

When the Kingdom Comes Close: The Great Invitation

Luke 14:15–24

MAIN IDEA

God has prepared a great banquet for His Kingdom, but many who assume they belong refuse His invitation, while unexpected people gladly receive it.

ANCHOR TRUTH

The tragedy is not that the invitation is too narrow. It is that so many refuse it.

RSVP Culture

One of the frustrations of planning any large event is waiting on RSVPs. Wedding planners know this. Party hosts know this. Church event coordinators know this.

People say, "I'll be there." Or they say, "Count me in." Some might even say, "Wouldn't miss it."

Then the day arrives. And they don't show up. Or they have another priority. Or something more important came along. The problem isn't the invitation. The problem is the response.

That is exactly the tension of this parable.

SETTING THE TABLE

The sermon begins with a statement. Someone at the dinner says, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God." That sounds spiritual. But Jesus hears something deeper.

The man assumes that "we'll all be there. We're the insiders. We're the invited guests." Jesus responds with a story designed to challenge that assumption.

I. THE INVITATION IS GENEROUS (vv. 16–17)

A Great Banquet

This is not a small meal. Not a snack. Not a simple gathering. It's a big, big table with lots and lots of food. It is a great banquet.

Throughout the course of Scripture, banquets symbolize salvation, celebration, fellowship, and eternal joy.

Isaiah 25 talks about the Lord of Hosts making a banquet for all people after he swallows up death forever. In Revelation 19 talks about the marriage supper of the Lamb. Throughout Scripture we see the Kingdom is portrayed as a feast.

The Kingdom is not deprivation. It is joy. The Kingdom is not loss. It is a celebration.

Everything Is Ready

The servant announces, "Come, for everything is now ready." This is important. The host has done all the preparation. The guests contribute nothing. The feast is already prepared.

Gospel Connection

Salvation is not an invitation to help prepare the feast. Christ has already done the work. The invitation is simply, "Come."

Many people think Christianity begins with, "Get your life together." "Improve yourself." "Become worthy."

Jesus says, "Come. Everything necessary has already been provided."

Before we move on, let's remember why Jesus tells this story in the first place. The dinner has become uncomfortable. Jesus has healed a man on the Sabbath. He has exposed the pride of the guests. He has challenged the motives of the host. And now someone at the table speaks up.

"Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" On the surface, that sounds wonderful. And in one sense, it's true. Scripture repeatedly pictures God's Kingdom as a great banquet.

Isaiah saw it. Jesus teaches it. Revelation celebrates it. One day God's people will gather at His table in joy and fellowship.

But I suspect this man isn't simply making a theological observation. I think he's trying to relieve the tension. Something like, "Well, regardless of our disagreements, won't it be wonderful when we're all sitting together in God's Kingdom someday?" And that is exactly where the danger lies.

Because Jesus hears the assumption underneath the statement. The assumption is, "We'll all be there." "We're the invited ones." "We're the religious people." "We're the insiders." Insider attitude is corrosive to the Kingdom and twists and distorts churches, turning them into disconnected silos and holy huddles.

And Jesus immediately tells a story designed to challenge that assumption. Because those who appear most likely to be seated at the table may be in danger of missing it altogether.

II. THE EXCUSES ARE REASONABLE—AND REBELLIOUS

The story takes a shocking turn. The invitations go out. The feast is prepared. Everything is ready. And one by one, the invited guests decline. Notice what is remarkable.

Nobody says, "I hate the host." Nobody says, "I don't want to come." Nobody openly rejects him. Instead, they simply have other priorities.

The first says, "I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it." There is nothing inherently sinful about owning property. Nothing wrong with business. Nothing wrong with responsibility. The field isn't evil. It has simply become more important than the invitation.

The second says, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them." Again, nothing sinful. It's work stuff. It's about the family business. It is contributing to commerce. It is focusing on productivity. The very things many of us spend our lives pursuing.

The oxen are not evil. They are simply more important than the invitation.

The third says, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Marriage is God's gift. Scripture celebrates marriage. But even a good gift can become an ultimate thing. Even something God intended as a blessing can become a rival.

And that's the point. The issue isn't wickedness. The issue is misplaced priorities.

The greatest threat to many people is not open rebellion. It's distraction. Most people do not reject Christ because they have carefully studied the evidence and concluded He is unworthy. Most people reject Christ because they are occupied with other things.

Busy. Successful. Comfortable. Distracted. The enemy does not always need people to hate God. Sometimes he only needs them to postpone God.

One more promotion. One more season. One more project. One more opportunity. One more year. And eventually postponement becomes refusal. That's why this parable is so unsettling.

No one rejects the banquet because they found something bad. They reject the banquet because they preferred something lesser. And that remains one of Satan's most effective strategies. He rarely needs to convince people that Christ is worthless. He simply needs to convince them that something else is more urgent.

III. THE INVITATION GOES TO THE UNEXPECTED

The servant returns. The invited guests have refused. And the host becomes angry. Not because his pride is wounded. Not because his plans have been disrupted. But because grace has been despised.

The invitation was real. The welcome was genuine. The feast was ready. And they would not come. So, the host changes the guest list.

"Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame." Those words should sound familiar. Jesus just mentioned those same people earlier in the chapter.

The very people society overlooked. The very people the religious elite ignored. The very people unlikely to receive an invitation anywhere else. And yet they are welcomed here. Why?

Because they know they need the invitation. The self-sufficient rarely hunger for grace. The needy do.

People who know they are broken often recognize mercy when they see it. People who know they are lost often respond more readily to rescue. People who know they are sinners often run toward grace.

The servant returns again. "Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room." Still there is room. What a beautiful statement. Still there is room. Though millions have come, there's still room for one.

And the master says, "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in." Not force them. Not coerce them. Invite them. Urge them. Plead with them. Persuade them. Why? Because the heart of the host is being revealed.

He wants his house full. The point of the story is not that God is reluctant to save. The point is that God delights to save. God wants the Kingdom full because God overflows with mercy.

IV. THE GREATEST TRAGEDY IS MISSING THE FEAST

Then comes the sobering conclusion. "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet." The issue is not merely missing dinner. The issue is missing the Kingdom.

Missing Christ. Missing forgiveness. Missing eternal life. Missing joy forever. And remember who Jesus is talking to. He is talking to religious people. Insiders. Pillars of their local synagogue. Church people, if we might put it in modern terms.

People who assume they belong. People who assume they have a seat reserved. People who know the language and code words. People who know the customs and swear by the traditions.

Yet Jesus warns them that familiarity is not the same thing as participation. Knowing about the feast is not the same as attending it. Being invited is not the same as coming. This connects directly to what we saw last week.

The Narrow Door warned that not everyone enters. This parable explains why. Many refuse.

But there is another question we need to ask. How can this feast be free?

Who paid for it? Every banquet costs something. Someone bears the expense. Someone pays the bill. And this banquet is no different. The host has provided everything. The guests contribute nothing. The table is prepared. The meal is ready. The invitation is free.

But it is not free because it costs nothing. Salvation is free, but it is not cheap. It came at a costly price for someone else. It is free because someone else has paid. And that is the Gospel.

At the cross, Jesus Christ purchased the feast. He paid the debt we could never pay. He bore the judgment we deserved. He absorbed the wrath our sins had earned. And through His death and resurrection, He secured an invitation for sinners like us.

The invitation is free. But it was purchased at enormous cost. The question is no longer, "Can I afford to come?" The question is, "Will I come?"

Imagine a great banquet hall. Tables prepared. Candles lit. Food ready. Seats waiting. The host has done everything necessary. And yet some seats remain empty. Not because there wasn't room. Not because there wasn't an invitation. Not because the feast wasn't sufficient.

But because people chose something else. A field. Some oxen. A schedule. A relationship. A distraction. A lesser thing.

The tragedy of this story is not that the invitation was unavailable. The tragedy is that it was refused. And yet even now the invitation still goes out.

"Come, for everything is now ready." The Kingdom has come close. The table is prepared. The invitation has been extended. And there is still room. The question is not whether there is room at the table.

The question is, "**Will you come?**"