

# Parables of Jesus

Message 5

## *A Divine Dinner Invitation*

Luke 14:15-24

### *Celebrating With Friends*

I suppose all of you here are looking forward to the day when you will graduate with a degree from Lehigh. It will be a big occasion, and you will probably invite your family and friends to celebrate with you. Perhaps you will have a party, and your house will be filled with your friends all celebrating with you. I suppose an even bigger occasion for most of you will be your wedding. I don't know about you men, but when I was your age I never gave my wedding a single thought. But I have been informed that women are entirely different in this regard. I am sure that some of you women here can picture the day. You have your hair fixed beautifully and your make-up carefully applied. You get into the most wonderful dress you can imagine. At the appointed hour you walk down the aisle to meet the most handsome and fabulous man in the whole world. The wedding almost goes by in a daze and before you know it you are whisked back down the aisle, into a car, and out to the wedding reception where you expect to spend the rest of the afternoon or evening with your family and friends. You expect to see a room full of your dearest companions. They will toast you with champagne and you will enjoy a terrific meal. Perhaps there will be a band and everyone will dance throughout the evening. But when you leave the car and enter the banquet hall, you find it empty! No one came! On this, the most important day of your life, no one wanted to celebrate with you.

How will you feel? Will you be crushed that your friends have all let you down? Will you be angry that they chose to do something else instead? Will you feel better knowing that one friend was unable to come because he just got a new computer and had to set it up? Will you understand if someone just bought a new car and had to try it out that afternoon? How will you feel if another newly wed couple decided they just needed the afternoon for themselves? Will these excuses make any sense to you, or make you feel any better? I think I speak for us all in saying that I would be devastated to find that all my friends had better things to do than come to my wedding. It would be a devastating disappointment.

### *Eating With the Pharisees*

Jesus' parable of the Great Supper comes while He is eating a meal in the house of a Pharisee. At the beginning of this chapter we are told that it was the Sabbath day, and that the Pharisees were watching him closely. You know the Pharisees were very scrupulous about keeping all the tiny ceremonies and legalisms of the law. Jesus irritated them because He did not toe the line on all the details of their laws. It's not that He broke any of the laws in the Bible – He perfectly obeyed all those. It was the human additions to the Bible Jesus disregarded. He just had the annoying habit of showing mercy to people at the wrong time, like healing people on the Sabbath day. And sure enough, He did it again! He healed a man with dropsy. Then Jesus compared this act of mercy to pulling a donkey or ox out of a ditch. None of the Pharisees would have left a valuable animal in a ditch on the Sabbath. They would have recognized that rescuing the animal was more important than the human regulations about the Sabbath. When Jesus pointed this out, they really had no way to criticize his healing of the man with dropsy. They were left speechless.

Then Jesus went on to address the way these Pharisees took their seats at the table. He noticed that they maneuvered for the most prestigious seats in the room. Jesus pointed out that this is a foolish thing to do. You might succeed in getting a good seat, but if an honored guest comes in later, the host might need your seat for the honored guest. Then not only would you be stuck with the last seat available – you would also have the humiliation of being demoted in front of everyone. Jesus concluded in verse 11, "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" Although it at first appeared that Jesus was simply giving good advice about social etiquette, it becomes apparent that He was really

addressing the heart of the Pharisees. Their essential problem was pride. Humility was in very short supply among the Pharisees.

Turning next to His host, Jesus said he should not invite his friends to dinner, but invite the poor and crippled instead. Jesus is using hyperbole here. He is not saying never to invite your friends over to dinner, but not to neglect the poor and disadvantaged. It's like when He said that if your right hand causes you to stumble, you should cut it off. He was exaggerating to make a point. Most of us remember this saying because it is so vivid, and thus we remember the point – sin is as dangerous as losing your right hand! Here Jesus' point is that serving the poor is as important as serving your friends. Now why did Jesus bring this up right at this point? It's because caring for the poor and helpless is a strong antidote to pride. Nothing will get the Pharisees' mind off the picayune points of the law and their social standing like spending time with those who have no social standing. This is true for us also. Serving the poor and needy can help us put into perspective our own problems which often seem so urgent.

After this one of the other guests said, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Now where did that question come from? Well, after all they are eating a meal. Still, it is rather out of place. No one has been discussing the Kingdom of God. I think this statement is a response to the awkward silence. Remember, Jesus had really put the Pharisees in their place, and they were speechless. You know how it is when you are in a group and no one knows what to say. The silence makes everyone uneasy. I think this guy was just trying to move the conversation along. but Jesus used it as an occasion to teach another very profound truth.

### ***The Great Supper***

The parable emphasizes the magnitude of the meal. This was no come-as-you-are sort of affair. It was far different than pizza and coke in the apartment. It was a great supper and many were invited. Indeed it was much like a graduation party or a wedding reception. The host spent a lot of time and money preparing for this banquet. In those days they did not have telephones or email, so when the meal was ready, the host sent his servant around to summon the guests to the feast.

Now it would have been understandable, perhaps, if one or two of the guests had urgent, unexpected problems which would keep them from the big occasion. If someone's father died, or child was very sick, or he had been injured – these are serious problems which clearly would have kept a guest from attending – and the host certainly would have understood. But in this case *none* of the guests came. Every single one had an excuse why he could not make it – and their excuses were really lame. At first you might not notice this, because they have to do with important matters – buying property, buying cattle, and marriage. Definitely these are weighty matters. But the specific issues are trivial! The first can look at the land another day, and the second can test his oxen after the banquet. And the third – here he has an opportunity to take his wife out for a great dinner at no cost! Clearly these are silly excuses masquerading as serious problems.

How would you feel if you were the host? What if you had spent many days and thousands of dollars preparing a feast and no one came? It would be similar to no one coming to your wedding banquet, wouldn't it? Wouldn't you feel angry, just as the host did? And why would you be angry and disappointed? Wouldn't it be because it would show that your friends really didn't care much about you?

In our story the host is angry because he now sees that land and oxen are more important to his friends than he is. So he determines that none of his first invited guests will ever get any of the supper. He will fill the hall with people who really want to be there – people who will be grateful for the big spread – people who do not have other things more important to attend. So he sends his servant out again and orders him to fetch all the poor and crippled people – the despised of that society – and bring them in to the meal. Why would he do this? Why gather up the social outcasts to attend the meal? It's because he does not want

to eat it alone. The master has prepared a glorious banquet and it would be no fun at all to eat it by himself.

So the servant goes out and calls everyone he sees and knocks on the doors to invite all the poor people to the banquet. But when they all come, there is still room left. So the master sends the servant out again. This time he searches the back alleys and rundown warehouses. He goes to the park and gets all the homeless people living there. He turns the town upside down to call every single person to come to his master's great banquet, and eventually the hall is filled. Every seat is taken and there is no room for any of the first guests, should they try to come later. And everyone had a marvelous time enjoying the lavish feast the master had prepared.

### ***Eating Bread in the Kingdom***

Now, what is the purpose of this parable? Why did Jesus tell it? He told it in response to a statement about eating bread in the Kingdom of God. So, it must be about eating bread in the Kingdom of God. It seems fairly obvious, therefore, that the master would have stood for God. What about the invited guests? Well, who did God first invite into His Kingdom? Wasn't it the Jews? And weren't the Pharisees the most likely candidates for being invited into God's Kingdom, since they were the most faithful of all the Jews? Furthermore, who is the subject of this whole passage? Isn't it the Pharisees, the ones listening to Jesus right here? Well, if God is the master and the Jews, particularly the Pharisees were the first invited guests, what then is the supper? What specifically does it mean to eat bread in the Kingdom?

Eating bread surely has the denotation of having a meal. But this phrase also has the connotation more broadly of fellowship. Meals, especially in other cultures, are never simply an occasion to fill your stomach or energize your body. They are social events – an occasion to enjoy the company of friends. It is an intimate gesture to invite someone to a meal, and attendance shows you are on close terms with the host. So to talk about eating in the Kingdom of God is to refer to intimacy with those in that Kingdom – God, certainly, and the other citizens.

So far so good. Now, where, or when, *is* the Kingdom of God? Is this a reference to the end of time when God removes His enemies from the earth and establishes eternal peace with his own people? Perhaps. The book of Revelation gives credence to this idea. In chapter 19 God's victory over His enemies is followed by a marriage supper with His people. Amazingly reminiscent of the statement by the Pharisee, we read in verse 9, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" This might be a reference to a huge celebration at the end of time with God and His people.

But remember also how a kingdom is defined. A kingdom consists of a king, a people, a law, and a land. When we think this way, it becomes apparent that God's kingdom began, at least, with the coming of Christ. Jesus is the King, His followers are the people, His teaching is the law, and the whole earth is His land. So the Kingdom of God has at least two dimensions to it. There is the final Kingdom, when all God's enemies have been destroyed and all that is left is His own faithful people – and there is the beginning of that Kingdom, when Jesus exercises God's rule among His followers. This beginning Kingdom coexists with God's enemies until the end, but it is a real kingdom. The defining element of God's Kingdom is the presence of Christ. Where He is, God is establishing His Kingdom.

Now let's put this all together. Eating bread in the Kingdom of God must mean sharing intimate fellowship with God and God's people. This would mean eating a meal together, but it also means any intimate relationship. It will be complete at the end of time, but it is a reality now for those who follow Christ.

### ***Fellowship With Jesus***

But wait! In the parable those invited first never got into the feast! What does this mean about the

Pharisees? If our analysis is accurate, it means that they will not get into the Kingdom of God, doesn't it? No, it doesn't mean that – it means simply that *those who make excuses* will not enter. Jesus told this parable as a warning to the Pharisees. They had a tendency to get caught up in man-made laws and traditions. They did *not* have a tendency to keep the laws that require people to show mercy to the poor and destitute. There they were, with Jesus right in front of them, and they were not sure if they should follow Him. There they were, eating with Jesus. This is a good sign, right? Didn't we say that Jesus' presence was the beginning of the Kingdom? But this is almost an anti-supper, for true fellowship with Jesus is missing. They did not invite Jesus to learn from Him, but to check up on Him. They were united, but not with Jesus. Furthermore, they seemed oblivious to the needs of the poor around them. They would have kicked out the man with dropsy, not realizing the Kingdom of God will be made up of such as he.

Yes, this is a warning to the Pharisees. Eating bread in the Kingdom of God means fellowship with Jesus and his people – like the sick man. If they will not follow Jesus – accept His teaching and show mercy on the poor and sick – they will not eat bread in the Kingdom. They are like those who, having been invited, decide they are really more interested in other things. Their traditions, their friends, their possessions are all more important to them than eating with Jesus and the rabble.

This is also a warning to you. When Jesus calls, do you come? Are you part of the happy throng of the poor and needy who eat with Jesus? Or are you more interested in other things? What does it mean *today* to eat with Jesus? Remember, this concept takes in our whole relationship with Him. It means that you have daily interaction with Him. It means that prayer and Bible reading are a regular part of your life, and not as a chore to check off your list. It means you pray and read your Bible because you enjoy Jesus' company. Is this true of you? Do you enjoy Jesus, or do you find Him tiresome? It also means there is intimate fellowship with others at the table. Meaningful conversation and activities with other believers would be part of each day. It means your conversation would go beyond your busy schedule and include your joys and struggles to serve God. You would do things to help each other serve God. Is this true of you? Are you growing closer to other believers? And then there is the actual meal Jesus serves every week, the Lord's Supper. Are you in church receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread in the Kingdom of God? This is not the only thing this passage refers to. It is not even the primary thing. But Jesus definitely gave us a meal of bread and wine to share with each other. If we neglect this, will He not turn His back on us and invite others to take our place?

You are very blessed here tonight. Not everyone has the opportunity to hear the words of Jesus. But now that He has called us into His banquet hall, we must go, lest we offend Him and find our place given to another. If you go from here and decide to live a nice, normal American life, with a little religion thrown in for balance – or if you decide to make up your own approach to God, like the Pharisees, you are doomed. You are ignoring God's invitation to the banquet. Woe to you for such folly! Repent of such thoughts! Abandon your new computer, your new car, your new video game. Bring your boyfriend or girlfriend along, but do not refuse the invitation of Christ! There is nothing so wonderful as eating with Jesus. Don't think anything else is more rewarding.

If we were able to take a survey of all your deepest thoughts and aspirations right now, we would find some of you thinking, "All this sounds wonderful, but it just doesn't fit me. I wish I could love and follow Jesus with all my heart, but honestly, my heart isn't in it. I'll just keep muddling along and hope for the best." Now here is where the gospel shines forth in its greatest power. When Jesus calls, He doesn't expect a clean heart and pure motives. Jesus doesn't demand that we come to Him full of love and a zeal to serve. All Jesus calls for is that you come. Maybe you don't know banquet etiquette. You're welcome! Maybe you don't feel hungry, but you want the joy of the banquet. You're welcome! Maybe you're afraid you won't like the other banqueters, but are captivated by the feast. Come! Because if you come to the banquet, Jesus will do the rest. He will give you the manners, the appetite, and the friendship you need. The

gospel is a call to sinners, including those whose desire is weak. Come to Jesus and He will save you. Make no mistake about it, you must leave behind your other loves. But if you come to Jesus and sincerely ask Him admittance into His Kingdom, He will welcome you and change you into a true citizen. This is the gospel. Praise God for the depths of His love!

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