

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Jonathan Pokluda
Series: Summer of Stories
July 19, 2020

An Invitation to the Feast
Luke 14:15-24

Harris Creek, it's so great to be with you this morning. I'm not in our church building; I am actually at Old Bethany. So I'm so thankful for the Worleys and the Whytes for allowing us to film here today. We're here because a week ago I was in a venue just like this for a wedding. Actually, last week I was invited to two weddings. One of them was kind of an, "Ah, do I have to go?" and one of them was, "Oh, I'm really excited to go."

I know when you hear, "Ah, do I have to go?" you think, "Gosh, that's not very nice. That's not kind," but before you judge me, let me tell you about it, okay? It was someone who invited me via Instagram. They invited me seven times. I don't know who they are. Okay, this is not a flex. This has never happened to me before. I've never been invited to a wedding of someone who I don't know.

Finally, after the seventh invitation, I thought, "You know what? Maybe we will go. Maybe it's at the Silos or something, or maybe it's here in Waco, and we can just go and meet these people. They're brothers and sisters in Christ." So I asked them. I said, "Okay, where is the wedding?" They said, "Well, it's in St. Louis, Missouri."

I was kind of taken aback. I'm like, this person who I don't know, they're not asking me to officiate the wedding; they just want me to go, but I don't know them. I would purchase plane tickets. I would have to get a hotel room, and then I would go and be like sitting next to Grandpa Bob who I don't know, you know. It would be weird. It would be awkward. So I get that, and I'm like, "Gosh, do we need to do that? Is that something we have to do?"

But the other wedding was very different. It was of two dear friends of mine who had asked me to officiate, to stand with them as they enter into a covenant before God. I was overjoyed. I was excited about it. I was looking forward to it. Their wedding was originally scheduled for May, but it was moved due to COVID-19 to last Sunday. It was hot. It was triple digits. It was way out in the country, about a three-hour drive from here at a venue that looked very much like this, and in the midst of a global pandemic, but we were very excited to go there because we knew them, and we had a relationship with them.

I bet you've been invited to some things, and some of those parties, some of those events, some of those banquets, you have had the same emotional response. I bet you there have been some who are like, "Ah, do I have to?" and some are that you're like, "Oh, I'm really excited." So you get that invitation. You put it on the refrigerator or on the kitchen counter, and maybe you're telling your roommates or the family, or you call the family meeting. You say, "Hey, this is the wedding. This is the date. We're going to go, and we're excited."

Some of those other ones are like third cousins you haven't seen in 16 years that you feel is a mercy invite, and you're like, "Gosh, do I really need to go to that?" You're kind of debating it. As I think about the invitation God gives us, not just an invitation into heaven, but an invitation to enter eternal life with him today, to have a relationship with him, I think so often we can be placed in two categories. One of them is, "Ah, do I have to?" and one of them is, "I'm overjoyed that I get to."

The difference is how well you know him. Do you have a relationship with him? Do you daily commune with him, fellowship with him, hang out with him? Do you enjoy him? So we're continuing our series *Summer of Stories*, where we're going through the parables of Jesus. Parables are a story Jesus told while he was on this earth to illustrate a point.

The guys who have gone before me have done a fantastic job. I've been so encouraged by the things I've learned from them. I'm taking notes just like you, learning from them, learning from the Scriptures, and it's a privilege to be with you today to continue in this series as we talk about the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14, if you want to turn there.

This morning, I want to talk about our RSVP to God's invitation. RSVP is French. It stands for *répondez s'il vous plait*, which is, "Respond if you please," I think. I don't know French. I barely know English, but I'm pretty sure that's what it is. The parable of the great banquet. It's just this reality that all of us believers have been invited into a life with God, but not all of us respond the same way.

For some of us, there are distractions to the abundant life Christ offers us. Some of us, we don't respond in the way that would honor God. In fact, for some of us, what he invites us into, we're like, "Do I have to? Do I have to share the gospel? Do I have to read my Bible? Do I have to pray? Do I have to show up for Life Group? Do I have to be a member of a church? Do I have to?" No; you get to.

So often it's our attitude toward God that's wrong. We think we know better than him. We think we know better than what his Word has invited us into. The issue for so many Christians today is we don't know him. We're going to stand before the throne of judgment, and God will be a stranger to us, or worse, we'll be a stranger to him, where he says, "Depart from me. I never knew you."

That is my motivation today in teaching this passage. It's I do not want God to be a stranger to you, and I do not want you to be a stranger to him. I want you to walk in relationship with him today and forevermore every day you live so you can respond to his invitation with, "I'm excited to."

As we move through this text, we're going to look at *the regrets of the religious*, *God's relentless inviting*, and before we finish today, *the response of the needy*. Luke 14, verse 15. To set this up, Jesus is having dinner with a prominent religious figure, a Pharisee, a kind of a head Pharisee if you will. He is in his house. Some sort of feast, some sort of banquet is going on.

These guys are trying to trick him because it's the Sabbath, and they want to see if Jesus is going to heal a man on the Sabbath. So in some sort of sick fashion, they put a man with a condition called *dropsy*, that is a swelling of his body, right beside Jesus to see if Jesus is going to heal him.

Jesus, being brilliant, being God, says, "Hey, which one of you wouldn't heal your son or your child if they were sick?" He turns to the man, has compassion on him. Of course, he heals him. Then he sees these guys, these prominent, elite figures of the community, begin to jockey for position at the table. They're getting up. They're like, "Place back. Hey, don't take my seat. That's my seat." You know, licking the knife, putting it down. Like, "Hey, no. Don't you try to, you know, take my seat from me."

Jesus says, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. When you have a banquet, you don't need to invite people who can do something for you in return; you should invite people who can't do anything for you in return as an act of service, as an act of love." When they heard him say this, one of them sits up, and he goes... Now this is verse 15. **"When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.'"** So Jesus tells a story. Verse 16:

"Jesus replied: 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready." But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me."

Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me." Still another said, "I just got married, so I can't come." The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."

"Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room." Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

In this story, certainly the person who is throwing the party is God. The banquet is heaven. The people who declined his invitation are the Jews, God's chosen people, Israel. The people...the blind, the lame, the poor, the needy...are the Gentiles. Jesus is telling this story to the religious elite, and he wants them to realize they won't enter into the banquet feast because they don't realize who is standing right before them. They are so caught up in their religious games, they're so caught up in their pride, they're so caught up in their church arrogance that they can't see the way. They miss it.

Now you have to understand some things in this culture that are happening. A banquet in this culture would be the thing everybody would look forward to. Keep in mind they don't have Helberg Barbecue. They don't have Shorty's Pizza at this time. They can't order according to

their preference, so most days they eat simply to survive. Right? They just have to consume something. They're not eating for taste. They're not ordering to preference.

So if someone is going to have a banquet, they think free food, and it would be on the calendar, and everybody would be looking forward to it for weeks or for months. It would be something you would absolutely go to. It was the epitome of fun and entertainment and joy.

Keep in mind they don't have... It would be like they don't have tickets to concerts or something. It would be like you have tickets to the Big 12 Tournament or championship game, and you put those tickets on your fridge. You have the calendar marked, and you know nothing is going to get in the way between you and attending. It's the Silobration of their time. They're going. Right?

But here they make these lame excuses. This would've been their entertainment. They didn't have Netflix. They didn't have Disney+. Everybody is going to this banquet. It was the epitome of joy. It's what they would've thought of as heaven. This is what Isaiah the prophet says in chapter 25. He says, in describing the day of the Lord, as describing heaven, **"On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines."**

Feasts were often used to describe heaven like fire was often used to describe hell. There's a place there called *Gehenna*, where they would burn the trash. It stunk. People would sacrifice children to false gods there. It was a terrible place. Because it was the most horrific place they could fathom, and a banquet is the most wonderful place they could think of, this is what we would use, this was the word picture we're given for heaven and the feast with God, and fire, a place of eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth, torture of sorts.

This parable we just looked at was told to communicate to the Jewish religious elite that they wouldn't enter the kingdom because they had overlooked Jesus, and the invite would go out to the Gentiles. That's you and me. That's good news for us, that we would be adopted in as sons and daughters of God through his Son Jesus Christ.

This is what Romans 9 says. Verse 30: **"That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone."** They've rejected the cornerstone, that is the Son of God, the Christ, the Messiah who walked the earth 2,000 years ago.

So how do we apply this message today that's clearly written to Jews about us being adopted in? I think one lesson we can learn is we're going to be surprised by who is there and who is not. Also, just this reality that Jesus is talking to the rule-followers, the people who take great pride in their religion. He is communicating to them that they're not getting in.

As I was preparing this text before, a friend told me, "Just be careful to make sure you don't bring people to a place where they question their salvation." Then as I was studying what scholars and theologians said about this text, the first commentary I opened up said, "Jesus told

this story so that his hearers would question their salvation." That was a part of the purpose of him communicating this story. So with that in mind, I want to talk about...

1. *The regrets of the religious.* "Regrets" is the way you would RSVP to an invitation if you weren't going to go. So these are the people in the text who said, "Hey, we can't go." They have rejected Christ's invitation. It says in verse 18, **"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'"**

These are bad excuses, right? You would not buy land without seeing it first. You would not purchase oxen without first trying them out, making sure they would meet your need. In the first century, you getting married would certainly not preclude you from a banquet, but would rather cause you to be excited about going and showing off your new groom or your new wife, you guys being together. This is something you would celebrate.

So these are bad excuses. These are the equivalent of, you know, "Oh, I can't go. I have to go change my sock drawer." This is what I would hear when I would ask girls out back in the day. "Will you go on a date with me?" "No. I've been around someone who has been around someone who has been around someone who has been quarantined." This was long before COVID-19. I mean, they would just get real creative in their ways of turning me down. "I'm grounded." "You're 22. What are you talking about?"

The categories though are interesting, right? The first one is he bought a field. That's possessions, right? So do our possessions keep us from enjoying the presence of God? The greatest distraction for me when I go to spend time with Jesus in his Word is my idolatrous phone, iPhone for short. The reality is that the Scriptures just aren't as interesting as Instagram. So the things we have they certainly can distract us from God.

The five yoke of oxen. This would be synonymous with work, or symbolic of work. Does our work distract us from time with God? Well, often what I do on my idolatrous phone is check hundreds or on a good day dozens of emails, text messages, messages of all kinds. Our work distracts us from the abundant life Christ has for us.

The guy who says, "Well, I just got married." This would be symbolic of family and relationship. Listen, does family and relationship distract us from intimacy with Christ? And all of the moms said, "Amen." Right? I mean, just this week I'm sitting on my back porch. I have my Bible open. I get up before all the kids get up. I'm sitting there, and I'm having a sweet time with Jesus.

I'm reading the Word of God, and all of a sudden, I hear this knock on the window right beside me. I turn and look over there, and it's my 7-year-old. He has his bare chest pressed up against the window and his belly pressed up against the window, and then he begins to press his face up against the window and make faces at me. What was me and Jesus was now me, Jesus, and Weston. It was a little bit of a distraction.

This guy wants them to respond to the invitation, but they're distracted. Same thing today. Possessions, work, relationships. Now Jesus spoke this into a culture 2,000 years ago, yet today we face the same distractions. I'm just telling you, anything that would keep you from a thriving relationship with Jesus is not worth it. Charles Spurgeon says to live entirely for the Lord is to live indeed; all else is mere existing.

As I think about my friends' wedding this past Sunday in triple-digit temperatures in Texas... It was outside, by the way. It was about a three-hour drive, and it required us getting a hotel room, and it was in the midst of a global pandemic, but we wouldn't have missed it for the world because we love them, and we know them, and we're going to respond to that invitation with joy because we have a relationship.

This is what God is asking of us through this story. Not just to take this invite and put it on the fridge and be like, "Oh yeah, one day," but no, today. To do something today. It's because he loves us. That's what I want to talk about next.

2. *God's relentless inviting.* It says, "**Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'** 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them...' *Compel* them. You could underline that word in your Bible. "**...to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.**"

He says, "Go out quickly. Compel." In the Greek, it's *anagkazo*. It shows up several times. It's a very unique word Jesus used to place into this story because it's a forceful persuasion. We see this word when Jesus interacts with his disciples in Matthew 14. He says, "Guys, get in the boat. Now. Get in the boat. Let's go." It's the same word Paul uses in Acts 26 when he talks about torturing Christians. He said, "I would try to compel them, forcefully persuade them, to blaspheme."

So when God says to this servant, "Go and compel them. Do everything you can to get them here," there's something for us to take away from this. God is pleading with us to be saved. In Ezekiel 33:11, he says, "**As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?**"

Second Peter 3:9 says, "**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**" God is relentlessly inviting us into an abundant relationship with him through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus.

I'll say it like this. God desires to save sinners. His desire to save sinners is infinitely greater than any sinner's desire to be saved. Let me say that again. *God's desire to save sinners is infinitely*

greater than any sinner's desire to be saved. He's relentlessly inviting us, but we're busy. We have stuff going on, man. We have soccer games and baseball games and school. We're trying to figure out, you know, if we're going to go to school in person, or is it going to be social distance learning or distance learning. Am I going to homeschool next year? Please don't...

When are we going to be in church again? I mean, does it really matter if I miss right now? I mean, it's just like we're watching church on the TV. Does that even... I know we're supposed to be with our Life Group, but, you know, with this COVID thing, I mean, do we even need to? Why? You know, I have the Zoom. I'm so sick of Zoom. Let's just call it quits. The Enemy is having a field day, man. He's throwing a party and doing the happy dance. He loves it. God will fill every seat at the banquet. He will search until he finds hearts that are fully his.

See, because of COVID, my friends had to be really careful about who they invited. They were very limited in numbers. In fact, they had to uninvite people, which is terrible. When you have a wedding, you want all your friends and family there, but they had to be very selective to just their closest family and their closest friends. Then they had to be very strategic to make sure every seat in that place was filled with people they loved and who loved them.

God is telling us, "Hey, I'm going to fill every seat. I'm pursuing you, and I'm inviting you. If you harden your heart toward me, I'm running to the next person because I want every seat full. I want my followers there." He's not just giving an invite so we can set it on our refrigerator and think, "One day."

No, God wants us to do something with it today. *Today*. That's the heart and the nature of this invite. It's that you would respond and do something today. That it would change your action in the moment, right? This is what is interesting about this first-century story. In fact, lastly, I want to talk about...

3. *The response of the needy.* God has invited us into his banquet, that's his kingdom, and we have a choice to respond. What is unique about this first-century culture is actually the idea of "save the date" was invented then. What they would do is they would send an invitation before the invitation.

They would say, "Hey, this is when the party is going to be." Then when the food was ready and everything was there... You'd kind of know around what time it was going to be. Then he would send out a servant to say, "All right, come on." There would be this verbal invitation that would spread throughout the land. "Now's the time."

What people would do is they would jump off their ox. They would leave their plow in the field. They would run to the banquet. They would leave everything behind. There was a sense of urgency. God is not calling you to be normal and worldly; he's calling you to something different. When he invites you, your life changes. It looks different than your atheist neighbor. The way you love, the way you talk, the way you worship, the way you date, the way you spend the firstfruits of your morning, the way you pray, the way you read... There's a difference. There's a change that occurs.

Delayed obedience is disobedience. This is something we talk about in our home a lot. Delayed obedience is disobedience. So two days ago, Monica made dinner. The kids are playing Monopoly at the kitchen table. They're doing their thing, rolling the dice. I go in there, and she says, "Hey, bring the kids in for dinner." I say, "Hey, guys, dinner is ready. Y'all come to the table. The other table. Y'all come here into the kitchen."

What happened next was really confusing to me. Somebody grabbed the dice. They rolled it one more time. They moved their part around the board. Then the next person went. Somebody took some money. They continued to play as though I hadn't said anything. So I walked up to them to the table, and I said, "Guys, what are you doing? Did y'all not hear me?" One, you know, the spokesperson for the crew, got bold and said, "Daddy, let us just go around the board one more time."

I'm like, "If you want to eat, you're going to get up right now, and you're going to come to the kitchen like I told you because delayed obedience is disobedience. The food is served, and it's hot. We made it for you. We provided it for you because we love you, and now is the time to eat. Let's go."

This is what I think some of us are like. "God, one day, man. One day, I'm going to be all in with you. I'm going to have a family and some kids. One day, I'm going to wake up early, and I'm going to disciple my children. It's going to be awesome. One day, God, I'm going to start reading the Bible. I'm even going to memorize some verses one day.

One day, I'm going to really prioritize my Life Group. One day, I'm going to join a church. One day, I'm going to get in my life that Life Group 101 thing they keep talking about. One day, God, I'm going to respond to that invitation. One day. One day, I'm going to be in a very intimate relationship." I just would say, how many days have you been saying this? You look back. What, since the fifth grade? The invitation is for today. That something in our life would change today. Because I think so many of us have, "Do I have to?"

Do I have to read my Bible, or do I get to experience the Spirit of God making known to me the things of God? Do I have to give 10 percent, or do I get to partner with the work of God in the amazing things he is doing, investing in his kingdom? Do I have to go to Life Group, or do I get to fellowship with believers and have things in common and celebrate what God and Jesus are doing in our midst?

Do I have to watch church from my living room, or do I get to remain connected to this body and celebrate all God is doing? Do you know what? You can go from, "I'm so excited and joyful," and you can grow old and grumpy and crotchety and find yourself in, "Ah, do I have to, older brother?" Be careful. I see it happen all the time. The Father takes no delight in it.

Hear me out, friends. He takes no delight in your criticism. He takes no delight in your cynicism. He takes no delight in your pride. He takes no delight in your arrogance. Something happened in your heart. It grew hard, and the Holy Spirit is enough to soften it. You've received an invitation today that you would respond to.

Do I have to share the gospel, or do I get to partner with the Creator of the heavens and the earth in saving people's eternal life? Do I have to? Do I have to pray before meals so the food is not poisonous, or do I get to commune with the Father because the veil has been torn, and I can talk to him in any given moment? I can turn my worries into prayers supernaturally through the Spirit of God. This is a gift we have.

There's this repeated word in there, and it's the word *enjoy*. Do you enjoy God? Only you can answer that. Do you enjoy him? In his joy, the Scripture says, someone responded to an invitation to the kingdom of God. In his joy. Do you enjoy God? See, I think we think spiritual maturity is knowledge and obedience, and I'm telling you that spiritual maturity is not just knowledge and obedience but also the enjoyment of God.

What that means is there are people who've responded to the gospel in their joy, and they are more spiritually mature than someone who has graduated from seminary, been in church their whole life. Maybe they're a pastor, but they don't enjoy God. This is problematic. Our RSVP to this invitation is through God's Son Jesus.

He paid the greatest price for us to be at this banquet. He gave his one and only Son in our behalf. His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins. That we would trust in that. Not our own works, but his amazing grace. If you know God, you enjoy him, and if you enjoy him, you respond joyfully to his invitation. No one wants to go to a party of someone they don't know. No one wants to invite someone to their party they don't know. A party is a place for close friends and family to be together.

We prep these messages together. We have a team that is just kind of part of the development of our staff as we're all in a room and we're talking through this. As we were prepping this message, one of my friends had to get up and run out the door because he got a text message that his father-in-law was dying.

Then I get up, and I leave. Then I get a message that my dad has been diagnosed with COVID-19. Then my mom has it. My brother has it. We are faced today with our mortality, that life is short. That's the motivation in this message for me to plead, to compel, *anagkazo*, forcefully persuade you into a full relationship with God through his Son Jesus Christ so you can experience the abundant life he has for you.

In summary, the regrets of the religious will be eternal. God is relentlessly inviting you into a relationship with him and a full life with him. A right response is a humble heart toward Jesus, depending upon Jesus. We come to God with our need. It's what we bring to him. Our need. That's why he goes to the lame and the blind and the crippled. It's the needy. God wants us to show up with our need.

This week, we're going to do something fun. You're going to receive an invitation in the mail. There are five different ones going out. First and foremost, we're going to invite you into a relationship with God through his Son Jesus. But if you're a member here, I assume you have a relationship with Christ. So we're going to invite you to do something in your neighborhood, to maybe come up to the office and walk around the building and pray. Yes, I know it's hot.

Maybe to write everyone on your street a note. Maybe to forward one of the messages from *Summer of Stories* to a friend. Maybe to call somebody you've been estranged from and share the gospel. So you'll have this kind of assignment, if you will, we're going to invite you into. You'll receive that invitation this week. If you're in our system, you can be looking for that in the mail. There'll be one per household. So we'll put one name at the top, but the whole family, or you and your roommates can look at that. One is going out to each address we have. I just want you to be looking for that this week.

I'm going to close today by telling you another story. It has actually happened in history. There was a guy named David. King David. You know David. David and Goliath. David and Bathsheba. David. David was a very successful king. Jesus comes from his lineage. David had conquered many armies, many civilizations, but on this particular day, David was having a bad day because David had a best friend. His best friend's name was Jonathan.

The Scripture says that Jonathan and David's hearts were knitted together. They had a very special relationship. David loved Jonathan very much. On this day, he died, and Jonathan's father had committed suicide. David is left in this amazing palace at this banquet table by himself. He is grieving, and he says, "Is there no one left in the house of Jonathan whom I can show grace to, whom I can invite to dine with me at this table?"

He says to his servant Ziba, "Ziba, is there not anybody whom I can show favor to?" Ziba says, "Well, there is Mephibosheth. It's Jonathan's son, but he has been rejected. He has two clubfeet. He's crippled, but he's alive." David said, "Bring him to me. Bring him to me that I might share this with him."

So you can imagine the scene. Mephibosheth walks into the palace, into the grand banquet hall. He is there with his crutches and his clubfeet. He falls before the lord, and he says, "Who is a dead dog like me that you would have mercy on me?" The king says, "Get up. All I have is yours. Not because of who you are but because of whose you are. You have been adopted into everything that belongs to me because of your relationship to the one I love."

This is the gospel, friends: that we have been invited into a relationship with God, not because of who we are, but because of whose we are, that we belong to him through his Son Jesus Christ. My prayer is that you would know this. So as we go to sing these songs, would you reflect on that message, that it might penetrate deep within our hearts?

Father, we thank you that your Word does not return void. We thank you for the gift of these stories Jesus told, and the gifts of history David lived, and would you help us to know how to apply them to where we're at today? We thank you for your goodness and for your grace, for the banquet you've invited us into.

We anxiously, eagerly wait to be with you fully in your presence, but, Lord, I pray we would respond to your invitation today with our whole lives, embracing the abundant life you have for us. We love you, God. It is such a privilege to be your servants. In Jesus' name, amen.