

Parables: Jesus the Storyteller, The Great Banquet, Luke 14:15-24, 8/22/21

Pray for Haiti and Afghanistan.

Turn to Luke 14. The dinner table is the context this parable, which is fitting since the parable is typically referred to as the Parable of the Great Banquet. Jesus is invited to a dinner party at the house of a prominent pharisee. Now I love a good meal. Possibly my two favorite words in the English language are “Dinner’s Ready!” I love food and I eat almost anything...except Kale- which tastes like bug spray.¹ But a good meal isn’t just about the food, it’s about the people you are sharing it with. Sharing a meal together is about relationships, about acceptance and equality...when you’re here your family. It’s one of the most intimate and vital connections you can make. WSJ several year ago discussed the importance of family mealtimes for children. One Harvard Medical study showed that kids who ate regularly with their parents were considerably healthier and 72% less likely to experience depression, struggle with self-esteem, have suicidal thoughts, develop eating disorders or use illegal drugs than those who did not.² And if we know that the dinner table is significant for us, it was far more central to the social fabric of the ancient middle eastern culture. Some of the most significant moments of Jesus’ discipleship ministry took place around the dinner table. Zacchaeus had his life transformed during a meal with Jesus at his home. It was at the dinner table that Jesus had his final intimate moments with his disciples before his journey to the cross. What is it that Jesus calls us to do to remember Him? Share meals together until he returns.

[Blank Slide] The dinner table is meant to be a place of acceptance, relationship building, enjoyment of one another. With all this being said, that’s the opposite experience of this dinner table in Luke 14. Have you ever been at a dinner party that got really awkward or intense? Maybe the wife shared something embarrassing about her husband and he got defensive or really quiet. Or a school masking debate broke out. Well this dinner party got awkward and intense from the moment Jesus entered. He offends the dinner party immediately by healing a man on the Sabbath, the guests are all jockeying for the best seats at the table, everyone is suspicious and judging Jesus’ every move.

Jesus uses all of this as an opportunity for a teachable moment on true hospitality. See, Jesus is not like most of us, when things get awkward most of us just smile and nod and try to avoid the confrontation. Jesus steers right into it. Jesus wasn’t concerned with keeping fake peace and he wasn’t concerned about being accepted by them. He was more concerned about the condition of their hearts. Which meant he would have to confront their deepest idols, their false belief system, even if that meant risking offense and an uncomfortable meal. And so as Jesus is calling out the guests and the host, someone at the dinner table tries to break the tension and lighten the mood. ¹⁵ *When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”* I think what he’s saying is “OK maybe we got off to a bad start. But we’re all Jews, we’re all good, moral and important people. We’re all

¹ Jim Gaffigan joke

² “Much Depends on Dinner,” by Cameron Stracher, Opinion Journal, Wall Street Journal, July 29, 2005.

going to be important guests at God's dinner table one day." The Jews rightly believed that one of the metaphors for the kingdom of God is feasting. That when the Messiah returns to set up his kingdom it will be described as an eternal celebration and satisfaction in a restored world. And they thought, because of their religious and social status, they would be at the head table. Well Jesus doesn't waste the opportunity to teach them about who will really be at the dinner table of heaven and who won't be, and it's the opposite of what they expect. Here's the parable.

¹⁶A 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."

It was customary, especially on the occasion of such a great banquet, for an invitation to go out many weeks in advance. The guest would have accepted the invitation in advance so that the banquet could be properly prepared. And then when the banquet is ready the servant would go make the announcement to the guest. Jesus is making a theologically significant point here- this great banquet represents the invitation into the kingdom of God that was first extended to the people of the Abrahamic covenant. The second invitation is the invitation to accept Jesus as the Messiah who prepares the way to this great banquet in heaven.

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." ...because after all I don't know any women who like to get dressed up and go to a fancy dinner.

However valid these excuses may have seemed, they are all unacceptable compared to the significance of this great banquet. If you were invited to dinner with the Queen at the Buckingham Palace, my guess is that you aren't going to say, "Thanks but I was planning on cleaning out the garage that day." So what's going on here? They had other allegiances in their hearts that took priority. Notice that the first two allegiances were their possessions and the third was his affections. One commentary says, "Possessions and affections cover virtually every reason by which men and women give their regrets to the kingdom of God."³

²¹The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry.

Now, in a shame/honor culture of this time this was a massive social dishonor. To accept the first invitation and then to decline the second was considered a complete slap in the face to the host. Jesus is saying to these religious leaders, "Your rejection of me as the Messiah is a rejection of God's invitation to his banquet. Here I am in your midst but you are too preoccupied with your status, your prestige, your wealth your pride, that you have missed the

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word Commentary, Luke*

opportunity.” It’s like he’s saying, “Enjoy this meal, because you won’t be at the table for eternity.”

²¹He 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.”

²³Then the master told his servant, “Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.”

How shocking this would have been to these religious elites at the table, that this wealthy master would have invited the outcasts and outsiders to such a great banquet. Imagine the scene- a black tie affair and in walks these people- how unworthy, how inappropriate, how scandalous...how just like Jesus!

Now in this parable Jesus is also predicting how the Kingdom of the Gospel will work in redemption history. The invitation into the kingdom of God comes first through the Jewish people. After the rejection of the Messiah by the religious leaders the invitation then extends to the outcasts- the Jewish commoners, those who were not the elite...but the sinners, the poor, the cursed. But it didn’t stop there. The gospel invitation goes out to the highways and byways- not just to the outcasts, but the outsiders- the Gentiles. The command of the Master to the servants is Great Commission language. *Acts 1:8 You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.* And isn’t this exactly what has happened and continues to this day? The Gospel invitation to enter the banquet- a loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ that never ends- is reaching the most remote villages through Bible translation and mission work and to the most unreached places as well.

And so again Jesus turns the over the tables of the religious people, this time not physically (although that would have been epic if he flipped the dinner time) but theologically and spiritually. “You think you are in, but you’re out, those who you think are out are in.”

You say, OK that’s a great story Nate, but what does any of this have to do with me today? Everything! Enormously relevant to our lives. A warning, an open invitation, a challenge

A Warning:

²⁴I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.

Up until this point he’s been telling a story, but now he shows it’s personal to him. He’s the Master in this story, and those religious, morally buttoned up, confident people in front of him are the ones outside the kingdom. And it was pride and allegiances that excluded them from the banquet.

This whole parable is warning not only of the religious community in Jesus’s day, but to anyone of us who is trapped in their religious pride and allegiances. These religious people didn’t see just how desperate they are for God’s salvation. JD Greear: “Religion is the #1 substitute for

genuine faith. Religion convinces you that you are worthy and gives you a list of things to make yourself more worthy!"⁴ Now you might not think of yourself as religious but spiritual. You say, "I meditate and try to think positively, I try to be a good person, be kind and considerate of others, be conscience of the environment, generous and helpful to my society and a better verse of myself." That's religion wrapped in the language of modern spirituality because it is all an attempt at making yourself acceptable and worthy before God, to bring something of your own effort. Let me illustrate it like this. The Woodall's host such incredible dinner parties. Multiple courses, fine china...just spectacular. Imagine if we showed up with a some hot pockets and handed them to the Woodalls. That would be offensive...and knowing General Jack he would put me in my place. Thinking you can somehow supplement 6 course meal with some hot pockets is like thinking our good works somehow can add to what Jesus has already done for us.

Any belief system that rejects total depravity, that man is incapable of saving themselves or making themselves worthy, that rejects a need for faith in Jesus and his substitutionary atonement on the Cross, that rejects accountability to God for his divine law is man-made religion. "Jesus didn't come to make bad men good or good men great but dead men alive."⁵ What are you trusting? Are you trying to earn your invitation?

An Open Invitation, Luke 14:23

Gallup Poll- 43% of Americans when asked what they are most concerned about after they die- that God will forgive them.⁶ They are concerned about getting into the banquet. That's the great news of this parable! No matter what you've done, no matter how far away you think you are, or how much you don't feel like you belong, everyone is invited! It's an invitation for those of you who grew up in church and prayed the prayer, but maybe you are distant, frustrated or angry at God and maybe you've locked yourself in your bedroom. It's an invitation to come down to the dinner table! Rich, poor, sick, insignificant, the sinners, the rebels, those in the most remote places, the despairing to find hope, the lost to be found and the broken to be restored. No one is beyond the reach of the invitation of Jesus to the dinner party!

But Jesus is a gentleman. He will not force anyone to come to his banquet. He invites them to come. He encourages them to come, he woos them to come, he explains to them why you would want to come. He sends servants into your life to invite you. He will not force you. Maybe you've sensed Him chasing you but have had excuses too- My career is just too all-consuming for me, I'm focused on my education right now, I'll think about spiritual things when I'm older, I want to live my life first, I need all my questions answered first- These are allegiances- possessions and affections that are in the way of accepting God's invitation. How important is an invitation from the creator of the universe to you? Wouldn't it supersede anything in this world?

⁴ JD Greear quote from sermon on Luke 14

⁵ Ravi Zacharias Quote

⁶ Shared by Mark Clark in sermon on Luke 14

A Challenge, Luke 14:23

If you are a Christ-follower, not only will you be at the dinner table of the kingdom, but until then you and I are servants of the master- we are called to compel others to come in. Ambassadors of Christ- be reconciled through Jesus! Join the feast! Which means that you and I are called to not only live in a way that is compelling, but open our mouths to share the invitation. We need to be able to articulate the gospel. It's not just let me be nice to my neighbors for 10 years and maybe they will see that Jesus is the only way to heaven because of my niceness. No! We must open our mouths and invite them to dinner!

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There is a Great Banquet waiting- share the gospel.