

Sermon: Are You Going to the Party?

Text: Luke 14:15-24

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Introduction: It was still Sabbath and Jesus had been eating with one of the prominent Pharisees and some other guests. Only Luke has accounts of Jesus eating with Pharisees as the host. Jesus had managed to force his host to uncomfortably look at his position of what was appropriate activity during the Sabbath. He had also made his host and his guests reevaluate some of their self-righteous practices regarding hospitality.

The anticipated time with God in His Kingdom is commonly talked about in terms of extraordinary meals. Isaiah shared with his readers: **Isaiah 25:6-9 (NIV)** ⁶ 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. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people 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.”

Here, Jesus was being entertained by a Pharisee. There is a more important party, though, I'd like to tell you about. And I wonder if you're going to this party.

Luke 14:15 (NIV) 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.”

Jesus says that for the final meal:

I. Invitations Are Offered (vv. 16-17).

Luke 14:16-17 (NIV) 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.’

A. Come now!

God has not rejected Israel. They have rejected Him. God continued, even with Paul's ministry, to go first to the Jews to offer salvation. Luke tells us finding God is like sitting down to a great wedding banquet (supper). And these events would go on for days.

The word (**καλειν**) translated “invited” is a key word in this 14th chapter. It can also be understood as “called.” This is the same word Jesus used when he “called” his disciples.

In Jesus’ time, people coming to these wedding dinners would have had an initial invitation issued to them. This would be something like a save-the-date kind of card. And then on the day of the event, they would be reminded so they would be on time.

“Rigid etiquette controlled the procedure for invitations...The length of time during which invited guests were welcomed was indicated by a cloth hung from the house, and this was removed only after the three introductory courses had been served.” - Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Times of Jesus*, p. 93

If you ever get an invitation to the Lord’s Wedding Banquet, go! There is nothing like showing up at an event where:

B. Everything is ready!

God is without question the “certain man” in our story. Everything is ready. God’s perfect timing was being carried out in his son Jesus Christ.

Those of you who prepare food and put on dinner parties know that some parts of the meal need to be timed perfectly or something is too hot or too cold or too dry, or not fresh.

A few years ago I attended a retreat sponsored by Bob Russell Ministries called: *A Time of Refreshing*. From the time I arrived at the Retreat Center, my car was parked, my luggage was taken to my room. Every meal was paid for. They took eight of us to Churchill Downs, the Louisville Slugger Bat Factory, bowling, golfing, and a night out at Ruth’s Chris. Looking at their menu I must have eaten \$80.00 worth of food.

It was a wonderful time as promised, and it was absolutely free! Yet there were a couple of requirements. Firstly, I had to come to the retreat to experience it, and on a certain weekend. And secondly, I had to put up a personal check for \$500.00 that would be cashed if I did *not* come.

Everything was free, but there was a penalty for not accepting this gracious gift.

The Kingdom of God will be like that. We must accept the invitation and go, or we will forfeit a wonderful meal and suffer the consequences - something more valuable than \$500.00. What amazes me is that there are minister friends that I have encouraged to go to this, and they do not make the phone call to be put on a list. Have you ever noticed how some people cannot accept anything that is free?

Also, in our story, oddly enough:

II. Excuses Are Offered (vv. 18-20).

Luke 14:18-20 (NIV) 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.’

Depending on what commentaries you read, one could get a different impression as to the validity of these stated excuses. The first man could not come to the party because of:

A. Other obligations

The first man, instead of going to the party, went to look at a newly purchased field. “‘I must go and see it’ affirms that the man’s field is of greater importance to him than his relationship to the host.” - Hendrickx, *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 116

All of those who are giving excuses after having been invited and having accepted the first invitation, were being extremely rude and inconsiderate of the host. Yet, this kind of obligation was used to even exempt a person from serving in the military (**Deuteronomy 20:5-7**).

Both of these first two who chose to excuse themselves were probably rich. And we know what Jesus had said about riches.

Matthew 19:23-24 (NIV) ²³Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

James 1:11 (NIV) ¹¹For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

Excuses Are Offered because of:

B. Other pursuits

The second man's excuse involved buying 5 yoke of oxen. This would allow for 2 to 5 times the amount of land being worked, than the average farmer. Both of these first two men could have done what needed to be done *after* the host's party.

The questions must always be asked: How much do I need, and how much is enough? The pursuit of riches is an empty occupation. There are certainly economic pressures in life, but money and chasing after bigger and better is a spiritually-deadly treadmill. Anything we put ahead of God's invitation to real life is idolatry and will damn our souls if we fail to see Who is important in our lives.

And lastly, **Excuses Are Offered because of:**

C. Other relationships

There is nothing quite so wonderful as a good marriage. And newlyweds have little time for others in their world of two. We all wink at that kind of immaturity, hoping they will grow up into lives that do care for others. We pray that true love is finally found in sacrifice and inconvenience, loyalty, and commitment in spite of less-than-ideal situations.

Jesus made it clear about the need to give priority to our relationship with God. **Luke 8:19-21 (NIV)** ¹⁹Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. ²⁰Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you." ²¹He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice."

No matter how you interpret these excuses whether they are absurd or good reasons - they are bad choices with the same outcome. All of the excuses seem to be just putting off the host. Each person says "I have just" done something that interferes with my willingness to come.

God is not a high priority for the majority of the population; and that is more true unfortunately for the younger demographic. To many, Jesus Christ and His Church is just another option among many other choices to drain their time.

This banquet is not about charity, but relationship.

All of the stated excuses could have been good or poor ones for not attending the wedding banquet. God is always competing for our attention in a over-stimulated, hyper-sensory world.

Because the original invitees decline to come when called:

III. Alternatives Are Offered (vv. 21-24).

Luke 14:21-24 (NIV) 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 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.’”

A. The Host will include some.

The church is going to look much different than what the Pharisees thought. Jesus was going to give everyone a chance to sit at table with him. Jesus’ guests would be the ones left off the Pharisees’ list of acceptable dinner companions.

Only those who think they are too good are not good enough, and only those who think they are not good enough, Jesus says: you’re invited.

“I was invited last year, in mid-October, to the University of Winnipeg in Canada to give two lectures, one Friday night and one Saturday morning. I went. I gave the one on Friday night. As we left the lecture hall, it was beginning to spit a little snow. I was surprised, and my host was surprised because he had written, ‘It’s too early for the cold weather, but you might want to bring a little windbreaker, a little light jacket.’ The next morning when I got up, two or three feet of snow pressed against the door. The phone rang, and my host said, ‘We’re all surprised by this. In fact, I can’t come and get you to take you to breakfast, the lecture this morning has been cancelled, and the airport is closed. If you can make your way down the block and around the corner, there is a little depot, a bus depot, and it has a cafe. I’m sorry.’ // I said, ‘I’ll get around.’ I put on that little light jacket; it was nothing. I got my little cap and put it on; it didn’t even help me in the room. I went into the bathroom and unrolled long sheets of toilet paper and made a nest in the cap so it would protect my head against that icy wind.

I went outside, shivering. The wind was cold, the snow was deep. I slid and bumped and finally made it around the corner into the bus station. Every stranded traveler in western Canada was in there, strangers to each other and to me, pressing and pushing and loud. I finally found a place to sit, and after a lengthy time a man in a greasy apron came over and said, 'What'll you have?' I said, 'May I see a menu?' He said, 'What do you want a menu for? We have soup.' I said, 'What kinds of soup do you have?' And he said, 'Soup. You want some soup?' I said, 'That was what I was going to order--soup.' He brought the soup, and I put the spoon to it--Yuck! It was the awfulest. It was kind of gray looking; it was so bad I couldn't eat it, but I sat there and put my hands about it. It was warm, and so I sat there with my head down, my head wrapped in toilet paper, bemoaning and beweeeping my outcast state with the horrible soup. But it was warm, so I clutched it and stayed bent over my soup stove.

The door opened again. The wind was icy, and somebody yelled, 'Close the door!' In came this woman clutching her little coat. She found a place, not far from me. The greasy apron came, 'What do you want?' She said, 'Glass of water.' He brought a glass of water, took out his tablet, and said, 'Now what'll you have?' She said, 'Just the water.' He said, 'You have to order, lady.' 'Well, I just want a glass of water.' 'Look I have customers that pay--what do you think this is, a church or something? Now what do you want?' She said, 'Just a glass of water and some time to get warm.' 'Look, there are people that are paying here. If you're not going to order, you've got to leave!' And he got real loud about it. So she got up to leave and, almost as if rehearsed, everybody in that little cafe stood up and started toward the door. I got up and said, 'I'm voting for something here; I don't know what it is.' And the man in the greasy apron said, 'All right, all right, all right, she can stay.' Everybody sat down, and he brought her a bowl of soup.

I said to the person sitting there by me, I said, 'Who is she?' He said, 'I never saw her before.' (But if she's not welcome, then none of us are welcome.) The place grew quiet, but I heard the sipping of that awful soup. I said, 'I'm going to try that again.' I put my spoon to the soup--you know, it was not bad soup. Everybody was eating this soup. I started eating the soup, and it was pretty good soup. I have no idea what kind of soup it was. I don't know what was in it, but I do recall when I was eating it, it tasted a little bit like bread and wine. Just a little like bread and wine.

But also:

B. The Host will exclude others.

God's chosen people had rejected the invitation of the Chosen One of God. By thinking too highly of themselves and not answering God's call, they found themselves - with the cloth removed, door shut, and left outside.

Pride can keep people away from church and a relationship with God. I have heard every excuse imaginable and so has Jesus, but none of them will be good ones in the end.

I think of Rosemary Sisco in her wheelchair who the men of the church would carry up and down the stairs of our church because she wanted to be in services. I think of the time when I baptized her in her own bathtub, with her brother helping, so she could accept the invitation of her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

One point is completely clear in this parable of ours: You have to come to be involved in the banquet. You have to respond to the invitation.

Conclusion: This parable is one of judgment and grace. It is our choice how the story will end for us. Some people say they cannot make time for church. What they really are saying is they cannot find time for the Head of the Church. Some people say they do not have time to read and study God's Word or pray. Let's be honest with each other. What they are really saying is they do not want a relationship with Jesus. We all do what we want to do. God will also do what He wants to do *with us* based on our response to his invitation to come. Do not wait so long that the invitation is withdrawn.

Right now, He is inviting and calling each of us. *Are You Going to the Party?*