

Dining with Jesus – Parable of the Great Banquet Luke 14:15-24

Please turn in your Bibles to Luke 14:15, which will be the bulk of our text this morning.

As you turn there I want to quickly remind you what happened just prior to this.

Jesus is invited to a dinner party **on the Sabbath** at the house of the **prominent Pharisee** and the guest list included more Pharisees, some **experts in the law** and a **man suffering from a physical ailment**. And the text says that *“Jesus was being carefully watched.”* As I mentioned last week, I believe this man was a plant, to test and see what Jesus would do for this man, since it was illegal to heal someone on the Sabbath. Of course Jesus heals the man and then sent him away.

Secondly, Jesus notices how the people as they were arriving were all jockeying for positions of prominence around the table. And Jesus suggests that when they go to a party, they should choose the lower seats rather than the seats of more prominence. That way, they won't be embarrassed by being demoted by the host, but hopefully promoted as the guests arrive.

Thirdly, Jesus addresses the **invitees list**. He suggests that rather than inviting people just like you, you should instead invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind to your parties. Of course that would have never happened in that society because of a principle of reciprocity. This principle taught that you only invited people to your parties who could reciprocate by hosting a similar party that you'd then be invited to. And the poor, crippled, lame and blind could never possibly afford to reciprocate with a similar party, so they'd never consider inviting those people.

That brings us to our text this morning. *“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.”* (Luke 14:15 (NIV) The Jews eagerly looked forward to a time in the future when the Messiah would host a dinner party and all the Jews would be proudly seated around that table enjoying the richest of foods. And so perhaps this man is trying to change the subject of the discussion so far to a much more pleasant topic that they could all agree on. And likely he's anticipating, or at least hoping, that Jesus will say something like, *“You're so right. That's going to be a great time together around that table enjoying each other's fellowship.”* But Jesus didn't take the bait. And here's what Jesus taught next.

Luke 14:16-24 (NIV) *Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’*

18 “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.’*
- *19 “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’*
- *20 “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can't come.’*

21 “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.’

22 “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

23 “Then 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. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

In that culture, if someone were planning on hosting a great banquet they would send out a **Save the Date** type of invitation requesting the invited guests to **RSVP**. And based on the responses, the host would know how much food to purchase and prepare. Then when the meal was actually getting closer to being prepared, the host would servant out to tell them that it's time, come on over.

But what happens is shocking. Three of those invited give quite evident lame excuses for not coming.

No one would buy a field or 5 oxen without first inspecting them and deciding if they were something you wanted to own. It would be like me telling Connie, *"I'm going to be a little late getting home from work tonight because I just bought a new house and I need to go look at."* Nobody I know would do that. For all these people know, they could have just purchased totally unusable swamp land and weak sickly oxen. Plus, in that culture you wouldn't buy 5 oxen because you always purchased oxen in pairs so that they could work together and accomplish much more together. Part of inspecting oxen, prior to purchasing them, would be to see if they could work together effectively.

The third individual simply says I just got married, so I can't come. He's implying, I'm going to be busy with my wife tonight. And he doesn't ask to be excused, he just says he's not coming. This is even more an obvious snub of the host than the other two have been. He would have known about his upcoming wedding when he first accepted the invitation to this banquet and would have said that he can't come.

So, it's very obvious that three individuals aren't just too busy to come, but they are intentionally snubbing the host and trying to sabotage his banquet and force him to have to cancel it.

The modern day equivalent would be if you were hosting a dinner party and those who have RSVP'd are all gathered in your living room. But when you say dinner's served, come on into the dining room, one by one your guests get up, grab their coats and leave saying such things as:

- I've got to go home and mow my grass,
- I've got to check out a car I just purchased, sight unseen yesterday,
- I've got to go to a dentist appointment.

The key to the story is **how is the host going to respond?** He has every right to be angry after how he's been treated. He could send his servant back out to these three people and inform them that they will never be invited to one of his parties ever again. But that's not what this host does. He sends his servant back out to invite people to his party that would have never been invited to a banquet of this magnitude. And he instructs his servant to *"go out into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the "poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."* If that list sounds vaguely familiar, it's because it's the same group of people Jesus earlier tells them they should invite to their banquets (vs. 13).

The servant does what the master had instructed but he's told there's still more room, so he instructs the servant to *go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house may be full."* This would have been likely the Gentiles, the non-Jews. The word "make them come in" is not intended to mean to physically force them to come, but rather conveys the idea, that many of these people will think this is some kind of trick or cruel joke, because I would never get an invitation to such an event as this. The host is telling the servant, that it's urgent that you persuasively convince them that they really are invited to attend and sit at his table and enjoy his food and fellowship. Rather than dispensing judgment, the host dispenses extravagant grace. Rather than these outcasts being judged they are invited.

Clearly God is the host of this banquet. But notice Jesus' closing statement. *"I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."* (Luke 14:24 (NIV) The language switches from **there is a host** to **I'm the host** and this is **my banquet**, and this is who will get to sit at my table.

I think it's safe to say that this is probably not the response the man had hoped for when he first said to Jesus: *Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."* Because the bottom line is, most of those currently seated at this prominent Pharisees table would not be seated around Jesus' table and the Messiah's great banquet.

This revised guest list should not have surprised anyone seated at that table, because God had frequently through the prophets had declared that these are the kind of people that matter most to God and therefore ought to matter to us as well.

One such example is the words spoken through the prophet Isaiah. God redefines what His kind of fast is. When we think of a “fast” we often go to depriving ourselves of food or something else that might have a hold on us. But God redefines what a fast looks like to Him.

Isaiah 58:6-12 (NIV) *“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

Then God says this will be the result of you regularly participating in this kind of fast.

8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. 11 The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. 12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

God is predicting that if this is how you live your lives then God will guide you and provide for your needs and you’ll be an active participant in making a profound difference in the lives of the people in your own community. You’ll gain a reputation as a *Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings*. I don’t know about you, but that’s the kind of disciple of Jesus Christ I want to be and the kind of influential church I desire us to be. Over the years, this church has been very generous supporting Operation Christmas Child and the food drives and clothing drives for STEP or for needy individuals in our local schools. And thank you for that. But that’s a safe sterilized way to be involved. It takes it to a whole different level when you invite someone who’s on the fringes of society to sit across from you at a table and look them in the eyes and get to know them. Let them see the love God has for them flow through you as you take the time to care and love and listen. Jesus didn’t just financially support the poor and needy, he gained a reputation as a “friend of sinners” by eating with them and sharing life with them. He intentionally went out of his way to show them God’s love by eating with them and not condemning them.

I’ve been reading an interesting book recently entitled “**A Meal with Jesus**” by Tim Chester. And I’d like to share a couple of excerpts from his book.

If you tell someone he’s a sinner who needs God while you’re handing him a cup of soup, then he’ll hear you saying he’s a loser who should become like you. But when you eat together as friends and you tell him what a messed up person you are, then you can tell him about sin and grace.

Pastor Simon Carey Holt says: “At its base, hospitality is about providing a space for God’s Spirit to move. Setting a table, cooking a meal, washing the dishes is the ministry of facilitation: providing a context in which people feel loved and welcome and where God’s Spirit can be at work in their lives. Hospitality is a very ordinary business, but in its ordinariness is its real worth.”

If you're looking to be inspired by a modern day example of Jesus' parable, consider the remarkable story of Sarah Cummins. Her and her fiancé had canceled their wedding about a week before the scheduled date. Sarah was devastated, but the food and reception had already been paid for and was nonrefundable. So, after consulting her fiancée, she launched the idea to contact several of the local area homeless shelters and invited 170 people to join her for this dinner. Several local businesses and residents heard about Sarah's plan and donated suits, dresses and other items for the guests to wear. Sarah arranged for buses to provide transportation to and from the event.

What a great idea, but you don't have to have your wedding cancelled to reach out to others and show them the love of God. For the past year, several of us have been going over to Treehouse once a month and providing a delicious meal for about 30 youth. Yesterday, I was privileged to join Tim Thorman and go down to People Serving People and help provide a delicious meal to about 200 residents of this facility that works to get people and families back on their feet. My part was peeling and cutting potatoes for about 4 hours. And this afternoon 4 more individuals are going there to volunteer their time. And I'm praying, seeking God's leading as to what other meaningful programs we can all be involved in that allows us to show others God's love. But you don't have to wait for us to provide you with an opportunity. Begin to ask God to show you ways that He wants to use you to show God's love to those who may not even be looking for it. Jesus didn't call us to primarily gather here in this building once or twice a week for worship and Bible study. Jesus wants us to be out in the world, in our communities and neighborhoods showing God's love in very practical ways. And perhaps it starts with complimenting someone for his or her smile or friendliness or enthusiasm etc. Those types of compliments go a long way towards breaking down barriers and building bridges between them and God's love for them. Remember Jesus words that the host of the banquet "*wants his house to be full.*"

Who do you know who God wants around His table and doesn't know it yet? Pray that God would give you the courage and the burning passion for others to know about God's invitation to become part of His family through you.

Perhaps there's someone here this morning who's never accepted Jesus Christ's invitation to accept His grace and love, displayed when he died on the cross for your sins, and become part of God's family. If that's you then I invite you to come forward as we sing our invitation hymn this morning. Or, if you're already an immersed believer and follower of Jesus Christ and would like to place your membership with this church and work with us for the cause of sharing Christ's love with others, then come forward while we sing this next song.

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2. What are the three excuses given for not attending the banquet and why are they lame?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. What is the host's response?
4. How would you define a "*fast*" from Isaiah 58:6-12?
In what ways are you living that type of fast?

Application questions:

1. What excuses do you give for not following Jesus more fully?
2. What gets in the way of you fully following Jesus?
3. God loves to throw parties!! Does that change your view of God?
4. Do you ever struggle believing God wants you around His table?
Why?
5. 2 types of people:
 - a. those too busy to come to God's table
 - b. those who don't see themselves as worthy to sit at God's table.Which person are you most like?
6. How would you feel being seated next to a smelly homeless person at God's table?
7. Who might God be desiring to draw closer to Him through you?
8. What action steps is God calling you to do next?

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