



RSVP Required

Luke Series # 37

Luke 14:1-24

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We're going to look at Luke 14:1-24. With God's Word open before us let's ask for His blessing on the preaching, the hearing and the living out of His Word.

God, we thank You that Your Word is the light of our paths. It is the key to the Kingdom of Heaven. God, we thank You that Your Word is our comfort in affliction, it is our shield and sword against Satan, it is the school of all wisdom. Lord, we thank You that Your Word is a window through which we see the very face of the Lord Jesus. It is a testimony of your favor and the only food and nourishment for our souls. God, would You nourish us through Your Word today? Through the power of Your Holy Spirit, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I don't know how you feel when you go to the mailbox six times a week but as I think about the mail that we receive at our home it basically falls into three categories: the good, the bad and the ugly. Birthday cards, notes from friends and missionary updates are definitely the good. All that junk mail would have to be the bad and the ugly would definitely be the bills that we receive.

But in which category would you put an invitation? Well that depends on what the invitation is for. Is it an invitation to the opening of a new appliance store? Or is it the invitation to a graduation open house or a wedding? Or maybe a presidential inauguration? It also depends on who sent the invitation? Is it someone you really care about? Is it a friend or a family member? Somebody you want to spend time with? Or is it somebody who just felt obligated to send you an invitation?

Some invitations don't have to be responded to right away. You can think about it. You can see what you have going on that weekend. You can wait and see if maybe you get a better offer. But when you receive an invitation with an RSVP card you must respond. You have to decide, "Is this a party I want to attend?"

In Luke 13, Jesus gave us a picture of the Kingdom of God as a great dinner party with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets there. He had a surprising guest list that excluded many whom we would have expected to be there and included many whom we wouldn't think would be there. Now in Luke 14 we see Jesus continue to build and expand upon that picture of

God's Kingdom as a lavish dinner party—a great banquet like a wedding banquet—in which the invitations have been sent out and an RSVP is required. Jesus is going to explain why some who were first to be invited are going to miss out while others who were last to be invited are going to sit with the Guest of Honor in the Kingdom of God.

Appropriately enough it all begins at a dinner party. We read about it in the very first verse of our text. It says, “*One Sabbath, when He went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees...*” “*One Sabbath...*” Those words ought to peak our interest immediately because we don't know much about what Jesus did on any given Sabbath. I don't know if He invited His disciples over to watch Sabbath-night football. I'd like to think so but I don't know. But I do know this: the Sabbath was the arena of controversy for Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. Their interactions often seemed to revolve around keeping the Sabbath and what was okay to do on the Sabbath.

God had given His people the Sabbath and commandments about resting on the Sabbath, but like with the other laws that God had given in the Scriptures—the law of Moses—the Pharisees and other teachers of the law had added a number of other laws to them; manmade laws which they meticulously enforced, laying that burden on others but often not obeying themselves. The Sabbath became sort of the epitome of the legalistic and hypocritical tendencies of the Pharisees and other religious leaders. So Jesus was constantly clashing over this issue with the Pharisees and religious leaders and their opposition against Him is rising. Remember that's what is happening as He is making His way toward Jerusalem. The opposition is going to continue to mount until eventually Jesus will be sentenced to death by this very group. We see the controversy brewing right here. Jesus has been invited to this dinner party and so has this man mentioned in verse two. It says, “*And behold, there was a man before Him who had dropsy.*” This condition of being swollen or retaining water was just an indication of a much more serious condition on the inside. This guy was in serious shape physically. He was diseased and the Pharisees were just waiting: Would Jesus heal this person on the Sabbath like He did last week? So the only reason that Jesus and this guy received an invitation to this banquet was to set up an opportunity to trap Jesus.

In verse one He sees that they're watching Him carefully. He knows this is just a set up. Notice in verse three He responds to them saying, “*And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisee...*” They didn't say anything to Jesus but their actions demanded a response. Notice how Jesus, rather than going on the defensive goes on the offensive with these religious leaders. “*And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?'*” There's a trick question! Is it lawful according to whose law? According to God's law?

There is no law against doing good and healing someone on the Sabbath but according to the laws that the Pharisees and others had added on to God's law there was. There were all these little details, "You can do this. You can do this much of that. That qualifies as work." It would have been against their add-on law.

Verses 4-6 state:

But they remained silent. Then He took him and healed him and sent him away. And He said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" And they could not reply to these things.

Jesus shows them their hypocrisy similar to the way He did in Luke 13. He says, "Hey listen. You care about your children. You care about the animals on your farm. If they need your help on the Sabbath you will quickly and immediately help them. Why shouldn't I minister God's love to this man on the Sabbath? Why shouldn't I heal him?"

But they have no answer for Him. It says "*They remained silent...*" in verse four. Then in verse six, "*They could not reply to these things.*" Since they have nothing to say Jesus is going to take advantage of this opportunity to teach them something about the Kingdom of God. He's going to do that in the rest of our text by telling us three parables that have the connecting theme of feasting or partying.

- In the first parable He talks about a wedding feast (14:7-11).
- In the next parable Jesus talks about a dinner or a banquet (14:12-14).
- Then in the third parable He talks about a great banquet (14:15-24).

Understand that these are all images of God's Kingdom. These are Kingdom parables. Often before He told a parable Jesus would say, "The Kingdom of God is like..." Or, "To what can we compare the Kingdom of God?" It's clear from the context here Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God and comparing it to a great feast or a great banquet—the feast that was predicted in the Old Testament and that we see in the image of the wedding supper of the Lamb in the book of Revelation.

Let's consider these three Kingdom parables with the theme of invitations.

- The first one is about receiving an invitation.
- The second one is about giving an invitation.
- Then finally about the great invitation.

In each parable I want to boil it down to one Kingdom truth. Typically when Jesus told a parable it came down to one pungent truth. I want to look carefully at these truths and then wrap them up with a summary statement.

1. Receiving an Invitation

So let's begin the with first parable about receiving an invitation in verses 7-11. Note in verse seven to whom Jesus told this parable and why. Verse seven says, "*Now He told a parable to those who were invited (to this dinner party that He was at), when He noticed how they chose the places of honor.*" So the guests would have arrived and the seats of honor at a wedding, or at any feast like this, would have been on either side of the host. The tables probably would have been set up in a U-shape and the host would have been at the center, at the bottom of the U with the most honored position at his left and the second most at his right. Then the pecking order was all the way down and around the tables.

Of course the most important people wouldn't get there early but they would arrive fashionably late (similar to today, right?). So the less important people arrive early and try to work their way up to the front of the table. Here's what Jesus says about that in verses 8-11:

"When you (as a child of the Kingdom with God's Kingdom values) 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, 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 (as everybody watches you have to move from the head table down to the end).

"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. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Here's what to do and here's what not to do when you're invited. Don't scurry for a place of position; don't assume that you deserve to be there. Rather choose the lower place. It's a humility principal that Jesus states. "*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.*" If you're not going to be humble you're going to be humiliated. But the one who will humble himself or herself will in due time be exalted. Humility now, exaltation later. The opposite is also true: self-exaltation now, humiliation later.

So the Kingdom truth that we see in this first parable is **the way you receive an invitation reveals your heart disposition**. Are you a humble person or are you a prideful person? It's humility versus humiliation for the proud.

2. Giving an Invitation

Next Jesus tells a parable about giving an invitation in verses 12-14. Note again to whom Jesus told this parable. It says in verses 12-14:

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."

So when you give a dinner party or a banquet don't invite the beautiful people of the world. Don't invite your buddies. Don't invite the well connected. Don't invite people you might get something from in return. Rather invite the nobodies of the world. Invite the marginalized. Why? Because they can't repay you. So rather than storing up your treasure now looking for repayment, you're storing up your treasure in Heaven.

So the Kingdom truth for this second parable is that **the way you give an invitation reveals your determination**. That is, are you a giver or are you a getter? Are you determined to give or are you determined to get? The way you give an invitation reveals your determination—your motive—to give or to get.

Wow! Jesus is getting pretty intrusive here, isn't He? I mean He is just a guest. Who is He to tell the host whom to invite? Well in the next parable He is going to tell us exactly who He is. He is the King Who is giving a great banquet. In fact His very presence on the earth is an invitation into the Kingdom of God; to the great feast of all time. So He has every right to say whom one should invite and whom one should not invite. Let's look at the parable that I want to call "The Parable of the Great Invitation" in verses 15-24.

3. The Great Invitation

Note what triggers this third parable by Jesus. Somebody there figures out that Jesus is talking about the Kingdom of God so in order to impress Jesus, he wants to say something kind of religious and pious.

Just thinking back through the gospels and observing Jesus, how does it usually work out for people who want to say something to impress Jesus? Not so great. Jesus is not impressed. In verse fifteen this guy says, "*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!' Apparently this was a very prideful expression by this guy, assuming that he would be on the invitation list. Jesus says, "Well, let's talk about who is being invited. Let's talk about who will feast in the Kingdom of God. You might be surprised."

So Jesus goes on to expand the parable. It's three parables but it's kind of one big parable about a great feast with three vignettes to it. Starting in verse sixteen Jesus says:

But He 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.' 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.' 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.' And the servant said, '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. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

The image again is of a great feast—a feast that is the central event in a town in Jesus' day. The invitations would have been sent out well in advance and there would have been an RSVP request. It takes a long time to prepare a great feast in a culture like this so you're not going to text your reply on the day of the event, telling them, "Yes, I'm going to come to the banquet." It's not really a time culture but more of an event culture so you're not asking people to come at a certain time. When everything is prepared, you tell the servants to go out to those who are invited and say, "My master says the feast is ready. The great banquet is ready. It's time to come."

As the servants are sent out they begin to get these really lame excuses:

- The first guy says, "Hey, I bought a field and I've got to go take a look at it." It would be like us saying, "We just closed on our house yesterday and now we're going to go have the inspection."
- The next guy has the five yoke of oxen, a major business investment for his farm. But he says, "By the way, I've got to go check them out. Give them a test drive, kick the tires." And that can't wait until tomorrow or next week when the banquet is done?
- You might think the third guy has a good excuse as a newlywed. In Israeli culture a recently married man had a year off before military service. But this isn't about going to war; this is about going to a party. I mean who wouldn't want that? Even though it

is only the men who are going to the feast, this still would be something that his wife no doubt would want him to attend. It would increase their stature in the village. It would be an opportunity for him to tell the other men how wonderful his new wife is. Yet he doesn't even ask to be excused, he just says, "I can't do it."

Who will feast in the Kingdom of God? It doesn't seem to be those who were initially invited—the well connected. The master says, "Okay, go out into the city streets and invite people in." And the servant says, "We've already done that and there is still room." So he says, "Okay, go outside the city gate. Go to the highways and the byways. Go to the hedges where the homeless and the vagrants are going to be trying to find some shelter and compel them to come, urge them to come to the feast. Don't take no for an answer."

Do you get a sense of the largeness of the heart of God? Of the deep, deep love of our God that is pictured here? He has a big house—a big, big house—and he wants to fill it with people from every tribe, language, nation and people group. He is calling them into His house. He wants His house to be full. His invitation is wide open.

The Kingdom truth we see in this final parable is that **the way you respond to God's gospel invitation reveals your destination.**

Will you be feasting or will you experience a self-imposed famine? The way you respond to God's invitation to come into the Kingdom reveals whether you'll be feasting or whether you'll experience an eternal famine. You need to humbly reply, "Lord, I need You. I am a self-absorbed sinner. I love the place of honor. I live for the kingdom-of-me apart from Your grace but I repent of that. I put my faith in Jesus." If you do that you will already be feasting in the Kingdom. You will know the hope of feasting with the King one day face-to-face. But if you refuse His invitation or just put it on the shelf or say, "You know, I'll respond later." Or, "I'm going to check out some of my other options here." Then you will one day face your Master and you will hear Him say, "I never knew you. So you shall not even taste of my banquet."

Jesus' invitation is wide. He has invited many. Today He is inviting you through His Word. He is telling you that there is still room. He wants His house to be filled so stop making excuses and come to Him. Repent of Your sin and turn to Jesus Christ as your Savior and you can feast at His table today! Or you can know the famine of weeping and gnashing of teeth for eternity.

3. The Application

In summary:

- The first Kingdom truth was that the way you receive an invitation reveals the disposition of your heart.
- The second is the way you give an invitation reveals you're determination—giving or getting.
- And thirdly, the way you respond to God's invitation of the gospel reveals your destination.

I want to take these three truths and summarize them into one big gospel truth: **Grace receivers are grace givers.** Those who have received God's grace, who have been transformed by it, love to demonstrate grace to others. It's the wideness of the invitation in this passage. Those who respond in humility to the invitation of the gospel love to practice humility. Grace receivers are grace givers.

Let's apply this in two ways. I want to review a couple things that were already said and talk about humility versus pride, then giving versus getting as those who have experienced God's grace.

a. Humility vs. Pride

As a result of receiving God's grace—of turning from our sin, repenting of it, embracing Jesus Christ by faith, following Jesus in His Kingdom—we are those who should practice humility rather than pride.

I have a problem and I wonder if you can relate. Here's my problem: even as a follower of Jesus Christ, I am not naturally humble. I was getting humble but then I started to brag about it and it kind of backfired on me. My default mode is to want to impress people, to show them how worthy I am of their attention. "Come on! Show me some attention here!" Sometimes I even do this in a backwards way saying, "Woe is me."

Can anyone relate? Anybody else have a problem with pride? A lack of humility?

The bottom line is that our sinful hearts want people to make much of us. It feels good. It gives me a sense of worth. I want to sit at the place of honor like those folks in the parable. But the gospel of Jesus comes along and it smashes the idol of my worthiness. It tells me what I'm worthy of: exclusion from God's banquet. Not a place of honor but a place outside looking in at Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom. A place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The gospel tells me that this is what I deserve but not what I get.

Because of the largeness of God's invitation to me through Jesus Christ, what I get is a place at the table of my King. A place that His love has compelled me to enter: fellowship with Him. In this way the Holy Spirit uses this truth of the gospel to transform me so that I might not think too highly of myself but consider others more important than myself as I look to my Savior Who did not consider equality with God something to be held onto, but made Himself of no account and took on the very form of a servant (Philippians 2:1-11). So I find that as I practice humility, I am closest to the heart of my Savior.

You know what the wonderful thing is about humility? We all have lots of opportunities to practice it. Just look at our speech and the tone of what we say. Do I constantly feel the need to impress other people? "Oh, you went to Morocco? Well I went to..." What about our relationships? Do my friends exist to tell me how wonderful I am and prop up my ego or has God graciously blessed me with friendships so that I can demonstrate the self-sacrificing love of Jesus to others.

How about with your spouse and children? Do you act as though you always have to be right and always have to justify yourself? Or can you admit your failures to those who are closest to you, confess your sins, experience forgiveness and experience more of God's grace?

What about your relationships with other believers? Would those in your care group say that you are a transparent person or do you keep your struggles to yourself because you fear what your brothers and sisters in Christ may think of you rather than knowing the grace of their care in your life? If you exalt yourself, you're going to be humbled.

This isn't about wallowing in your faults and unworthiness. It's really not about you. Humility is the gift of self-forgetfulness. It's not about self-esteem; it's about God-esteem. It's about Christ-esteem. The undeserving nature of grace sets you free to not say, "I am number one." Instead you can humbly claim, "I am number two. I am second. Jesus is number one and everybody else comes before me. I am here to serve."

b. Giving vs. Getting

Which leads us to our second application: giving versus getting. This is another related way to assess whether I have received the gospel of the Kingdom, the gospel of God's grace. Am I a giver? Do I take joy in extending undeserved favor to others? Do I love to do that? Do I love to see it happen? Here's where Jesus lays the foundation for Christian service. Why do I serve others? Because Jesus has served me so liberally, so lavishly, so abundantly by inviting me into His Kingdom and giving me a place at His banquet table.

Like the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind in the parable who have nothing to offer from a human perspective, Jesus did not invite me into relationship with Him because I had something valuable to offer Him. It's like that old Gaither song:

All I had to offer Him was
Brokenness and strife,
But He made something beautiful
Of my life.

(Something Beautiful by William J. & Gloria Gaither)

All I had to offer was the brokenness of my sinful life and the strife of my rebellion against my Creator. But He invites me to "feast at the abundance of His house and drink at the river of His delights (Psalm 36:8).

That's the largeness of God's love. That's the deepness of it. So then how should we who have experienced God's grace look at those who are broken? Those who are physically broken? Emotionally broken? Those who are broken in their relationships? Broken economically? Broken because of their own sinful patterns and habits?

We begin by saying, "There, but for God's grace, go I." God's choice to invite to me to Himself was unconditional. He didn't require me to clean myself up before He invited me through the gospel of His Son. While we were yet sinners, still a long way off like the lost son in the next chapter of Luke, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Not for His friends, not for good people, but for His enemies. For me, the chief of sinners. His arms were spread wide as if to say, "The offer of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Me is wide open. Come to me ALL who are weary, ALL who are burdened by their sin, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28-30).

So as a result of His grace, we ought to be lavish with the gospel, demonstrating and proclaiming the truths of the gospel. We demonstrate the gospel because we know it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35) because we've received everything we need to live with hope from Jesus (2 Peter 1:3-11). And so our acts of compassion individually and our ministries of compassion corporately as the body of Christ are a living illustration of the gospel, tangibly showing mercy to someone in need who cannot pay us back. That's why we have ministries of compassion. That's why we reach out with love to those who are in need. That's how Jesus served us, pouring out His life sacrificially. So our disposition is to serve others, not because we're their savior but because we know what it's like to be in need and to continue being in need. We continue singing:

Lord, I need You, oh, I need You
Every hour I need You
My one defense, my righteousness
Oh God, how I need You

Where sin runs deep Your grace is more
Where grace is found is where You are
And where You are, Lord, I am free
Holiness is Christ in me

(Lord, I Need You by Matt Maher)

Those who have received God's mercy love to demonstrate mercy toward others. Grace receivers are grace givers and grace proclaimers. We want our demonstrations of God's grace in deed to lead to opportunities to proclaim God's grace through Jesus Christ through the words of the gospel story—through gospel proclamation. More than anything else, more than meeting someone's physical needs, more than alleviating suffering, we want others to take their place at the table of delights with the Savior and to taste of His delights: the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, a hope and a future today, knowing the joy of worshipping Him, "no guilt in life, no fear in death...knowing that Jesus commands my destiny" (from *In Christ Alone* by Keith Getty & Stuart Townsend). We want people to know that.

So like the servants of the master in the parable, we go out, compelling and urging people to come to Jesus. We tell them the story. We get to know them. We come alongside them and speak the truths of the gospel, calling others to repentance and faith in Him. Grace receivers are grace givers.

This picture of God's Kingdom as the great banquet, as the great feast, as the great wedding supper, of a banquet hall that He wants to be filled, is throughout Scripture. You see a picture of it in the Old Testament in Isaiah 25:6-9:

*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...*

That's what's going to make this great feast so wonderful. No more death, no more sickness, no more sin, no more barriers in our relationship with our Savior.

*...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."*

I love the question that Tim Keller asks in his [Prodigal God](#) resource about this passage. It says, "What would it be like if we were the kind of people who could almost taste that ultimate

feast? What would we live like right now if we could almost taste that future feast in the Kingdom of God in all its fullness?" Well, I think we would be people who don't need to be first, who don't need to put ourselves forward. We would be people who lay down our lives sacrificially for those who can't pay us back. We would be those who speak with great urgency and great compassion the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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