

Series: *The Parables of Jesus*

The Parable of the Great Banquet

Whom Should You Invite to Dinner? And What Should You Talk About?

Luke 14:12-24 (ESV)

12 He said also to the man who had invited him, *“When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*

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.*

One of the reasons we chose to do a sermon series on the parables of Jesus is because the parables are so incredibly practical while at the same time being deeply theological. They are sources of invaluable instruction on how we are to live our lives and they reveal so much about who Jesus is and what He loves. Without the parables we would miss much of Him.

This parable Joel read this morning took place over dinner and it cause me ask two questions. 1) Whom should I invite to dinner? And 2) What should we talk about? Keep these two questions in mind as we consider this parable.

He Said To The Man Who Had Invited Him

Our text begins by telling us to whom Jesus is speaking. He is speaking to **the man who invited him**. We might naturally ask, “who is the man who invited him and to what was he been invited?” We find the answers at the beginning of the chapter and answering these questions will provide us a fuller context of what is happening.

Luke 14:1-2

1 One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.

The occasion of this parable is on the **Sabbath**. We learn that Jesus has been **invited to dine** at the house of a **ruler of the Pharisees**. In the previous chapter Luke tells us that Jesus has been traveling around from town to village, teaching in the synagogues as He made His way toward Jerusalem (13:22).

Looking Forward to Easter

Jesus is already on His way to Jerusalem to be murdered. Jesus was already looking forward to the fulfilling the reason for which He was sent. We will celebrate that fulfillment in just three short weeks!! Are you looking forward to Easter?

It is extremely likely that Jesus had been the guest speaker that morning in Synagogue. And as was the custom for visiting rabbis, He was subsequently **invited** to dine at the house of one of the **leaders of the Pharisees**. This probably means that he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling religious council. This man was an important and influential man. He had also invited other influential men, lawyers, scribes, and other Pharisees (see 14:3, 7).

They Were Watching Him Carefully

The young rabbi was invited to dinner so that He could be examined more thoroughly. This verse tells us **they were watching Him carefully**. They wanted to know His opinions on theology and politics. To have this young rabbi over for dinner would offer opportunity for Him to be observed and questioned. They wanted to know what He was like, so **they were watching Him carefully**.

Jesus Healed A Man

Jesus gave them plenty to see. To start dinner off, He healed a man right in front of their eyes. This man may have been put in front of Him as a test or he may have been there to find food. Nevertheless, Jesus opens the dialogue by coming straight to the point. **"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"** (v.3) No one said a word.

Jesus then demonstrated that it is right and good to do acts of mercy & compassion on the Sabbath (14:5) and then promptly healed the man. Again, they said nothing (14:6).

Jesus Was Watching Them

They, however, were not the only ones doing the watching. Jesus was watching them. Verse 7 says,

Luke 14:7

Now He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them ...

Jesus then took the opportunity to **tell the invited guests a parable** about a wedding feast. This parable exalted the virtues of humility as opposed to the proud self-exaltation He witnessed before Him as these haughty religious leaders tried to maintain their dignity while diving for the places and seats of honor.

This young rabbi who had been invited to dinner quickly took the opportunity to teach these Pharisees something wise. The lesson in a sentence is; **it is better to choose humility than be publically humiliated**. Jesus states the truth very plainly.

Luke 14:11

*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*¹

We will all do well to cherish this teaching in our hearts.

To The Man Who Had Invited Him

No doubt Jesus had so far made quite an impression on the dinner guests. He had their attention. I suspect *the room may have still been a little quiet*. Jesus then turned to His host, the Pharisee who had invited everyone to dinner.

Luke 14:12-14

12 He said also to the man who had invited him, *“When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*

Recall the two questions I earlier asked you to keep in mind. Who will you invite to dinner? What will you talk about? Jesus has an opinion about who should be invited to dinner and He makes it known very openly and clearly. Jesus has essentially just told His guest, “You have invited the wrong people and I’ll tell you why.”

At first, you might be tempted to think Jesus was being rude, but He wasn’t. He loves his host. I know He loved him because of the reason He said what He said. Jesus wanted His host to be blessed with eternal blessings rather than temporal ones. Look at what He says.

Do Not Invite Those Who Can Repay You

Jesus instructs His host when he gives a dinner or banquet **not** to invite friends, family, relatives, and rich neighbors because they might reciprocate. Jesus is saying, “If you invite them to dinner, they might turn around and do the same to you!”

Why is this such a sad state of affairs? Jesus answers, “If they do invite you in return, then you will have been repaid.” He was saying, “When you host a big dinner do **not** invite those who can repay you, because they probably will.” Do not do this.

Do Invite Those Who Cannot Repay You

So what should you do? Jesus says, “When you host a big dinner, **do** invite those who **cannot** repay you,” like the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Why should you invite them? The answer is, ‘Because you will be blessed because they **cannot** repay you!’

¹ See also James 4:6,10 and 1 Peter 5:5-6.

This is what we might call ‘blessed non-payment.’ Jesus said you are blessed when you invite those who cannot repay you. Does this mean it is not good to seek repayment? No. It means it is not good to seek repayment on this side of the resurrection. It means whatever repayment is offered on this side of the resurrection, is not worthy to be compared with the repayment that awaits us in the kingdom of God. There is a greater reward than what this world has to offer.

Jesus loves His host because He is seeking His eternal good! That is the definition of love; seeking someone’s highest and ultimate good! Jesus wants His host to seek an eternal reward rather than a temporal reward. Jesus is telling this Pharisee to seek the things of the kingdom of God and not the things of the kingdom of man.

Jesus is directing his host’s attention toward a ***blessed reward*** that will be granted at the ***‘resurrection of the just.’*** Jesus wants this Pharisee’s thoughts directed toward the resurrection even when he’s making out his guest list. *Jesus intentionally steers this dinnertime conversation to the resurrection and He does so by commenting on who this Pharisee has invited to dinner.* This is what Jesus chose to talk about.

Jesus has done a risky thing. In pointing this man to the blessed repayment at the resurrection, He has run the risk of offending him. If the host understands what Jesus is doing (that he is seeking his greatest good), then he might not be offended. But if he misunderstands, he could be very offended. Jesus has just told him that he has invited all the wrong people.

What Will You Talk About At Dinner?

Would you do this? Would you run this risk? If you were invited to an influential ecclesiastical man’s house for dinner would you question whom your host had invited? And would you turn the conversation to the resurrection?

Can you imagine being invited to Cardinal Seán Patrick O’Malley’s (Cardinal of Boston) house for dinner and telling him he had invited all the wrong people? And then saying in love, “You know, Cardinal Sean, you should really start thinking about the resurrection more often.”

Would you direct the course of the conversation in this way? Would you talk about the resurrection over dinner? Would you bring up the resurrection even when it was the farthest thing from the mind of your host and the other dinner guests?

A Quiet Room Again???

The room was probably very quiet once again. No one likes silence. It’s awkward and no one is really sure what to say. So one man could not stand the tension any longer and decided to say some thing that everyone agreed on.

Luke 14:15

Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!

Who can disagree with that, right? Everyone who eats bread in the kingdom of God has to be blessed, right? He successfully turned the conversation away from the uncomfortable topic of who had **not** been invited and directed the focus to a more positive subject, all those who **had** been

invited, namely ‘all us pious Jews sitting here around the table. One day we’ll all be blessed when we eat bread in the kingdom!’ Right?

Eating Bread In the Kingdom of God

This idea of eating bread in the kingdom of God describes eternal life. Jesus has already brought up the idea by stating the phrase the ‘resurrection of the just.’ This man picks up on the theme and broadens it to what will happen after the resurrection, which will be the great messianic banquet that will come at the end of history. The prophet Isaiah wrote of this.

Isaiah 25:6-9

6 *On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.*
7 *And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.*
8 *He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.*
9 *It will be said on that day,
Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the LORD; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.*

This is an incredibly wonderful picture isn’t it? Imagine the LORD of hosts Himself making supper and preparing a feast fit for kings. [This reminds me of the parable we looked at [last week](#); The Parable of the Serving Master. Here we find that image again.] Imagine, dining with the Creator-God of the universe!

This will be a feast that will include people from **all nations**, both Jew and Gentile alike! The table is indescribably beautiful. God will remove the veil that keeps His glory from being seen and rejoiced in. Death will die and stay dead forever. And as the Lord come to each of His children and wipe away every tear “from all faces!” What a wonderful thought!

Our reproach will be removed forever. No one will ever ridicule the children of God ever again. The Lord WILL do this for all those who have eagerly waited for Him and they will be glad and rejoice in His salvation!!! This wonderful image is the backdrop of this man’s statement and it will happen at the resurrection of the just.

Indeed, “*Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!*”

What this man says almost sounds like a toast doesn’t it? It’s almost as if he’s saying, ‘here’s to all of us who will one day eat bread together in the kingdom of God.’ He was waiting for Jesus to say, ‘Yes, you’re right. All who eat bread in the kingdom of God will be blessed! And most assuredly all around this table will be among them! Now back to eating bread!’ But this is **NOT** what Jesus said.

But He Said To Him: The Parable of the Great Banquet

Instead, Jesus looks at this man and speaks directly to him and tells the parable of the Great Banquet.

A Great Banquet :: Many Invited

Jesus tells the story of a man who ***gave a great banquet and invited many***. This was a very wealthy man who was very generous. He *invited many* people. Huge banquets such as this would have two invitations. The first would be delivered and state the day of the banquet. Then based upon how many guests agreed to come, the host would then decide on how much food to prepare. The invited guests would have told the servants whether or not they would be attending on the occasion of the first invitation.

The arrangements would then begin. This would take some time. They didn't just run down to the store and pick up what they needed. Everything would have to be prepared fresh and by hand. The chickens would have had to be first, caught, then killed, plucked, cleaned, and cooked. The lambs would have to be slaughtered, cleaned, washed, and prepared. Many servants would be needed.

The second invitation would be sent when the location and the food was ready. We still receive two invitations today. We receive a written one in the mail to which we are expected to RSVP. This invitation tells us the date and time. The second invitation usually comes in person on the day of the event. After having arrived, the host welcomes the guests, then something is said to the effect of, "Dinner is served!" This then gives us permission to eat!

Come, Everything Is Ready

After the animals had been killed, the meat cooked, the arrangements made, the location prepared, the tables set, and wine prepared, everything was ready for the guests to arrive. The host then sent out his servant to say, '***Come, for everything is now ready.***'

The servant obeys. He goes out to deliver the message. However, there is a problem (v.18). *All of the invited guests begin to make excuses for why they cannot attend.*

Luke 14:18a

But they all alike began to make excuses.

All of those who had ***previously been invited and agreed to attend***, now begin to make excuses why they cannot attend. This is extremely offensive to the host. He bought and prepared food based upon the number of people who gave their word that they would attend. Now they will not attend?

This would be like you inviting over all your neighbors to your house for dinner. They all arrive and are waiting in the living room until the food is on the table. You lay everything out and then go into the living room to announce the food is served. Suddenly, people start making excuses about why they have to leave.

Jesus says they '*all alike*' do not come. None of them come. It makes you wonder, did they all agree together not to go? Did all decide together that they had someplace better to be? We don't know, but it makes you wonder.

And their excuses are just that, excuses. They are ridiculous. Jesus lists a few absurd excuses. The first guy says (v.18),

Excuse Number One

Luke 14:18b

'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.'

Land in the Middle East was a precious commodity and in short supply. It is not easily or quickly sold. "The process can take months."² No farmer buys land without first seeing it. He would want to know where it was located, and how much sun it received, were there trees or rocks on the land, was it near water, how was drainage, etc. This is an utterly ridiculous excuse.

It would be equivalent to being told today, "I can't come to the banquet because I just now closed on a house and I have to go have it inspected." No one buys a house without it *first* being inspected (about 3 times from 3 different agencies). No one buys a field without first seeing it. This man's request to be 'excused' is more than a smack in the face to the host of this banquet. This refusal is an intentional insult.

Excuse Number Two

Luke 14:19

And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.'

Again, the same situation, no one puts down the kind of money it would have taken to purchase five yoke of oxen, without seeing them first. That's 10 animals! This would like buying 5 farm tractors. Small farm tractors and cost \$40,000 each! This would be like saying, "It would be like saying, I just bought 5 tractors and I need to go see if they run! You understand! Please convey my deep regret that I am unable to attend the banquet!" This is intentionally insulting and belittling.

Inspection At Night

In both of these cases, one thing should be noted. If this Great Banquet happened at the dinner or supper hour, which it most certainly is, then it is close to getting dark. Even if we could accept that their excuses were acceptable which they are not, it makes no sense whatsoever to go out at night to see a piece of property or check out some oxen. These excuses are clearly deeply insulting.

Excuse Number Three

Luke 14:20

And another said, 'I have married a wife, therefore I cannot come.'

At first consideration, this guy appears to have the more acceptable reason. However, upon deeper consideration he might be the most callous of all. His answer is more curt than the others and he does not even bother with the pretense of asking to be excused!

Furthermore, this reference to the fact that he has married a wife is probably somewhat rude and crude in its implications. Marriages are months in the planning. Did he not know he was to be married when he agreed to attend the banquet upon the first invitation? Was this a quick wedding?

² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2008) p. 314.

Or is he simply a vulgar man making light of the unique relationship between husband and wife? It is as if he was saying, “Umm, I just got married! I’m a little busy. I will not be attending your banquet!”

The servant then returned to his master to report what has happened.

Luke 14:21

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.*

The Anger of the Master

If it seems strange to us that the master of the house responded in anger, it is because we do not understand the Middle Eastern culture. In the eyes of those who lived in the culture, the response of the master of the house was justified. “To refuse the second summons would be an insult, which is equivalent among the Arab tribes to a declaration of war.”³

One Egyptian Christian commentator wrote, “Here the master of the house became angry because he knew that the excuses were vain and the apologies were insults that demonstrated the hatred of the [invited] guests [for the house owner].”⁴

“The master has every right to retaliate with verbal insults or ... even some action that will punish these guests who have attacked his personal honor in public. He has every right to tell the servant, ‘These former friends have chosen to be my enemies.’”⁵

The Grace of the Master

Yet, even though he had a right to revenge, the master turns his anger into grace. Instead of telling his servants to go out and get his armor, he tells him to go out into the city streets and **bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame**. These are the same unwanted people whom Jesus had told His host that he should have invited in (14:13). Instead of sending his servant on an errand of revenge, he sends him out on a mission of grace.

The servant again obeys.

Luke 14:22-23

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.*

The Highways and the Hedges

He then tells his master that there is still room. First, he went to the streets of the city, and brought in all who would come. He then reports that there is still room. The master is determined to have his **house filled** so he instructs his servant to go out to the **highways and the hedges** and **compel** people to come in.

³ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Lk 14:17.

⁴ Bailey, p. 316.

⁵ Ibid.

Those who would be on the highways and hedges would be the foreigners and strangers, those whom we might call ‘the outsiders.’ The master wants even those people invited. He tells his servant to **compel** them. This does not mean to force them to come it. It means that they will require earnest persistent pleading in order to convince them that the invitation is genuine.

They will no doubt be surprised at the incredible invitation to an amazing banquet. How shocked would you be if some man flagged you down on the I-93 and when you rolled the window down you heard,

Servant: “Hi, my master wants me to invite you to his Great banquet. Will you come?”

You: “What do you mean your master wants me invited to his great banquet? He doesn’t even know me?”

Servant: “I know, but that’s why he wants you to come!”

You: “Is this a joke?”

Servant: “No. The food is ready. Will you come?”

You: “Are you serious?”

Servant: “Yes, aren’t you hungry?”

You: “Well, yes...”

Servant: “Then come, come everything is ready!” And he hops into your car and excitedly says, “This way, this way!”

And now we come to verse 24 and there is a significant change.

Luke 14:24

24 *For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.*

Up until this point, the master has been speaking to the servant in the singular. In verse 24 the ‘you’ in the Greek text shifts to the plural. Where I used to live in Pennsylvania they would translate this, “For I tell yous, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.”

Jesus has just stepped out of the story and entered back into the room in a way that He was not there before. The master is no longer speaking to his servant in a story. Jesus has now entered the room as **THE** Master speaking to all the dinner guests present. And he is talking about **HIS** banquet!!!

He is saying, “Yes, blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. That Great Banquet at the end of history is **MY** banquet! And not all of you sitting around the table will join Me at table. You are invited to come if you will come. But you will be surprised who is there. The table is open to all, the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. There will be Jews there (from with in

the city) but there will also be Gentiles there who come from the highways and the hedges. Remember what Isaiah said.”

Isaiah 56:6-8

6 “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,
and holds fast my covenant—

7 these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

8 The Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered.

There are three types of people whom God will gather to Himself, the faithful of Israel, the outcasts of Israel, and the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord. Salvation is from the Jews, but God given salvation to all nations through faith in Jesus.

Many are invited into the kingdom of God. Many will make excuses. Excuses are offensive & insulting to God. Any excuse made to God on why His kingdom was refused will, on that Great Day, appear as ridiculous as these three did.

Being a landowner brought with it great power. Many will miss the Great Banquet because they loved power more than they loved the Savior. Owning 5 yoke of oxen had the potential to bring great wealth. Many will miss the Great Banquet because they loved money more than the Savior. Having a spouse is a great blessing, but there will be many who will miss the Great Banquet because they loved sensual pleasures more than they loved the Savior.

God’s anger toward sinners is real (and it is just). Jesus bore that anger on the cross and turned His anger into grace. However, if the gracious sacrifice of Jesus is refused, then nothing but wrath awaits you at the resurrection. “Abused mercy turns into the greatest wrath.”⁶

The invitation is to **all** who are **unworthy**, both from ‘within the city’ (streets and lanes, i.e. the Jews) and from ‘without’ (highways and hedges, i.e. the Gentiles). Both are unworthy. But both are invited.

Some need to be compelled, urged to come to God through faith in Jesus because they just can’t believe they are really invited. All nations are invited and we need to plead with them to come.

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*.

God is calling His servants to go out with this message – to invite people to the ‘marriage supper of the Lamb,’ the one we talked about last week, the one where Jesus Himself will serve His faithful servants a meal that will bring them everlasting joy.

There is still room at the table. The Master wants His house filled. There is still time for the invitation to be sent and there is still time to receive it.

All who refuse the invitation to come to God through Jesus will never be allowed to enter this Great Banquet, forever! “They that will not have Christ when they *may* shall not have him when they *would*. Grace despised is grace forfeited.”⁷

Will you be at this Great Banquet? Will you invite the unworthy to come?

Who will you invite to lunch? And what will you talk about?

⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*.