

The Parable of the Great Banquet

Luke 14:15-24 (New American Standard Bible)

¹⁵ Now when one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

¹⁶ But He said to him, “A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; ¹⁷ and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, because everything is ready now.’ ¹⁸ And yet they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, ‘I purchased a field and I need to go out to look at it; please consider me excused.’ ¹⁹ And another one said, ‘I bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.’ ²⁰ And another one said, ‘I took a woman as my wife, and for that reason I cannot come.’ ²¹ And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here those who are poor, those with disabilities, those who are blind, and those who are limping.’ ²² And later the slave said, ‘Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ ²³ And the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and the hedges and press upon them to come in, so that my house will be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my dinner.’”

Introduction

One day a Pharisee invited Jesus along with others to a dinner. Jesus was the honored guest. During the dinner, one of the guests said, “Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. (v. 15)” Then, Jesus tells the following story called the Parable of the Great Banquet.

Let’s pay attention to the story of Jesus one more time:

Invitation and Preparation: A certain man wanted to throw a big dinner party inviting many folks in town. *There will be plenty of food and fun*, he announced, *so please come*.

Imagine that you were *that* host: What would you do first? Make a guest list and send out the invitations. Based on the number of expected guests, you plan the dinner. Remember, nowadays, for food you can hire a catering service, but back then, you have to prepare everything in your own household. You also need to figure out how many animals are needed.

- Here’s an example in the first century standards: “A chicken or two would suffice for 2 to 4 guests, a duck for 5 to 8, a kid for 10 to 15, a sheep for 15 to 35 people, or a calf for 35 to 75 people” (<https://www.jesuswalk.com/luke/064-banquet.htm>).

Dinner Is Ready: After days of preparation, the dinner is finally ready. You send out your servant to invite one more time the guests to come. Wait a minute. You may think, that's not the way we do in America. Once the guests RSVP'd, we expect them to arrive at the door in time, right? Not so in the First Century in Israel: *"Attested both in Jewish and Roman settings, the invitation was two-fold: (1) the initial invitation some time ahead, and (2) the actual summons to the meal when it is ready"* (*ibid*).

Rejection and Insult: *"Houston, we have a problem."* What's the problem? The servant comes back and says, "Many guests are unable to join the party." What?! At the last minute?! It bothers you greatly. To make things worse, it's not just one or two guests who said that they couldn't come. The majority of them (in our story, every single one of them) are not coming! How would you feel about that? Awful, right?

Now, let's check it out what such a last-minute excuse meant to the host in the first century in Israel:

"Not to come to a banquet where one had previously indicated acceptance was a grave breach of social etiquette. It was an insult to the host. In a society where one's social standing was determined by peer approval -- who is invited to whose dinners -- this was an act of social insult as well. For a whole series of guests to reject the final summons appears to be a conspiracy to discredit the host" (Ralph Wilson) (*ibid*).

You, the host, would be really embarrassed with an empty house with plenty of food, wouldn't you? Furthermore, you cannot stand this series of rejection among your peers. In fact, you would be very angry, because you knew what it meant to be rejected at the last minute—"it was an act of calculated rudeness and social defamation." (Ralph Wilson, *ibid*.)

Flimsy Excuses: Now, let's talk about the excuses. When you really think about them, you know that they are all lame: The guy who bought a field, for example. I am sure before he made the final payment, he must have inspected it! What about the guy who bought five pairs of oxen and must try them out now? Can't they wait until tomorrow? By the way, who would buy five pairs of oxen without testing them first (It's like buying a new car without a test-drive.)? Excuses, excuses! You fume over those excuses!

Invitation Extended: So, you the host have a choice: either cancel the whole thing or go ahead as planned. In the story, the host was determined to go ahead. *My house must be full*, he says to himself. *I will NOT be made a fool of. I WILL have a full house!* So, he commands his servant to go out swiftly and bring people to fill his house. *Go to the city streets and back alleys*, he commands, *to bring people to the party.* So, the servant goes out and finds everybody inside the town, mind you, those who weren't originally invited: the

blind, the crippled, and the lame; the poor, the beggars, and the indigent; those considered unworthy to be the guests.

Well, even after the servant brought them in, the house is still half empty. So, the host orders his servant again, this time, to go outside the town and bring the vagabonds and sojourners, the outcast and the unwelcome in the town. *If necessary, he orders, compel them! Drag them in!* (Middle Eastern hospitality: “*even the poorest modestly resist the invitation to the entertainment until they are taken by the hand and gently forced to enter the house*”—(the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1990, 707). The host is furiously persistent. He wouldn’t stop until the last minute and until the last seat of the table is filled.

Judgment: At the end of the story, the host vows, none of the original guests will be allowed to eat at the dinner.

Interpretation:

Of course, we ought not to over-allegorize this parable to find a corresponding meaning for every detail of the story. However, one thing I can tell you for sure is this: the story is about God’s Kingdom and God’s invitation of humanity to salvation, Israel first, and the Gentiles later. It is about God’s heart and His persistence.

Here’s a summary of the meaning: “*here the host is God the Heavenly Father. He invites his people Israel first to the messianic banquet in the Kingdom of God. The rich and socially elite who reject at the last minute the host's invitation are the Pharisees and Jewish religious establishment who begin to plot against Jesus and eventually render the ultimate insult of having Jesus executed as a common criminal. The poor and downtrodden are the common people, considered unclean by the Pharisees. Perhaps those inside the town are the Jews while those in the outlying areas are the Gentiles*” (Ralph Wilson, op.cit.).

Here are **four lessons** for all of us:

Lesson 1: Do not Reject God’s Invitation to Salvation. Who would say “NO” to the invitation to Heaven? It is a no brainer, in my opinion. Yet, it happens. When people reject God’s offer to salvation, they must realize that it is an insult to God. Furthermore, their rejection brings forth an eternal consequence to their soul, which means a complete exclusion from the heavenly banquet. In other words, if you reject God’s invitation to accept Jesus the Christ as your Savior, you won’t be allowed in the Kingdom of God for eternity. Therefore, use your free will wisely when you respond to God’s invitation to salvation. Act with the end in mind. Take God’s invitation seriously.

Lesson 2: Put God's Business First above Yours. Jesus puts it this way: Seek God's kingdom and His righteousness first (Matthew 6:33). Think about those lame excuses one more time: Isn't it obvious that from the very beginning the guests didn't want to come to the banquet? How do I know? Because it wasn't like they were eager to come, and suddenly, those last-minute "crucial" events started happening beyond their control!

All the excuses, on the outside, seemed vital: tending the field one just bought, testing the oxen the other just bought, and being with his wife (after all, God even excused the newly married from the war duty for the first year: Deuteronomy 24:3). One can even argue that we cannot live without all these: farms (possessions), animals (professions), and families (relationships). But can we afford to live without God?

It is a heart issue, isn't it? The surface issue was "I am too busy to come." Yet, deep down, their hearts were not there with the host from the beginning. It all boils down to this attitude: *I have better things to do.*

Same thing can happen to us in our walk with God. Our hearts are far from God and His concerns. We pursue money more than we pursue God. On Sunday morning, we would rather be someplace else than at God's church. E.g., With all reasons such as '*I am too tired, I want to sleep in, and this is the only day off from work, and so forth*' we skip Sunday morning services. We choose to do something else than having a communion with God on the Lord's Day. If watching TV is far more interesting than praying, you need to change that. If checking out things on YouTube is far more entertaining than reading God's Word, you need to change that, too.

Let's not forget: when it comes down to God's call to know Him and do His will, and to obey His voice, we say 'YES' not because there's nothing else to do, but because they are the best and foremost interest for our souls and bodies, both presently and eternally. That's why all our earthly businesses can and must wait. We must make God's kingdom our priority.

Lesson 3: It is God's Mercy and Grace That Saved Us. Had God's grace and mercy not been extended to us the Gentiles who weren't originally invited to salvation, we would've still lived in darkness, despair, and sin. Praise the Lord for His everlasting kindness to us!

Conclusion

The story is a warning to all of us. Say Yes to His invitation to salvation. Straighten your priorities. Seek first His Kingdom and His causes above anything else, and you will be at the Great Banquet in Heaven. Amen.

Let us pray.