

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Parable of the Great Banquet

Luke 14:12-24

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Scripture

One Sabbath, while on his way from Galilee to Jerusalem, Jesus was invited to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. While there, Jesus healed a man of dropsy (Luke 14:1-6). Then Jesus told them all the parable of the wedding feast to illustrate the necessity of humility to enter the kingdom of God (Luke 14:7-11).

As soon as he had finished telling the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus told his host whom he should invite to a dinner or banquet. Then Jesus told another parable, the one we know as the parable of the great banquet.

Let's read the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:12-24:

¹²He 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. ¹³But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

¹⁵When 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!" ¹⁶But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸But 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.' ¹⁹And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' ²⁰And 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.’ ” (Luke 14:12-24)

Introduction

Like most couples preparing for a wedding, Dave Best and his fiancée were probably worried about whether or not everyone would show up on time for the ceremony on July 6, 2008. They didn’t need to worry about their friend Dave Barclay, though. He was so excited about the wedding that he showed up a year early!

When Dave Best emailed Dave Barclay, telling him about the July 6 wedding in Wales, Barclay assumed Best meant July 6, 2007. So Barclay bought a plane ticket from Toronto for \$1,000. When he landed in Wales, he called Best to get details about the location of the venue for the ceremony. It was only then that Barclay discovered he was a year ahead of schedule.

After a year, Barclay gave it another try. He said, “At least it assured me a mention in the wedding speech!”¹

We smile at the mistake that this guest made. However, in Jesus’ day the problem was not about showing up too early. Jesus constantly warned people about a late arrival or not even bothering to show up at all. The parable of the great banquet illustrates lost opportunity and the amazing grace of God.

¹ See <http://dalje.com/en-lifestyle/british-wedding-guest-turns-up-a-year-early/61317>.

Lesson

Let us examine the lost opportunity as set forth in Luke 14:12-24 and see what it teaches us about the amazing grace of God.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Rewarded Hospitality (14:12-14)
2. Hopeful Remark (14:15)
3. Gracious Invitation (14:16-17)
4. Feeble Excuses (14:18-20)
5. Wider Invitation (14:21-23)
6. Dreadful Exclusion (14:24)

I. Rewarded Hospitality (14:12-14)

First, observe the rewarded hospitality.

Jesus was at a Sabbath dinner party that had become very intense. Jesus healed a man with dropsy, who most likely had been planted by the Pharisees. But Jesus challenged them to know that God permits deeds of mercy on the Sabbath day.

Then Jesus rebuked the dinner guests for seeking seats of honor. He told them the parable of the wedding feast to illustrate the necessity of humility to enter the kingdom of God.

Then Jesus turned his attention to the host. **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"** (14:12). In Jesus' day proper etiquette required reciprocating dinner invitations. Now, Jesus was not saying that we should never have a meal with friends or relatives or neighbors. He himself did so on a number of occasions. Jesus was opposed to *quid pro quo* relationships, that is, you do something for me, and I will do something

for you.

Instead, Jesus went on to say, **“But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just”** (12:13-14). Many of us struggle with this. We only mix with people who are like us. We only have people over to our homes – if we ever engage in hospitality at all – who are similar to us.

This is a serious issue for self-examination. When was the last time you did something for someone who was not in a position to do anything for you? What are you doing to show the love of Christ to those less fortunate than yourself? Bishop J. C. Ryle said, “The Lord Jesus would have us care for our poorer brethren, and help them according to our power. He would have us know that it is a solemn duty never to neglect the poor, but to aid them and relieve them in their time of need.”²

Commentator Phil Ryken explained, “Jesus would have us do this because he wants us to have his heart for people in need – the same heart he had for us when he gave his life for our sins. The guest list he gives us – the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame – is the guest list of his own grace. These are the very people Jesus came to save.”³

When we love people in Jesus’ name who are disadvantaged, we will have God’s blessing. Disadvantaged people may not be able to repay us, but God will repay us at **the resurrection of the just**.

II. Hopeful Remark (14:15)

Second, notice the hopeful remark.

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 154.

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 78.

By this point in the meal, Jesus had offended just about everyone at the table. He offended the Pharisees by healing a man on the Sabbath, the guests by telling them not to take the best seats in the house, and the host by criticizing his guest list.

I am sure we have all been in a situation where there is a really awkward silence. So, to try and save the day, **when one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”** (14:15).

The statement is actually a true statement. According to one of the great promises of the Old Testament, God is preparing a great banquet in his kingdom for his people (cf. Isaiah 25:6-9). It really will be a marvelous blessing to sit down with all the saints of all ages to enjoy this great banquet. The problem was that the man who made this hopeful remark was presuming that he and all the other religious people deserved a seat at God’s great banquet. Furthermore, he assumed that Jesus would agree with what he had said, thus confirming God’s blessing.

The vast majority of people in the world today make the same mistaken presumption. They presume that they will be at the great banquet in God’s kingdom because of their own good works, their own obedience, their own efforts, and so on.

Yet the sad truth is that not everyone who talks about heaven is going there. That is what Jesus explained in the parable of the great banquet. Let’s turn to that parable now.

III. Gracious Invitation (14:16-17)

Third, look at the gracious invitation.

Jesus said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. 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’ ” (14:16-17).

In Jesus' day, the man hosting a banquet would have issued two invitations. The first invitation is mentioned in verse 16, and it came some time before the event. It was something like our modern "Save the Date" notice that is sent out. People responded to the first invitation by saying whether or not they would attend the banquet. Then the host knew how many people were coming, how much food he needed, and so on.

Then, on the day of the banquet, when everything was finally ready, a second invitation went out. This is the invitation mentioned in verse 17. To refuse to come at this point was considered a major insult to the host.

The parable of the great banquet is really about God's gracious invitation to sinners to enter the kingdom of God. As I mentioned, the banquet was an ancient symbol of salvation. God wants to have fellowship with people and to satisfy them with good things. So, in the parable of the great banquet, the man hosting the banquet represents God, and the banquet represents his kingdom.

God sent the first invitation to come to the great banquet in the promises of the Old Testament. The **many** whom God invited were primarily the people of Israel. Now it was time for them to receive the second invitation. Therefore, Jesus had announced that the kingdom of God had come. He was the **servant** who was sent to tell Israel that God's great banquet was ready. He was the Messiah, the Son of God, and Savior of sinners. Soon he would finish the work of salvation by dying on the cross at Calvary to pay the penalty for sinners. The time for the great banquet had arrived, so in his teaching Jesus offered the gracious invitation, "**Come, for everything is now ready.**" And the correct response to the gracious invitation was faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance of sin.

Bishop J. C. Ryle says, "There is nothing wanting on God's part for the salvation of man. If man is not saved, the fault is not on God's side. The Father is ready to receive all who come

to Him by Christ. The Son is ready to cleanse all from their sins who apply to Him by faith. The Spirit is ready to come to all who ask for Him. There is an infinite willingness in God to save man, if man is only willing to be saved.”⁴

Are you willing to be saved? God has extended a gracious invitation to everyone – including you. Everything is now ready. You will not be accepted at the great banquet on your own terms. But, you will be accepted at the great banquet if you believe in Jesus Christ and repent of your sin.

IV. Feeble Excuses (14:18-20)

Fourth, observe the feeble excuses.

Astonishingly, when the second invitation came, **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.” And another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.” And another said, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come”** (14:18-20).

These people had all agreed to come to the great banquet when they received the first invitation. However, now when the second invitation came, **they all alike began to make excuses.** And the excuses were extremely feeble. Who would ever purchase **a field** and inspect it after he bought it? Or, who would purchase **five yoke of oxen** and inspect them after he bought them? Or, who would not want to bring his new bride to show her off at a great banquet?

Philip Ryken tells the following story about these excuses:

These bad excuses (from people, it should be remembered, who had already accepted the master’s invitation) remind me of a song my sixth-grade class in grammar school

⁴ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 160–161.

used to sing – a simple chorus based on this parable:

I cannot come to the banquet, don't trouble me now;
I have married a wife; I have bought me a cow.
I have fields and dominions that cost a tidy sum;
Don't trouble me now – I cannot come.

To our music teacher's consternation, some of the boys in the back row sang a slightly different version, in which the second line went like this: "I have bought me a wife; I have married a cow." But really, this was only slightly more absurd than the original parable, with its own outrageous excuses.⁵

The invited guests simply did not want to attend the great banquet. There is no other explanation for their feeble excuses.

This is exactly what the people of Israel were doing to Jesus. They had received God's first invitation to the great banquet in the promises of the Old Testament, and had agreed to come. But now when God's second invitation came, in the person of his Son, they deliberately refused to come by faith.

That is how people still treat Jesus today. They have been invited to attend the great banquet by trusting in Jesus and repenting of their sins. Some people say that they want to be at the great banquet, but they never do respond in true faith and repentance. They offer similar feeble excuses. They are too busy with work or entertainment or family or whatever.

Is that true of you today?

V. Wider Invitation (14:21-23)

Fifth, notice the wider invitation.

When the guests rejected the second invitation, **the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant,**

⁵ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 82.

“Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame” (14:21). Apparently, the servant went and did his master’s bidding. Many people came to the great banquet. So, the servant went and reported to the master a second time, **“Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.” 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” (14:22-23).**

The wider invitation was a rebuke to the Pharisees and the people of Israel. They were the original invited guests, the people who had received God’s first invitation in the Old Testament promises. But when Jesus came and summoned them to salvation, they refused to come. So now Jesus was inviting all people – the Gentiles – to enter and participate in the great banquet.

You see, the invitation to the great banquet – the gospel – is for people who see themselves as spiritually poor and crippled and blind and lame. God’s amazing grace extends to everyone – even those who think they do not belong.

How do you see yourself? Do you spurn God’s gracious invitation? Or do you see yourself as a sinner in need of a Savior? I have good news for you: the gospel invitation is for you! All you have to do to attend the great banquet is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and repent of your sin. Do so today!

VI. Dreadful Exclusion (14:24)

And finally, look at the dreadful exclusion.

Jesus said in verse 24, **“For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.”** Jesus is saying that people – like the Pharisees and religious people of Israel – who refuse to come to him in faith and repentance will never taste his salvation.

This is a sober warning. People who dabble in religion, who want to go to heaven, who desire to attend the great banquet, but who do not turn to Jesus in faith and repentance will not be saved.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed lost opportunity as set forth in Luke 14:12-24, we should not delay and respond *now* to God's gracious invitation to attend the Great Banquet.

In almost forty years of talking to people about eternal matters such as heaven and hell, I only recall one person ever saying to me that he wanted to go to hell. I think he was just trying to provoke a response from me. He said that he wanted to go to hell because that is where all his friends would be. I tried to tell him that hell would be unspeakably horrible. He and his friends will not be having a party. They will be weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth in pain and misery.

Almost everyone wants to go to heaven. But people want to go to heaven on their own terms. They don't want to submit to the terms of Jesus. They don't want to trust in Jesus alone for the gift of salvation. And they certainly don't want to turn from their sins and live a life of grateful submission to God.

What is holding you back from accepting Jesus' invitation to the great banquet today? Are other things more important to you than Jesus? Do you live for your own pleasure? Do you want to make money more than submit to Jesus? Is your family more important to you than Jesus?

On behalf of Jesus, I invite you to accept the gracious invitation he extends to you to attend the great banquet. Believe in Jesus Christ and repent of your sins, and you will have a seat at the great banquet. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, I thank you for the parable of the great banquet. Jesus taught this parable to help us understand the horror of lost opportunity and the amazing grace of God.

O Father, I pray that everyone here today will accept the invitation to attend the great banquet.

Dear Father, grant faith and repentance to each one of us so that we may find ourselves seated at the great banquet in your eternal kingdom.

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!