

# **LUKE**

## Part 57: “The Banquet”

Luke 14:1; 7-24

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Sunday, March 24, 2019 (The Fourth Sunday of Lent)

### **Scripture Reading**

**14** One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully....

<sup>7</sup> Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, <sup>8</sup> “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, <sup>9</sup> and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. <sup>11</sup> For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

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

<sup>15</sup> When 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!” <sup>16</sup> But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. <sup>17</sup> 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.’ <sup>18</sup> But 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.’ <sup>19</sup> And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ <sup>20</sup> And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ <sup>21</sup> 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.’ <sup>22</sup> And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your word. May your Spirit give us eyes to see what is good and beautiful and true. We pray this in Jesus name, AMEN.*

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 14:1;7–24.

## Introduction

Jesus is at a Sabbath day feast inside the home of a leader of the Pharisees (Lk. 14:1). Lots of Pharisees are there. At this meal, Jesus is being evaluated to see if he could be corrected about something and put in his place. But instead, he turns this feast into a teaching moment and a visual metaphor for something more.

In the ancient Near East, a feast was a big deal. A feast took tons of foresight and preparation on behalf of the host. It was a source of great joy and anticipation for the guests.

For this reason, the biblical authors utilized the image of a great feast as a governing metaphor the hope of eternal life in God's kingdom. According to the prophets, there would be a day when God would restore all that was broken in creation. He would make all things new. He would bring an end to evil and eternal joy to his people. This would be the true and better feast of the kingdom of God, as is seen most clearly in Isaiah 25: *"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. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation'"* (Isaiah 25:6–9, ESV).

This is the one party you want to make sure you are on the guest list. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets will be there (Lk. 13:28). The most important people in the kingdom of God will be there.

The kingdom of God is a joyous feast you will want to go to, but how can you get in? Not in the way that the Pharisees and most people today would think.

## Exposition

### **1.) Put yourself last.**

Jesus lived in an honor-based culture, in which public honor was the highest aspiration, and public shame was the greatest fear. This led the Pharisees to posture and position themselves for a place of stature and significance in social settings.

A feast was the perfect arena to contend for social perception. Even the act of providing a feast turned into an opportunity for a host to advance himself socially. Guests too would use the feast as an opportunity to fight for perceived significance. The better your seat, the more important you would look. Their thinking is, "Power and significance come to those who fight for it and are willing to step on and over others to get it."

Jesus offers a counter-intuitive outlook against this view on life. He tells the Pharisees, “Don’t take the seat at the head of the table. Take the seat no one else wants. Don’t take the place of honor. Take the place of humility. Stop trying to put on a show for everyone else. Stop trying to prove yourself. Stop trying to one-up everyone else all the time. There is no place for pride in my kingdom.” He sums up this thought with this famous statement: *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 14:11, ESV). This is an excellent verse to memorize by the way. But it runs counter to everything to what the Pharisees thought.

The Pharisees thought and taught, in the kingdom of man you have to make something of your self. You have to fight to be the top man on the totem pole. Not only do you have to obey all the religious laws just right, but you also need to show everyone that you are more righteous than anyone else. Jesus is showing us that the Pharisees have it backward. In the kingdom of the world, the way up is up. But in the kingdom of God, the way up is down.

I do not think we are as far away from the honor-based culture of Jesus as we think. Last week I went to breakfast with a pastor who said he had to recently intervene in a fight two older women were having in the church. He said they were ready to go to blows with one another. What was the reason they were arguing? They were arguing about who deserved a certain spot in the church pew.

But we can fight for our perceived social position in ways other than vying for preferred seating. Think of applying this passage to social media for a moment. Social media as a method of advancing the image of honor we want people to have of us. But this does not make us happy or give us what we want. Social media has the potential of cultivating a neurotic sense of conscientiousness, a hyper-sense of self-awareness that robs of us of the ability to experience joy. The more we do this, the less happy we are and the more depressed we are (scientific studies show this to be true).<sup>2</sup>

Notice that Jesus even rebukes the guy who is currently feeding him! He has no chill! *“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. 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”* (Luke 14:12–14, ESV).

Is Jesus saying we can’t invite friends over for dinner? No, he is saying that true generosity is giving to people who you don’t expect to give back to you.<sup>3</sup> The leader of the Pharisees has turned this into an event of social competition that advances his sense of self-importance in the community.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2015/04/08/new-study-links-facebook-to-depression-but-now-we-actually-understand-why/#1f1aeb641e6d>

<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 390.

So too we often want to subtly make sure people see the good stuff we do so that we can get a little glory. There are ways we advance causes of goodwill as a form of worship of self. But Jesus is saying to be good and generous to those who cannot bless back.

Not only is a focus on self obviously repellant to others, it tends to destroy us. You can go and find a lot of Christian sermons and books about the key to a happy marriage, family, or life. But today I want to give you the key to the opposite. Do you want to ruin your marriage, your family, and your life? The key to a terrible marriage, family, job, and life is “make it all about you.” The key to unhappiness is putting yourself first

Christians are toward a life of love that has an other-orientation – toward a love of God and a love of people. All of this flows from a love of the God who loved us when we were unworthy. Our love for God should be reflected in the way we love people, and our love of God (Or lack thereof) is reflected in the way we love people.

We should not interpret Jesus to advocate for us to live in a state of false humility and self-deprecation for the sake of attention and fishing for compliments. True humility is not high self-esteem or not low self-esteem – it is *no self-esteem*. True humility is being so in awe of God and oriented to a love of others that we enter a state of blessed self-forgetfulness.

There is simply no place for pride in the one who truly knows God. If we truly understand the gospel, it should humble us.

## **2.) Put the kingdom first.**

Jesus then tells a parable about a great banquet. The master has prepared a great feast, and he sends the servant to gather the guests. Those in an ancient middle-eastern context would have understood the nature of this invitation better than we would at first glance. In an ancient setting, there would be two invitations.<sup>4</sup> The first would be the equivalent of a request for an RSVP for the feast. The second invitation would be the announcement that the feast has been prepared, all is ready, now is the time to come and dine. The announcement given in this parable is of the second category.

But when the announcement comes, people offer lame excuses: *“But 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”* (Luke 14:18–20, ESV).

Notice it’s not that they hated the master of the feast; they were indifferent to him. The excuses are excusable in our imagination: excuses like work and marriage. But they would have come off weak and offensive in Jesus’s time.

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*, International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 360.

Here is the connection we need to make. God has invited us his kingdom. The coming of his kingdom is the most important event, not just in our existence, but also the most important event in all of eternity. But how easy is it to be indifferent to the kingdom of God! How easy is it to put everything else in front of our relationship with God! We know that inherently sinful things can distract us from God. But even good things can distract us from God when we make them a priority over God. A good thing that becomes a God thing has the ability to destroy us and our relationship with God. When our focus and priorities are always in temporary things of this world, things that are even good things, our joy and hope will always be conditional. Fred Craddock writes, *“The forces against which God’s offer contends are reasonable and well argued, but God’s offer has priority not simply over our worst but also over our best agendas.”*<sup>5</sup>

Let’s go back to the parable. The master could have gone to war over such public insults. But he turns his anger into grace.<sup>6</sup> He extends the invitation to those who are desperate enough to accept it. He says, *“... ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame”* (Luke 14:21, ESV).

He invited those who know they are broken, those who know they are unworthy, those who are hungry. In the parable, these are the people who get to enjoy the feast. In life, these are the people who get to enjoy the kingdom of God. This why earlier Jesus taught: *“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh”* (Luke 6:20–21, ESV).

Biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson writes that: *“[Poorness in spirit is] ...a spiritual attitude, a disposition of soul which could be called poverty: a self-disposition which [makes] room for the Word of God...it’s most essential characteristic is the profound awareness of who we are as creatures before God. This is a sense of our dependency. We exist, moment by moment, only because of the creative love and fidelity of the Father. We are, of ourselves, totally unnecessary. We are naked and powerless before the mystery of our own destiny. This awareness is harder to achieve and maintain than we might suppose. When we think about it, it seems obvious. But look at how much of our lives is built around an avoidance of this realization. We construct around ourselves a veneer of protection against the simplest of fact of all about us humans: that we don’t belong to ourselves but depend upon Another.”*<sup>7</sup> To have poorness in spirit is to have an acute awareness of our own need. The poor in spirit are those who understand grace like West Texan farmer understands a gentle rain.

Maybe you do not hate the Lord. But this text should call you to ask an uncomfortable and challenging question of: am I indifferent to God and his kingdom? Are you more

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<sup>5</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 179.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth E. Bailey. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP, 2008), 316-17.

<sup>7</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson. *Some Hard Blessings: Meditations on the Beatitudes in Matthew*. (Allen, Texas: Argus, 1981), 34, 36.

concerned with the fleeting and temporary things of this world than you are the eternal significance of your relationship with the Lord?

I think the reason that we do not value and seek first the kingdom is because we truly struggle to understand the concept of eternity.

A few summers ago I officiated the funerals for my grandfather and grandmother who died less than three months apart. That summer, my family had the opportunity to do a lot of reflecting and remembering of their lives. And most people would say that they lived very rich and full lives. At the time of their deaths, they were both well over ninety years old. But at one of those funerals, I remember singing the song “Amazing Grace,” and the final verse struck me in a way that it never had before. The verse goes, “*When we’ve been there ten thousand years, / Bright shining as the sun, / We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise / Than when we first begun.*” I remember thinking of that number ten thousand years. It is a number that is huge to us, but for some reason, it is way more comprehensible than eternity. And I remember thinking that even a life of over ninety years is less than 1% of ten-thousand years. How much less is our life in scope of eternity?

Truly, our light and momentary afflictions are not worth comparing with the eternal weight of glory. So too the momentary joys of the temporary are not worthy of being compared to the eternal joy of Christ’s kingdom. God is not against our joy; he is more for it than we are. As C.S. Lewis once wrote: “*...it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily satisfied.*”<sup>8</sup>

## **Conclusion**

But do need to acknowledge that there is a gravitational pull towards putting self first, towards putting the kingdom of God last, towards forsaking the eternal for the temporary, towards forgetting the hope of the feast of great banquet of the kingdom.

For this reason, I so appreciate that as a church family to take the Lord’s Supper together. Every week we are reminded that there is a feast that is coming. Every week we are reminded that we are not worthy of this feast, but that Jesus’s blood on the cross cleanses us. Every week we are reminded that his broken body heals our brokenness. Every we remember the cross, we rest in the cross, and we look forward to the hope of the true and better banquet.

These are the words of Revelation 19: “*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and*

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<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory*. (New York: HarperOne, 1949, 1976, 1980), 26.

*his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure'— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God'" (Revelation 19:6–9, ESV).*

Redeemer, may we put ourselves last, may we put God's kingdom first, and may we set our hearts upon the hope of the banquet that is to come!

AMEN.

### **Community Group Discussion Starters**

- 1.) *Read Luke 14:7-24 and summarize some of the different ideas Jesus is teaching in this passage.*
- 2.) *Jesus lived in an honor-culture, wherein the seating arrangement at community feasts often reflected the significance (or lack thereof) of the various guests. In this context, people would often vie for the best seat at the table as a way to earn perceived importance. What are some ways that we can position ourselves to appear significant today?*
- 3.) *In the parable of the great feast (Lk. 14:15-24), the initial guests declined the invitation to the great feast due because they had their priorities elsewhere. In the same way, it is possible to neglect the eternal value of the kingdom of God because we are fixated on things of lesser importance. How might we teach our hearts to value the kingdom of God above all the temporary things of this world?*
- 4.) *In what ways does Jesus himself embody the truth that he teaches in this passage?*

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