

“PARABLE OF A GREAT BANQUET.”

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Scripture Texts: Luke 14:12-24

Introduction.

Having Jesus over for dinner could be a very awkward affair. It was the Sabbath, the high holy day, a day of real feasting for the Jews. Jesus was dining as a guest of the ruler of the Pharisees. Around the table were Pharisees, scribes, lawyers, elders, important leaders.

The meal had started with Jesus asking in the presence of an infirmed man if it was OK to heal on the Sabbath. Silence. So Jesus healed the man. Then he asked them which of them if their son or ox fell into a well on the Sabbath would they save him? More silence.

Then Jesus told a parable about vying for seats of honor around the table and trying to sit close to the host. More embarrassed silence. And Jesus still didn't give it a rest. He said to his rich host that he should invite not just friends and relatives but the poor and handicapped.

How awkward is that? What do you say to that? We can sympathize with the poor soul who finally blurted out, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

Have you ever put your foot in your mouth at a social gathering? Have you ever opened your mouth maybe to break the ice or ease the tension or to try to impress others, only to have it come out making you look foolish or arrogant? Have you ever tried to say something particularly pious and had it come off badly?

Jesus had just said something about caring for the poor ending with a very brief statement about the reward at the resurrection of the just and perhaps to fill the awkward silence one of them fastens on to that last little thread about heaven. I bet he regretted that after hearing Jesus' response.

Luke 14:12-14, we should invite the poor.

First, just a word about Jesus' teaching about the poor. Jesus doesn't mean that we should neglect our family and friends. Nor does He mean we are to be indiscriminate or undiscerning with our assistance to those in need.

But having said that, it's easy to over correct and neglect the important teaching of this Scripture. This Scripture does say something to us and we must be careful not to pare it down until it says nothing to us.

Jesus wants us to care about the poor and help them as we are able. It's our duty to lend them some assistance. If we are uncompassionate, uncaring, or even condemning of them we fall under Christ's rebuke, “I was hungry and you gave me no food; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink” (Matthew 25:42).

Luke 12:15-24, because God invited the poor, and we are poor.

The man's statement on the face of it is true enough. There's no greater blessing but to eat God's bread in God's kingdom in the life to come. This is a blessing to be anticipated with joy.

This Jew speaks well of God's kingdom but in truth has little interest in it. He doesn't even realize he has ignored or rejected an invitation to grace.

So Jesus tells a parable to reveal a sobering reality. The Jews whom God honored with the first invitation to come to the great marriage feast in the kingdom of heaven rejected the invitation and so it was about to be offered to the unclean, polluted, off cast Gentiles.

The Gospel of Christ can be summed up in two words, *great banquet*.

The sumptuous feast is the Gospel of God's grace revealed in the incarnation of His only Son Jesus Christ. God has considered the hunger and thirst of the human soul lost in sin and He has prepared a gracious, rich banquet for all who would come.

John 6:33, 35, 51 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ... 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The offer that Christ makes to the world can be summed up in one word, *come*.

Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden.

Come to me, eat and drink.

Come and buy wine without cost.

He that comes will not be cast out.

"The Father is ready to love and receive; the Son is ready to pardon and cleanse guilt away; the Spirit is ready to sanctify and renew; angels are ready to rejoice over the returning sinner; grace is ready to assist him; the Bible is ready to instruct him; heaven is ready to be his everlasting home" (J.C. Ryle, *Matthew*, p. 281).

Clearly God honored the Jews again and again. God sent multiple messengers of His grace and announced the coming of His kingdom. To them He gave the patriarchs, to them He gave His Law, with them He made His covenants, to them He sent His prophets. And as a final act of incredible grace, to them He sent His only Son. They had received every possible blessing, every act of covenant love and mercy (see Romans 9:1-8).

Before all others, God chose them first to receive His invitation to redemption and the marriage feast.

But they all began to make excuses, all innocent and legitimate things in themselves, but excessive attention to God's gifts turns gifts into curses and ruins men's souls. Ingratitude and contempt for God's invitation deprived them of the blessings held out to them.

Hell will not just be filled with wicked sinners and notorious criminals and God-haters. Hell will also be filled with those who were just too busy, who weren't really interested in Jesus, who figured maybe someday they would start paying attention to sermons or the Bible or to prayer.

“Open sin may kill its thousands; but indifference and neglect of the Gospel kill their tens of thousands” (J.C. Ryle, *Matthew*, p. 282).

The more they were invited to this great redemption the more they despised it and railed against it, the more they hated hearing anything about it. And to their arrogant rejection of grace was added the final wickedness of rejecting the invitation of the king's Son.

So a new invitation is given.

What an excessive demonstration of the love of God. If His love and grace are rejected in one place He will turn to another. And when the invitation went out and there was still room, He sent out another invitation. Salvation belongs to the Lord and He loves to save.

The great feast in honor of His Son will go on and it will be well attended. God will glorify His Son with people from every tribe and tongue and language and people.

The invitation is still going out and nations are responding. Countless thousands are coming to the table from Africa and South America. We hear the news of huge protest in Brazil. What we don't hear are the huge revivals in Brazil.

God would rather have the poor, homeless, lame, crippled, despised, looked-down-on members of society at His table than the ungrateful and self-righteous. Those who are thought hopeless, too far gone, a lost cause, to sinful for heaven, these are the very ones God wants and welcomes to come.

The Gospel really only works with the least, the lost, the lonely, the loser. Grace only works for the dead; for those who need a resurrection. Those whose only prayer is “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.”

Application and conclusion.

[Remember Paul's words to the Gentiles in Rome:

Romans 11:17-22 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. 19 Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. 22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.

We could paraphrase this parable to be about the ***Dutch***. To the Dutch was given a great reformation; to them was given great creeds and confessions; to them was given a free church; to them was given great grace in turning a small half flooded nation into a prosperous land; to them

was given faithful generations of pastors, teachers and parents training their children in the fear of the Lord; to them a rich inheritance that they faithful exported to this new land of freedom.

And what have they done with their blessings? In Holland they are greatly rejected and mocked. But what about here? What have we done with that great history and heritage? What have we done with that grace? How do we treat God and the things of God? How is it in our hearts and homes?

Or we could paraphrase this parable to be about *America*. To Americans has been given a great land rich in soil and minerals and resources; to us has been given a great constitution that sets all men free to pursue life, liberty and happiness; to us has been given the most incredible freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion; to us has been given great prosperity the likes of which has not been seen anywhere else in the world; to us has been given the Gospel of redemption preached all over this country; half a million churches, millions of pastors and teachers and messengers of the Gospel; countless Christian schools, Christian publishing houses, radio and TV programs; endless opportunities to hear and know and believe, more invitations than any other people anywhere.

What have we done with this great history and heritage of which we are often quick to boast? What have we done with all of God's grace and blessings? Are we selfish, do we think we are so deserving, do we think we are entitled, do we squander our blessings on ourselves or on our own pleasures?

Or do we bow daily in humble, heartfelt gratitude? Do we confess our unworthiness of so great a blessing? Do we hold it loosely in our hands and freely share it with those less blessed? Do we speak openly of this Gospel of grace and invite others into it? Are we like beggars telling other beggars what the bread is and where the bread of the kingdom of God is?

Are we so busy with our marriages and families and jobs and earthly interests and pursuits that we don't have time for God and the things of God? Are the cares of this life and this world blinding us and drawing us away from the kingdom of God?

And our excuses all sound, well, excusable right. Some are just married or have marriage issues; some of us have just entered into job or business arrangements that need time and attention; some are trying to get a business off the ground or start a new job or just make a living to provide for our family; some are in a very busy season of life and when things settle down a bit we will have more time to devote more attention to spiritual matters, maybe.

We are doubly guilty when we let God's gifts and blessings become hindrances to God. When grace becomes our excuse to reject grace, a great harm is done to our souls.

This disease is epidemic in our land and in our community. Some of you are wandering, some of you are listening but you aren't responding. Some of you think God owes you and has failed you. Some of you think your sins are too many. Some of you think religion is boring. Some of you just like other stuff better. Some of you just don't think you can change, you are without hope. What can I say that would compel you to come in, to surrender your life?

God has prepared the most extravagant banquet for you. God has planned the most sumptuous feast and it's free and He wants you to come. He wants you to be His invited guests, to have fellowship with Him. Only God could come up with so lavish a plan for our salvation.

Blessed are those who are in spiritual poverty and know it.
Blessed are those who grieve the condition of their own souls.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for true food and drink, for true righteousness.

Joy is the real message and theme of this parable. The joy of so rich a feast, the joy of so gracious an invitation, the joy of such an underserved and unexpected gift. The joy of being invited by so great a host to so great a home.

You will only be able to turn from the illusory pleasures of your present life when you are able to see the joy of what is offered. I invite you; I implore you to come to the only source of true joy.

The invitation isn't just a once in a life time deal. The invitation is daily to feast on Jesus, to rely on Him and depend on His grace. The invitation is to live in Him and for Him and by Him. The invitation is to love Him and your neighbor as He first loved you.

When God calls us to His grace let nothing hinder. When God stirs your heart to repentance and faith, be swift to response. When God gives you an open invitation to follow Him, trust and obey. God's house and God's table will be full. You have already been invited. Come.

“Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9).