

The Great Banquet In The Kingdom of God

Luke 14:1-35

Key Verse: 14:23

“Then 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.’”

Jesus would soon head for Jerusalem, where he would die on the cross. Opposition against him was intensifying. Still, Jesus kept on proclaiming the kingdom of God, and warning those who rejected it. The invitation is for all people. May we each accept it, humbly and thankfully. May we fully commit ourselves to Jesus, without excuses or hindrances. May God's love and mercy compel us to invite others to his kingdom.

I. Jesus at a Pharisee's Dinner (1-24)

First, Jesus heals a man with dropsy on the Sabbath (1-6).

On a Sabbath day, Jesus went to eat at a prominent Pharisee's house. This Pharisee seems hospitable toward Jesus; perhaps even open-minded to Jesus' teaching. However, Jesus was being carefully watched by the Pharisees and experts in the law. In front of Jesus was a man suffering from dropsy or edema. This was a disease of swelling in the body. This man with dropsy looked out of place at this dinner party. Most likely he had not been on the original guest list, since Jesus later sent him away. Jesus had already been criticized for healing on a Sabbath the woman who had been bent over for 18 years. But Jesus only exposed their hypocrisy that they untie their oxen and donkeys on the Sabbath to give them water. Jesus spoke first, with a question: **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”** Jesus' question was met with silence. Then Jesus took hold of the man, and healed him and sent him away. Jesus healed him by the power of God. Jesus healed him with the compassion of God. But his critics were mostly offended and humiliated. And more humiliation was on the way.

The correct answer to Jesus' question is, “Yes, it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath!”, since Jesus did it. Jesus regarded acts of mercy and compassion on the Sabbath as acceptable and pleasing to God, in spite of what others thought or taught. Jesus made it clear that loving God and loving people is the proper means to interpret God's law. Paul wrote in Romans 13:8, **“he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.”** Obviously, Jesus' critics did not love the man with dropsy. Rather, they were using the man to judge Jesus. What is worse, they already passed

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judgment on Jesus, rather than humbling themselves to listen and learn from him. Jesus appealed to all of their consciences by asking, **“If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?”** If they said, “Yes” to Jesus’ question, they would be agreeing with Jesus, which, in their pride, they didn’t want to do. But if they said “No” to Jesus’ question, then they would be lying, because all of them surely would save their child or ox on the Sabbath out of urgent mercy. Realizing their predicament, they said nothing. In their stubborn pride and indifference, they had no mercy, compassion or love in their hearts. Jesus was full of mercy, compassion and love. May we all grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! (2Pe 3:18)

Second, Humble yourself (7-11).

Not only were Jesus’ critics closely watching him, Jesus was watching them. Jesus noticed that the guests at the dinner were choosing respected places around the table, near the host’s seat. Jesus advised them not to choose the honorable seats for themselves but to take the least important place. Then, if the host thought it appropriate he would say, **“Friend, move up to a better place,”** and he would be honored before everyone. Jesus concluded in verse 11, **“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”** Someone thinks, “I don’t need any recognition or honor!” That’s not entirely true. Everyone wants recognition and honor. The question is: where does the honor come from? Exalting oneself doesn’t prove anything. Boasting about oneself or secretly condemning others does not prove that one is worthy of honor. Honor must be bestowed by others, not by oneself. Ultimately, God’s honor and recognition is what really matters.

Then how can we receive honor? Jesus said that the one who humbles himself will be exalted. **“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”** There are many examples of this in the Bible. For example, in the book of Esther, Haman was prideful and God brought him low, but God exalted the humble, faithful man of God Mordecai; Absalom proudly conspired against his own father David, but God restored the humble man David to his throne; Pharaoh king of Egypt was proud and refused to listen to God; in contrast, God exalted his humble servant Moses. 1 Peter 5:5 tells us, **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”**

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Jesus did not just teach about humbling oneself. He is the greatest example of humbling oneself. Philippians 2:5-8 describes it: **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!”** Jesus’ extreme humbleness was followed by the greatest exaltation: **“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”** (Php 2:9-11) May God help us to humble ourselves and to seek God’s honor and recognition only.

Third, Who will you invite?: Who will repay you? (12-14).

Some of the dinner guests were feeling uncomfortable about where they were sitting. Others were glad to be in less important seats. Jesus turned his attention to his dinner host and said: **“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”** Jesus pointed out something that we often do: we give gifts and invitations, expecting to get something back later. This may often be true of birthday and Christmas gifts. We often do things for others, expecting to get a return favor. Then whom should we invite? Jesus said invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. These are needy people who need help and love, but who cannot repay us. Jesus tells us to help people without expecting any worldly benefit in return. Why? Because God sees and God will repay. God knows our sacrifices and our tears on behalf of others’ well-being. He is keeping a record of it and he will repay it. Jesus mentioned the resurrection of the righteous. Those who have helped others out of love and prayer will be repaid by the Lord at the resurrection of the righteous. That is the time of true reimbursement from God. O Lord, purify our hearts from worldly benefit-seeking. Help us to seek your reward and repayment at the resurrection of the righteous.

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Fourth, The parable of the great banquet (15-24).

Jesus was still at the Pharisee's dinner party, making many people uncomfortable, both guests and host. One of those at the table spoke up, perhaps trying to change the mood. He said, **"Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."** Jesus launched into another parable: **"A certain man was preparing a mega-banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But 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.'** [Who buys a field without seeing it first? Bad excuse.] **Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'** [That would be like buying a car without trying it out first. Another bad excuse.] **Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'** [The honeymoon and house moving and thank you cards made him too busy.] **The 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.'** **'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'** **Then 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. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"**

Clearly, Jesus told this parable to express his plea and prayer and warning to his own people, even those at the dinner party. They were the privileged, chosen guests to God's great banquet. They received the invitation through the prophets. Now the time had come. Jesus came to give the final invite since everything was now ready. The kingdom of God had come in Jesus Christ. But they made excuses. How could they make excuses? For one thing, they were too engrossed in their own worldly lives: their own properties, possessions, careers and marriages. Work, business, and family were more important to them. They were like the people of Noah's time who were focused on eating, drinking and marrying, but who died in the flood. In the days of Lot people of Sodom were buying and selling, planting and building, but fire from heaven destroyed them all. In today's society, people might skip the banquet due to babysitter fees or trying out a high definition television. Sometimes we Christians think, "I hope Jesus comes again, but not yet. I have many dreams yet unfulfilled." This is very similar to those who made excuses not to accept the great banquet invitation. They had more urgent and

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important things in their schedules. They became proud and unthankful, thinking they didn't need to attend the banquet to be happy. Rather, they felt burdened by it.

But the banquet was not going to be canceled. Rather, other people will be invited to fill the seats. God will invite those who accept the invitation thankfully, like the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. They are needy people who met difficulties, sufferings and unfortunate circumstances in life, but they will accept the great banquet invitation with thankfulness. The invitation is given freely to them as well. God's banquet hall is very big and his house has many rooms. So the invitations went out beyond the borders, into all the world. God really wants to have a full banquet hall in his kingdom with all kinds of thankful people, celebrating together. This is God's heart. This is God's hope. This is God's love. Have you accepted his invitation to his great banquet? People are coming from all directions and from every tribe, language, people and nation (13:29; Rev 5:9). Are you thankful for his invitation?

Some translations use the words "compel them to come in" to the banquet. This parable of the great banquet was the last sermon D.L. Moody preached called, "Excuses." He preached it on November 23, 1899 in the Civic Auditorium in Kansas City. At the time, he was very ill. But he said, "Never, never have I wanted so much to lead men and women to Christ as I do this time!" There was a throbbing in his chest, and he had to hold to the organ to keep from falling, but Moody preached the Gospel and some fifty people responded to trust Christ. A month later he died. To the end, Moody was "compelling them to come in."

Now many of us are praying earnestly for our Regional Summer Bible Conference in Peoria from July 8-11. It's a little costly. Is it worth it? Some are not so sure. Let's consider the purpose of this event. What is the title? "The Kingdom of God is Near." So we pray to immerse ourselves in the study and hope of the kingdom of God. We can pray for this hope to burn in all our hearts and that it may ignite God's hope in people throughout the Midwest and the world. We will have fellowship and mutually encourage coworkers in Christ with our common hope, faith and love in Jesus Christ our Lord. We will see our precious and sacrificial American missionaries from several nations. We will hear the message and report of Missionary John Peace. When we last studied this chapter of Luke in January 2003, he was praying to be a missionary family to the Ukraine. Later that year, he and his family left everything in the USA and went to the Ukraine as missionaries. Two of their three daughters are actively praying and laboring for God's kingdom in Turkey, and they will also attend our conference. Our conference messengers

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gathered this week, taking time off work, to have a messenger training camp of devotion and struggle in the word of God and prayer. Soon we will say, "Everything is ready. Come to the Regional Summer Bible Conference." It will be a small taste of the great heavenly banquet where our Lord Jesus Christ is host. Most importantly, we must each personally accept our Lord's invitation to the great banquet in heaven and invite and help others to accept it as well.

II. The High Cost of Discipleship (25-35)

First, Jesus expects our first love (25-27).

Jesus was no longer at the Pharisee's dinner party. Large crowds were traveling with him. But Jesus wasn't interested as much in quantity of followers as he was in quality. Turning to them he said some very difficult words: **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."** Why does Jesus say a true disciple must hate his family members and his own life? After all, Jesus taught, **"Love your enemies."** Other gospel passages help us to understand what Jesus meant. Matthew 10:37-39 gives a similar teaching: **"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** Jesus expects first place in the life of his disciple. Jesus expects priority in heart over family and self. So if there is a conflict between pleasing Jesus and pleasing my wife or children, then I must please Jesus. Sorry, Maria, but that's Jesus' teaching. It is very clear that Jesus calls us to full commitment and devotion. Jesus did not offer any discount discipleship. Jesus did not mention temp job disciples.

Second, Giving up everything (28-35).

Jesus gave two short parables to explain the cost of discipleship: building a tower and going to war. If we stopped in the middle of building a tower or a house because we ran out of money, that would be ridiculous, not to mention a great waste of time, money and effort. Also, to begin a battle without training or confidence in our forces would be foolish and fatal. Jesus adds, **"In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."**

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Following Jesus is all or nothing. Jesus did not advertise a discipleship trial period with a money-back guarantee. The question is: how can God expect us to give up everything? He can do so because he gave us everything when he gave Jesus to save us. Jesus gave up everything and died on the cross for us. Can we give him any less? Jesus wants his disciples to be salty, not to blend in unnoticed with the world.

Through Luke 14, we see that Jesus wants us to be humble and thankful, for he will exalt us and share his heavenly banquet with us. It will cost us our loves and hopes and dreams in this world, but it will be worth it all. May God help us all to cherish his invitation to his great banquet. May God also bless us to help to bring others into his full house.