

The Great Banquet

Luke 14:1-24

Have you ever thought about how much of Jesus' teaching in the New Testament involves food or eating a meal together? Eating together is a social activity. This was especially true in the culture that Jesus was a part of. Here in the western world, eating together as family has become almost a thing of the past. I recently heard the testimony of a man who said that it wasn't until he was in his 20s that he had the experience of sitting down to a family meal; and that was not with his biological family! That's a sad commentary on our society, especially when I think of the valuable lessons I learned around the family table.

According to the Old Testament, the tabernacle, and later the temple, contained the showbread or bread of the presence in the Holy Place. One loaf represented each of the 12 tribes of Israel signifying the fellowship God wanted with His people. This bread was replaced each Sabbath with fresh loaves indicating a need for regular fellowship and renewal. In the New Testament the early church met often to break bread and fellowship together.

In our study of Luke's Gospel, we've observed various mealtime scenes; the most recent one being in chapter 13 where Jesus speaks of people who refused to accept His offer to enter the Kingdom. When they found themselves locked out of the feast, it was too late!

Today's study takes us to Luke chapter 24. Here, Jesus spends most of the chapter either participating in a meal or using it as a backdrop for teaching about the kingdom. I've called our study "The Great Banquet." But the food is not the focus; it's simply the setting for Jesus to give important teaching about personal choices.

Our text is **Luke 14:1 to 24**. Listen carefully as I read this portion of God's Holy Word.

In this text Jesus uses several KINDS of guests to illustrate the importance of our choices on our eternal destiny.

The First Kind of Guests are,

The Excluded Ones

As our text opens Jesus is asked to dine in the home of a Pharisee. The other guests at the meal are primarily Pharisees and teachers of the law. Jesus wasn't invited because He's so well

liked. In fact, the guests at this meal are watching Him furtively with evil intent. They're hoping He'll do or say something, so they can find fault with Him.

As they are waiting for the meal to begin, a stranger, an uninvited guest, enters the house. To understand this scene, you need to know a little about the customs of the day. Jesus and the other guests invited to this Pharisee's house would recline at the table and be served a meal. Friends, neighbors, and curious onlookers wouldn't eat, but they could gather around the perimeter of the room to observe the meal and listen to the conversation. These observers were free to move in and out of the house at will. This was normal.

As they're waiting for the meal to begin a certain man enters the room. He has a condition known as dropsy. I didn't know what that was so I looked it up. It means his body was retaining fluid. Most likely his legs or arms were swollen with that fluid. Today it's called edema. I understand this is caused by either the heart or lungs not functioning properly.

When Jesus saw the man He immediately knew what the Pharisees were thinking. He asked them if it was permissible to heal on the Sabbath. His question is met with silence. Then Jesus takes hold of the man, heals him, and sends him on his way.

This man was the excluded guest. The Pharisees would've concluded that his physical infirmity was caused by personal sin, making him unclean. In their pseudo-piety they would not have any contact with him. Jesus points out they had more concern for their animals than for this man! When Jesus confronted them they again remained silent, refusing to answer.

Now, jump down to verse 12 of our text. Here, Jesus offers His listeners, and especially His host, some instruction on hospitality. According to Jesus the poor man whom He healed, the one who was excluded from the meal was really the kind of person that should've been invited. Why? Because he had no resources with which to return the favor.

Jesus clearly pointed out the reason for His instruction. While there would be no immediate reward, no return invitation from such a person, there would be an eternal reward. That reward would come at the resurrection of the righteous.

You know, there's a sense in which Jesus was the excluded guest in this scene too. He was invited, He was present at the Pharisee's house; but He wasn't really welcome. His questions and His behavior made the host and other guests uncomfortable. They wanted a way by which they could exclude Him completely from their presence and from their society. They ultimately did that by having Him put to death. Their attitude toward Jesus and toward the needy

man sprang from the same corrupted root.

There's another thing here I believe it's important to notice; the progression from a meal, to a marriage feast, to a great supper. I'll have more to say about that as we go through the text.

The Second KIND of Guests are,

The Exclusive Ones

As Jesus observed what was taking place around Him, He noted how the guests at the Pharisee's house were choosing the best seats. He knew those in His audience understood that the Messiah's kingdom would be inaugurated with a great feast. So He told them a story.

Jesus could've said "When you're invited to a friend's house..." But He tactfully moves the story to neutral ground; a marriage feast. Incidentally, a marriage feast would've had many more guests than a meal at a private home.

In Jesus' story, the guest sees himself as worthy of his invitation; the most honorable man invited to the feast. So naturally, based on his viewpoint, he takes the best seat in the house. Unfortunately for him, the host doesn't see it that way. When a more honorable man than him arrives, he is forced with shame to take not just a lower seat; but the LOWEST one. In the interim between his arrival and the host asking him to vacate the uppermost seat, all the other seats have been taken. It is a humiliating situation!

Jesus points out that it is much better to take the lower seat first; then you can have the prestige of being called to a more honorable one. The host may even address you as "Friend." The other guests will be impressed that the host has elevated your position among them. And then Jesus closes that story with the familiar moral. *"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; whoever humbles himself will be exalted."*

Jesus followed up this parable by reminding his host that it would have been far better for him if he'd invited guests like the man with the dropsy; the poor, the lame, the blind, and so on. If he wanted to be exclusive, he should've focused exclusively on those who could not repay him. That would've been a true demonstration of righteousness. And it would have gained him an eternal reward in the resurrection of the just.

As Jesus finished speaking, one of the guests said *"Blessed is the one who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."* "Blessed" is happy, the same word used in the Beatitudes of Jesus. This pious remark, whether it was ignorant or hypocritical, was called forth by Christ's words about

the resurrection. It was a common figure among the rabbis, the use of a banquet for the bliss of heaven. This man probably saw the banquet as a prerogative of the Pharisees. He assumed complacently that he would be among the number of the blessed.

Jesus uses this conversational remark to tell a parable illustrating the final kind of guests.

The Final KIND of Guests are,

The Excuseless Ones

Jesus tells about a certain man who is making preparations for a great banquet. Because it was a great banquet there were many people invited. Who were these invitees? Well, who were the first people to be invited to partake of the kingdom of God? It was the Jewish people.

Remember, I said earlier that many of the Jewish people believed Messiah's kingdom would be inaugurated by a meal. They would've seen Isaiah chapter 25, and verse 6 in particular, as describing this kingdom meal. *"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."* ESV This may well be what the guest pictured as he spoke about the blessing of eating bread in the kingdom.

Now regarding the meal, it was customary in that day for two invitations to be given. The first was a preliminary, general invitation. The specific time would be announced later when the preparations were complete. This is what we see happening in verse 17. The servant goes out to those who had already accepted the general invitation to tell them that everything was ready and they should come now! But as we shall see, they made excuses (invalid ones, I might add) and refused to come. This was a serious breach of cultural etiquette. Tristram, in his book, *"Eastern Customs,"* says: "To refuse the second summons would be an insult, which is equivalent among the Arab tribes to a declaration of war."

Notice what happened. They all began to offer excuses. We only have three examples but they are representative of the nation of Israel as a whole. These three excuses correspond to the seed which fell among thorns as Jesus described it in Luke 8:14.

The first person said "I've bought a piece of land and must really go and inspect it. Please excuse me." Here, the cares of this world were choking out the good seed and there would be no harvest. But really, who would buy a piece of property without first examining it? Not only that, wouldn't the piece of land be there tomorrow, or the next day? This is why I've referred to these

guests as the “excuseless ones.” They really didn’t have a legitimate reason for not attending!

The next one said “I’ve bought a yoke of oxen and I must go and prove them. Please excuse me.” Again, who would make such a major purchase without doing the testing first? It makes no sense. Besides, the oxen would most likely not run away or be stolen if he waited another day or so to finalize the deal. Here, “the deceitfulness of riches” has captured the man’s attention insuring that no fruit will be produced.

The final example is one who says “I’ve just gotten married, so I can’t come.” I guess, in a sense, this man had the most plausible excuse. According to Deuteronomy 24:5 a newly married man was permitted special treatment. He was not required to go out for battle or to be charged with any business during the first year of his marriage. How a dinner invitation would violate that command is beyond me! In fact, most brides I’ve known would be delighted to accompany their new husband to a banquet.

Notice with me that even though this man had the most plausible excuse, his response was the rudest of them all. He didn’t say “please excuse me.” He just said “I can’t come.” The “pleasures of life” would cost this man entrance into the kingdom.

There is a common denominator in all these excuses. These people did not say they would not come eventually; they just said they couldn’t come now. They saw their current business as more pressing, or more profitable, than what they would gain by responding to the invitation. But they forgot one very important fact; if you don’t come when the banquet is ready, you don’t get in! Jesus had just warned them about this very thing in chapter 13:24 to 28.

So the servant returns and tells the master what’s happened. The master’s anger illustrates the sincerity of his invitation; he is slighted by the insult of those who said they would come and have now refused.

So the Master commands the servant, “the food is ready and there’s no time to lose. Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” Notice the invitees are still in the “city,” part of the Jewish nation. But they were the common people; those Jesus’ audience would’ve looked down upon, the publicans and sinners.

When these were all gathered the servant once again approached the master and said “*your command has been carried out, yet there is still room for more guests.*” The Lord responded “*Go out into the highways and hedges and constrain them to come in so MY HOUSE may be filled!*” Notice Jesus’ emphasis on “my house.” Now, the invitation goes to the heathen,

the goyim, those who knew they were not worthy to be invited to the feast.

The Master told His servant to “constrain, or persuade them; help them understand it is the right thing to do.” This group of people would need persuasion to help them overcome two difficulties that existed in their minds. First, they would not see themselves as worthy company for such a feast. Second, they would not have a suitable garment, and certainly were not acceptable in their regular clothing.

The Gentiles were being offered what the Jews had refused! And Jesus made it clear that the banquet would be furnished with guests.

And then the final words of judgment. Jesus said “none of those men who were invited (and made excuses) shall so much as even taste of MY supper. Again, Jesus use of the word my, personalizes the meal. The time would come when those who refused to come would gladly give everything for another opportunity.

Where do you find yourself in Jesus’ narrative? Are you one of the excluded ones? Do you instinctively know you’re not worthy? If so, there’s hope for you. You’re just the kind of person Jesus invites to HIS supper.

Perhaps you see yourself as one of the exclusive guests. You refuse to mingle with the rabble, the riff-raff, or the low-lives. You don’t want yourself or your family to become soiled with the sin of these people. You think you’re pretty good and you deserve a seat at the table.

Maybe you’re one of the excuseless ones. Oh, you have your excuses alright; but none of them really hold water. I’m too busy to think about eternal things now; I’ll take care of that later. Or, I’ve got to make a living somehow and that takes all the time I have. Someday I’ll have more time and then I’ll accept Jesus’ invitation.

Friend, if you find yourself in either of these last two kinds of guests you are in grave danger of being forever excluded from the great banquet – from the presence of Jesus. Let me urge you today – make sure you have a reservation for that great banquet!