

Invitation and Response

Luke 14:12-33

This morning we are of course continuing in Luke. Our text this morning will be Luke 14, starting in verse 12 and going all the way through verse 33.

As always, understanding the context is important when we read, but that is especially true as we start in verse 12, because here, Jesus is at a dinner party hosted by a Pharisee. And Luke begins telling us about this party back in verse 1. A few weeks ago Kevin walked us through verses 1-11, if you remember where the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus into healing a man on the Sabbath at this party and, of course, Jesus heals the man and confronts them about their hypocrisy. Jesus then would give them a parable about choosing the lower places at the table rather than the seats of higher honor, confronting them about their their pride.

Well, in verse 12, Jesus is still at this party, and He has some more things to teach them.

Luke 14:12-14

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

So here, Jesus moves from correcting their seating arrangement to now correcting their guest list. So he says, if you are going to have a dinner party, don't invite your friends or family, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Obviously, Jesus is exaggerating to make a point here. Jesus dined with his friends and family. We are encouraged to do the same in the Christian community, we show one another hospitality, and hopefully we look to one another as Christian family and friends. So don't feel guilty if you had someone over last night that you consider a friend.

Jesus is doing two things here: First, he is confronting their self-interested actions, and second, which we will see later, he is teaching about a greater truth which is the invitation into the kingdom of God.

But first, Jesus reminds us here that real charity is when we serve those who can't serve us back. It is when we give to others who have nothing to offer in return. Obviously that is different than when we offer to help those who can one day help us in return, those who have the means to return the favor.

I think if we are honest with ourselves we often serve with at least some selfish motivations. We might not consciously say it, but we often ask or think, "What's in it for me? If I do this thing or help this person, how might this benefit me?"

In this example with Jesus concerning hospitality in our homes, we all want to be around people we like being around. That is normal. But there could be a hint of selfishness in that. We invite some because of the joy it brings us. We like to be around them, we enjoy their company, they make our evening better. But then we neglect others because they might be awkward or difficult to be around, in other words, they don't offer us anything in return we would want.

The same is true in helping those he lists here, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. To show the true love of Christ is to serve those who bring nothing to the table but their need. And as followers of Christ, we ought to joyfully serve them, not because of what they do for us, but who they are, people made in the image of God and therefore people of inestimable value.

And so this begs us to reflect on our lives this morning. It's good for us to ask ourselves, "When was the last time I did something for someone who was not in any position to do something for me?" We need to recognize that as we serve those who have nothing to repay us, we are following in the footsteps of Jesus, who *always* did that. Think about that, anyone Jesus served, anyone Jesus healed, anyone Jesus taught, fell in that category, because who could ever do something in return for Jesus? What did He need? What did He lack that someone else could provide for Him? His entire life and ministry was an act of service to us, who have nothing to offer in return.

So, at the dinner party, Jesus has done some awkward things. He has just healed a man on the Sabbath in front of the Pharisees, breaking their law. He has critiqued the way they sought positions of honor at the table, telling them to stop jockeying for position but in humility take the lower seats. And now he has critiqued those they invited to the dinner, really critiquing the way they view others who are less fortunate than themselves. So, again, pretty awkward and uncomfortable party...

Look now at verse 15...

Luke 14:15

15 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!"

So in the awkwardness and tension of the party, someone speaks up to break the tension. “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

Like saying in a lull in an awkward conversation, “So, how about this gorgeous weather? Nice, right?” You feel like you need to say something that is positive for everyone. Like you need to somehow ease the hostility in the room.

But there was some truth to what this guy said. Scripture speaks of God, as the King of His kingdom preparing a banquet feast for His people.

Is. 25:6-9

6 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. **7** And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. **8** 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. **9** 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.”

So this a prophesied event in the Old Testament and, in fact, we see this fulfillment in the book of Revelation when the apostle John wrote...

Revelation 19:9

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.’”

So this Pharisee, knowing the Hebrew Scriptures, refers to this wonderful prophetic picture of God’s people feasting with the Lord and with one another when He comes to make all things new. It will be the best wedding party, the best reception ever, when Jesus, described as the bridegroom comes to be with His bride, the church, and live happily ever after. It really is the greatest love story that will ever be told and their will be a great feast to celebrate that occasion.

But in saying that, it’s as if the Pharisee is saying, “Well, whoever we have in our homes for dinner now, that’s one thing, but the ones who are really blessed are the one’s who will eat in the kingdom.” Saying with incredible confidence, we are the blessed ones. It was an extremely pious assumption to make. He was assuming that he would be in the kingdom. And unfortunately, many will make the same assumption today. In assuming they will be in the kingdom of God, assuming that they deserve to be there, they assess their spiritual condition much better than Jesus would.

And to that, Jesus gives another parable. This parable called the Parable of the Great Banquet and it is given to show that the only people who will sit and feast in the kingdom are those who respond to the invitation...

Luke 14:16-20

16 But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. **17** 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.’ **18** 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.’ **19** And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ **20** And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’

So in the parable a wealthy person is hosting a huge dinner party and invites a ton of people. And when it was ready he sends his servant out to tell the guests that dinner is ready.

The custom in the Ancient Near East is that there would have been two invitations. A day or two before the big feast, invitations would be given to the guests to know whether they would be there or not. And then, when all was prepared, they would be invited to come enjoy the feast.

So these people in the parable accept the first invitation but when the time comes for them to come to the party they give excuses why they would not come.

That is frustrating to say the least. We’ve all probably experienced this at some point, you’ve invited people over and they said they would come, maybe it was friends or family, maybe it was your Grace Group, but you spent all day preparing the meal, and then about an hour before dinner is served everyone texts you to say they aren’t coming. That’s a frustrating evening even when the reasons they can’t come are valid.

But in the parable the excuses aren’t very convincing. One person says they brought some land so they need to go inspect it. Truthfully, most people don’t purchase property without examining it before, and even if they did, the land still would have been there the next day for them to see it. Likewise another person says they bought some oxen and need to examine them. Again, they probably wouldn’t have purchased such important farming equipment without checking it out first. And then someone says, “I know that I said I would be there, but I got married,. Now I can’t make it.” The question would be then, why not bring your new spouse along and enjoy a great party together as newlyweds?

The point was that the banquet was ready but the people made lousy excuses not to come.

Luke 14:21-24

21 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.’ **22** And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ **23** 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. **24** For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

So in response to the rejection of the invitation to come, the master sends his servant out to bring in anyone who would come, even the outcasts of society.

He says to bring in “the poor and crippled and blind and lame.” These are the ones he said they ought to invite to their dinner party. Again, these are outcasts, those outside of their usual circle, those with nothing to give back, those who would not have been thought to be suitable guests to their privileged party.

The big point that Jesus was making for the Pharisees that evening was the Jewish people had the promise of God, that He would provide a Messiah and King for His people. In other words He had invited them to trust Him, to believe Him, to have faith in Him, that the Messiah was coming. And then, the Messiah, Jesus, came and now they were saying I don’t want that Messiah. They did not want to accept the invitation. They were making excuses for not coming to the feast even though they were invited.

So, Jesus says, I am having a banquet and *there will be people to enjoy it*, so the invitation is going to go out much farther than many thought it would. It would go out to those beyond the religious, Jewish leaders. It would go out to those who they would look to as unworthy, unqualified, and undeserving. The banquet would be opened to all, not just the acceptable and influential people.

By the way, mercy ministries, that is, any ministry that is aimed at serving those who are in need, whether economically or physically, mercy ministries are certainly a way to love our neighbors but Jesus points out here that they are also a picture of the gospel. When we help those who have nothing to repay us, we are demonstrating what God has done for us through Jesus. He has invited us, welcomed us, provided for us, and cared for us, when we could in no way pay Him back. And to help those with nothing is to do the same. So for us as Christians to not care for the poor, disabled, elderly, and unborn, those whom society often looks at as less than and disposable, to not care for them is a slight to the gospel. Since we’ve been loved and cared for when we had nothing to offer and still don’t, we love and care for others in the same way.

And then in the parable, the master says to his servant that he should go out to the “highways and hedges and compel people to come in.” Here, the invitation extends to travelers, it extends to foreigners. It is a beautiful picture in this parable to remind us that the invitation to feast at the King’s banquet is extended to not just one people group, but to all people groups of the world. And he says he should “compel” them, probably because a foreign traveler would not believe that he or she would really be invited to such a grand event. It would be like if you checked your mail and in your mailbox was an invitation to a royal ball hosted by the Queen of England. You would look at that and say, “Yeah, this came to the wrong house. There is no way this for me.”

ILLUSTRATION: I remember one evening on the mission field, in Italy, we were at dinner with some families from the girls’ school. And they were asking me about our church. We had planted an international church, a church made up of people from many different nations, we had Americans, Italians of course, Albanians, and another dozen or so nations. As I told them about the diverse nature of our church, one guy at

dinner looked shocked, and said he thought that only Americans would go to an “evangelical” church. And then he said, “Albanians? I didn’t really think Albania was an evangelical country.” To which I said, it isn’t. It was a Communist nation for years, then when Communism fell, it became largely a Muslim nation. And he replied, “So they just *choose* to go to your church?”

He was shocked because he thought that a culture’s religion was so fixed to a person’s identity that there was no opportunity to deviate from it later in life. And so it is all over the world. But we carry with us an invitation that is far better than that. The King’s feast in this parable was to be a multi-ethnic, incredibly diverse dinner party, and the marriage supper of the Lamb will be no different. In fact, we know from John’s vision in Revelation that we who have called on Christ as Savior will one day stand around the throne worshipping our King surrounded by other worshippers from every tribe, nation, and language.

And so we are commanded, like the servant, to go out and compel the nations to come to the feast. And we can’t neglect that calling on our lives. You see it is one thing for people to reject the invitation of the servant to come, but imagine the scandal if the servant never went to invite the people to come at all. Not only would that would be disobedient, it would also be tragic. We, too, must heed the call to go out and speak of our great God who has invited the world to come and know Him and enjoy Him. To know that they can come into the master’s house, they can come and feast with the King of all Kings. To neglect our part in the great banquet as not only guests of the banquet but as servants of the banquet would be a tragic mistake.

And so in the parable, the master tells his servant that he wants the invitation to go out, because those who were invited and refused to come would not be at the banquet.

Luke 14:24

24 For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.”

They were excluded from the feast, because they made excuses not to be there. And the warning here, of course, is that you will be excluded too if you make excuses. Excuses will only lead to exclusion.

And as we go on in our passage in verse 25, the scene changes, but the lesson remains. In fact, one of the keys to reading the gospels is to watch how the gospel writers group the various accounts of Jesus’ teaching and ministry, they often connect them to carry a theme or a lesson and this is true here as we go on...

Luke 14:25-27

25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, **26** “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. **27** Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Now Jesus here is using hyperbole to make a very important point about anyone who might want to follow Him. He says that our relationships on earth, even with those closest to us, even our relationship with our own life, ought to be described as hatred.

And of course, that sounds strange. Is Jesus calling us to turn our backs on our families? I mean, if he is, that is a serious red flag because that is a major characteristic of a cult. Separating people from their families. No, Jesus is exaggerating to make the point that our relationships, typically defined as loving relationships should be considered as hatred in light of the love we have for Jesus. It is to consider familial affections as the lesser affections. This does not mean that Jesus wants us to love our families less, in fact we are commanded to do just the opposite, we are to be a people defined by love. Husbands are to love their wives like Christ loves the church, we are to love our neighbors as our selves, we are to love even our enemies, but in comparison to our love for Jesus, it should be clear that our love for Him is greater.

And it needs to be that way, not only because He deserves that from us as the one true God, but because of the cost of following Jesus.

We were reminded last week that Christians are not guaranteed power and might in this world in this age, but rather we are guaranteed to encounter persecution because we name the name of Christ, because we hold to the values of Scripture in a world that despises them. And if our hearts are not firmly set on following Christ, we will not follow Him to the cross. We will not be thrilled that we share in the sufferings of Christ. If we love the approval of this world more than the approval of Jesus, we will bow to the world every time we are told to.

Make no mistake, to follow Jesus in this age is to carry a cross, because that is what Jesus did. Now, that won't always be true. There is a coming day when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and we will live with the King for all eternity, rescued from sin and Satan. But that is an age that is to come. We have tastes and glimpses of it now, but according to Scripture, this age before Christ's return is marked by trials, and love for our Savior is the only thing that will see us through.

And this is a sharp distinction from any teaching that says otherwise. This is the exact opposite of what many teach today, saying if only you come to Christ, your life will be easier now. Jesus will give you perfect healing now, He will always give you that promotion and financial prosperity, you will be a conquerer in this life, in every arena because you follow Jesus. But if that is why you've come to Christ, it was done not out of a love for Jesus but a love for self.

Jesus tells us something completely opposite. In this life, followers of Christ carry a cross, the symbol of death. Again, that will ultimately lead to eternal victory in Christ, but for now we follow our Savior who was despised and rejected by this world.

And so, those that are considering following Christ need to consider what that means for them in this life, and if Jesus is worth it.

Luke 14:28-33

28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? **29** Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, **30** saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' **31** Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? **32** And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. **33** So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

We've all seen construction projects that were started but for some reason or other, they were never finished. Usually the reason is that there was not enough money to complete the project. Likewise, Jesus says that those who want to follow Him need to recognize what that means, they need to "count the cost" so that your faith doesn't end up like a half-built tower or home, showing great zeal for Christ at the beginning, but falling away because of persecution, trials, or a greater love for this world than for Him.

Jesus also likens it to a king who is about to go to war, but sits down to contemplate whether or not victory is realistic. A wise king counts the cost before committing his troops to battle.

So, all potential followers of Jesus need to count the cost. And for those of us who call Christ Savior and King, it is a good reminder to continually count the cost as we follow Him at work, at school, at home, and in the community.

Counting the cost is about appraising value. We do this every time we consider purchasing something. We are willing to spend our money when we believe that thing or experience is worth the expense. Jesus is calling us to consider what or who do we ultimately value?

It is here where our two passages connect. Those invited to the great banquet gave excuses for not going because they counted the cost and found something or someone more valuable to them than sitting at the feast. Coming up with excuses for not following Jesus reveals you have counted the cost and you believe that Jesus has come up short in value in comparison to someone or something you'd rather hold onto. To come to Jesus, to follow Jesus, means you see His immeasurable worth and the freeing truth that everything and everyone else pails in comparison to Him.

And I don't know of anyone who has expressed this truth better than the apostle Paul.

Paul would say, from jail by the way, being put there for his faith in Christ...

Philippians 1:21

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Why would dying ever be considered gain? Because he recognizes the great worth of being at the banquet, feasting with Jesus, worth more than even his own life.

Then, on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that he will face great persecution when he gets there, Paul says...

Acts 20:24

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

In the words of Jesus in our passage, Paul “hates” his life in comparison to his love for Jesus.

And then one more example and the perfect summary...

Philippians 3:8

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

When we recognize the magnitude of the gift to know the Lord through Jesus any excuse we could give to not submit to Him dwarfs in comparison. There is no sin we don't want to give up, no relationship that we fear losing that can compare to the greatness of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When we value Jesus more than anything else in this world, no expense is too great for Him. But to cling to something else, reveals where our treasure lies.

CONCLUSION

A few conclusions for us this morning:

1. The King of Kings is inviting you to join Him in an eternal feast, and your RSVP is needed. If you've never trusted in Christ, never turned from your sin in repentance and looked to Christ in faith, what excuse are you clinging to? What excuse will you give to the King of the universe that you can't come?

You need to consider that at the cusp of eternity, in front of the Holy, Omnipotent God who gave His Son, all our excuses will look flimsy and insufficient.

The greatest tragedy possible in life is to offer the Lord your excuses even though He has offered you His Son.

We can either offer our excuses or we can carry our cross. Our excuses will only bring exclusion. We will be on the outside looking in as the guests of the King enjoy their banquet. Your excuses will only bring exclusion but the cross of Christ provides a feast. So turn to Christ today.

2. We should reflect today, how much do we value knowing and following Jesus?

Let me ask, have you counted the cost? Because there is a cost to be had. But the privilege to know Jesus, to be in right relationship to a God that owes us nothing, is a treasure beyond comparison. Let's take up our cross with joy.

3. Let's assume our roles as not only guests of the banquet but servants of it as well. We are called to get the invitation out to as many people as we can, compelling them to heed the invitation to feast on the bread of life.

A banquet awaits, the guests just need to be invited. Let's be faithful so that they hear the invitation.

VERSES

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SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

In our passage today, Jesus is still at the dinner party we saw in Luke 14:1-11 and He continues to teach the Pharisees in the form of a parable, this time with the Parable of the Great Banquet. He then instructs a larger crowd about the cost of following Him.

I. Loving Others v. Loving Self - Luke 14:12-14

In what ways can our service be tainted with selfish motivations? Can you think of specific examples in your own life?

What does this parable remind us about people in need and our role in serving them?

II. The Coming Banquet in the Kingdom of God - Luke 14:15

What does the picture of the future feast in God's kingdom teach us about that kingdom?

What does it teach us about the King?

III. Excuses for Not Coming to Banquet - Luke 14:16-20

In the parable, why were the excuses for not coming to banquet unconvincing?

What is Jesus highlighting here concerning the reasons people might not accept the invitation to know Him?

IV. The Invitation to the Banquet - Luke 14:21-24

What does the inclusion of societal outcasts teach us about the gospel?

What might the command to "compel people to come in" teach us about evangelism and missions?

V. Counting the Cost - Luke 14:25-33

Explain what Jesus meant when He said that His disciples needed to "hate" their families and even their own lives to follow Him.

What does it look like to "carry your cross?" What does that mean? What does that not mean?

In counting the cost, Jesus is calling us to find Him as our supreme treasure. What areas of your life tend to challenge the value of knowing and following Jesus?