looked up and said, "I'm sorry, but your name is not here. Without your name in this book you cannot attend this banquet." "Oh, there must be some mistake," I replied. "I am the singer. I sing for this wedding!" The gentleman calmly answered, "It doesn't matter who you are or what you did, without your name in the book you cannot attend this banquet." As I looked around the room I thought briefly of running to the groom and trying to plead my case, but with a hundred guests on the stairs behind us and every place at the tables assigned according to the thoughtful choices of the bride and groom, I stood silent. The gentleman with the book motioned to a waiter and said; "Show these people to the service elevator please." We followed the waiter past beautifully decorated tables laden with shrimp, whole smoked salmon, even gracefully carved ice sculptures. And adjacent to the banquet area was an orchestra, its members all dressed in dazzling white tuxedos, preparing to fill the room with glorious music.

We were led to the service elevator, stepped in, and the waiter himself pushed "G" for garage. My husband, thoughtfully, did not say a word, nor did I. As Roy drove out of the Columbia Tower garage, we both remained silent. After driving several miles in silence, Roy reached over and gently put his hand on my arm. "Sweetheart, what happened?" And then I remembered: "When the invitation arrived for the reception I was very busy and I never bothered to return the RSVP. Besides, I was the singer, surely I could go to the reception without returning the RSVP!"

As we drove on I began to weep. I was not weeping because I had just missed the most lavish banquet of my life, but I was weeping because suddenly I knew what it will be like someday for people as they stand before the entrance of heaven, viz. people who were too busy to respond to Christ's invitation to His heavenly banquet. People who have assumed

that the good things they had done, even perfect church attendance or singing in the choir, would be enough to gain entry to heaven. There will be people who will look for their names in the Lamb's Book of Life and not find it there. There will be people who did not have time to respond to Christ's gracious invitation to have their sins forgiven and accept Him into their hearts. Then, I wept again because I was so grateful that I had, many years earlier, received Christ as my personal Savior and can be confident that my name is written in the most important book of all: The Lamb's Book of Life. Is Yours?"

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12).

Let me be clear about the invitation. To recap, the invitation is sent to *everyone*. If we could only understand what God has prepared for those who love Him, none of us would find any excuse not to come to the Wedding Feast. William Barclay, a famous theologian, has stated, "The Christian life is at one and the same time an invitation to privilege, to responsibility, and to glory. At the back of it, there remains the haunting thought that the tragedy of life is to refuse the invitation of God."

Prayer: Please, Lord, help us to live passionately for You and, with love for our friends and relatives, to reach out to them before judgment falls. Enable us by Your Spirit to love like You do. Amen!

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