

Luke 14:15-24
The Great Banquet

Main idea: Who is invited into the kingdom of God? Who will sit and eat at the Great Banquet?

I'm going to be talking today about the Great Banquet, which is an illustration of the kingdom of heaven. The book of Revelation, which describes the return of Christ and the final age to come, also talks about the marriage supper of the lamb. The lamb, of course, is Jesus, who is the lamb of God who was sacrificed for the sins of the world, and the Church will be His Bride. In other words, in the end, all who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord will enjoy a feast, as we will finally and forever be perfectly united with God in heaven.

But that idea can be pretty offensive to us as we still live on the earth. I mean, who is invited into the kingdom of God? Who gets in, and who is stuck on the outside looking in? And who will sit and eat at the Great Banquet in the kingdom of heaven?

Different Christian churches actually answer these kinds of questions quite differently. Some churches, like ours, say that it's by grace alone through faith alone. Other churches say that in order to enter, your faith must be accompanied by actions. And some churches even go so far as to say that if you're not a member of their specific church or denomination, then you won't get in. But I simply want to point out that no matter what you believe about these questions, you're going to offend someone, because if you say some people get in, and others don't, that's offensive. As soon as you say some people qualify, and others don't, that's offensive. And even if you say that you hope everyone gets in, you offend most of the world, because most of the world hates someone, and doesn't want them to get in!

Well, the Bible says that...

God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4)

And Jesus said...

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

So, you see, God desires for all to come to the knowledge of the truth, and Jesus is the truth, so, if nothing else, we ought to desire, like God does, that all people would be saved by trusting in Jesus for salvation.

And that's offensive.

Well, a few weeks back, we started looking at an occasion when Jesus was invited to eat at the home of a Pharisee. A ruler of the Pharisees, in fact, who was probably a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court, so he was definitely not someone that you wanted to offend. And yet, we saw how Jesus started offending everyone as soon as He stepped in the door. He healed a man on the Sabbath. He challenged the motives of all of the dinner guests. He even criticized the host of the party for only inviting people who could repay him! And Jesus did all that before they could nibble on a breadstick!

Apparently Jesus was not at all concerned about what they could do to Him, because He trusted in His Father's plan.

Now, it would be foolish to say at this point that we should do the same as Jesus. I mean, we should trust in our Father's plan, but our faith can't come close to the faith of Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God, and God in the flesh! He has perfect faith! And our faith is weak. We want to believe, and trust, but so often our fears and failures take hold of us. And instead of trusting God's perfect plan, we make plans of our own, and we go our own way.

I guess you could say that we excuse ourselves from resting in the kingdom of God, and just enjoying the feast.

So what's the answer to our dilemma? Do we try harder to believe? Or, do we rest in the One who has perfect faith, who invites us and even compels us to enjoy His great banquet?

Luke chapter 14, starting in verse 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!" (Luke 14:15)

Father, we think we agree. Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in Your kingdom. So help us to invite the world to enjoy the great banquet with us. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Well at this point in the story, it looks like Jesus and the other guests have finally reclined at the table. And it looks like they maybe even began passing around some bread, some food, because often people talk about what's right in front of them, and we see that this person in verse 15 made a comment about eating bread. So, since Jesus is at a dinner party, and since they've finally sat down to eat, and since my sermon is even titled, "The Great Banquet," I prepared a great feast for us this morning as well, and everyone will get to enjoy the party.

But first, we should probably read what Jesus has to say about the great banquet. Verse 16.

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..." (Luke 14:16-18)

So in response to the man who exclaimed, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God," Jesus told a parable about a great banquet to which many people were invited, but those invited made excuses as to why they couldn't come. Which is interesting, because we would have expected Jesus to say something like, "You're right! Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" I mean, on the surface, his statement about being blessed in the kingdom of God seems like something any one of us might say, right? So why didn't Jesus just agree with the guy and move on?

Well, verse 15 says that this person who made this exclamation was one of those who reclined at table with Jesus. This was someone who was invited to the Pharisee's dinner party. And we saw a couple weeks back how the people who were invited chose their seats, choosing the places of honor, because they wanted to be honored, and they thought they deserved to be honored. So this person was someone who thought very highly of himself. He thought he deserved a spot not only at the Pharisee's table, but at God's table, because he was a Jew, one of God's chosen people, who obeyed God and therefore earned God's favoritism.

But then Jesus began teaching. Look at what Jesus had just said in verses 13 and 14.

"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." (Luke 14:13-14)

In other words, you can't earn God's favoritism. You can't earn your spot at God's table. God invites the poor of this world, those who recognize that they are poor in spirit, and makes them rich in faith. That's called grace. We don't deserve it, we can't earn it, and if you think you have earned it, you're probably not at God's table.

So you see, this man wasn't exclaiming something out of joy, being in the presence of Jesus, thinking about the blessing of being included in the kingdom of God by grace, he was actually disagreeing with Jesus! Jesus had just said, "You'll be blessed if you invite those who can't repay you. Don't invite your relatives and rich neighbors, but invite those who you consider to be outcasts: the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. In other words, don't invite the Jews, invite the Gentiles! Then you'll be blessed!"

So this Jew speaks up and says, "No, Jesus, blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But according to his way of thinking, you could only make it into the kingdom of God if you had certain relatives. Certain neighbors. If you were rich enough, faithful enough, and good enough to be worthy to be at the great banquet. In other words, if you were a Jew.

So Jesus told them this parable in which a man gives a great banquet, and invites many, but everyone he invites begins to excuse himself from the banquet.

Now, you've got to realize, this parable wasn't about just any dinner party. Jesus described it as "a great banquet." You might even translate it as "the greatest banquet." This was the place to be, the party of the year. No, bigger, this was the party of a lifetime. No, bigger, the party of the century. Even bigger than Woodstock. Even bigger than the Cubs winning the World Series. This was like the party of all parties!

I mean, you'd be a fool to turn down this party!

You know, the Bible says,

"The fool says in his heart, there is no God." (Psalm 14:1)

Well, anyway, the man in the parable throwing the party initially invited just a few, and everyone that was invited turned down the invitation. Verse 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.' 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.' (Luke 14:18-20)

Fools.

It's interesting that each one of these excuses was an acceptable reason to be excused from social gatherings according to the Jews. But at the end of the day, each one was just foolishly refusing the invitation to the great banquet. In fact, the excuses were outright laughable. Nobody buys a field or oxen without seeing them first. The field could wait one more day to be inspected, and the oxen could wait one more day to be trained to plow the fields. And in the last excuse, the guy doesn't even say "Please have me excused." He just says, "I just got married, and I can't come." Period. And once again, we could look at how this was an acceptable reason not to go, how a Jew was excused from a whole year of work and social gatherings after he got married in order to devote himself to his new wife, but the way this excuse was worded, it's like this guy didn't even want to go! Because if he only believed that the banquet would be the party of all parties, not only would he want to go, but he'd bring his wife! He wouldn't miss it!

And, listen, God invites us into His kingdom, to enjoy the great banquet, and so many of us continue to make excuses.

I love this little book titled, "I Will." It's about some of the commitments we will make to our local church if we want to be truly devoted to Jesus. I have an extra copy of it, and whoever asks first can get it after the service. I want to read a small section to you about a Christian who was truly devoted.

You had to admire his commitment.

He made the decision to attend. He would not miss it. The weather was terrible that day - steady rain, temperature in the forties. He still got out in the weather.

Because of the bad weather, he did not quite make it on time. It was difficult to get to his seat as well. But he persevered. His seat was not comfortable, but he neither left nor complained. His presence vividly demonstrated his love and commitment.

He was joyous the entire time. He enjoyed the presence of fellow believers. His attitude, his attendance, and his enthusiasm all reflect his deep and abiding commitment.

He was at a college football game on a Saturday afternoon.

By the way, he did not attend church worship services the next day. He was tired from the ball game. And there was a 40 percent chance of rain.

You see, he was a Christian who was truly devoted...to college football.

Isn't it amazing to what lengths people will go to see their favorite sports team play ball, but how easy it is to find an excuse not to come to church? Listen, I'm not saying that attending church is the sign of true devotion as a Christian, because God would have us do so much more, but if we love Jesus, and we want to glorify God with all of our lives, shouldn't we at least want to worship Him with His family? I mean, worshiping at church is just a small taste of the great banquet! It's just a small glimpse of heaven! And if you're thankful for Jesus, and look forward to worshiping Him for all eternity, guess what, you can do it every week! You can come, and sing, and serve God with your church family every week! And, no, going to church doesn't make you a Christian, but as Christians, church is like getting a taste of heaven on earth.

I'm amazed at the excuses I sometimes hear as to why people can't come to church. "I can't find a church that I like." "Someone at church offended me." "I have to work later in the day." "It's my only day off." Did you know most churches have more than one worship service, on more than one day, which can usually accommodate any schedule? And the Bible never says "Thou shalt go to the primary Sunday morning worship service so thou shalt hear the sermon." It says don't forsake gathering together. But all these excuses usually have very little to do with their actual circumstances, but rather with their hearts.

So let me be very clear here. I don't think God is upset that someone would not attend a church service because they were sick, or just got married, or there's severe weather. The problem is not the external circumstances. The problem is the heart of the person in the circumstance. My wife stayed home with a sick kid last Sunday. We've canceled church services in the past for bad weather and even for national holidays like Father's Day and the Super Bowl. It's not about the circumstance. It's about the heart. And if your heart is right, then yes, sometimes a circumstance is going to get in the way of attending a service, but it will not get in the way of your service and devotion to God and His Church. Your loyalty will remain with God and way more often than not you will desire to commit yourself to what honors God, and that includes coming together to worship, serve, and fellowship with other believers.

And if that desire simply isn't there for you, if you don't see the value in worshiping God with the church, then recognize that the problem isn't with the church, it's with your own heart.

And I get it, we've all been there. Even when there's a perfectly valid reason for not coming, because you are sick, or your kid is sick, or there's ice on the roads, or your schedule just changed and you have to work, sometimes things happen, but even then, our heart should long to return as soon as possible, because we should desire to be at the great banquet, not looking for any excuse not to be at the party.

And, you know, there are many things we could and probably should fix about our church. Some things cost money, like improving our facilities, but many things are free, like better organization of volunteers, and structuring our service to be completely focused on worshiping Jesus. And, of course, we should do all that we can to best use our time together to glorify God. But no matter how perfect we make our church, people will always have excuses as to why they can't come. Because the issue really isn't how perfect we are, because we'll never be perfect, the issue is whether you have a taste for what God is serving. Whether you desire to attend the great banquet. But when you continue to make excuses, God says to you, "You shall not taste my banquet."

So as long as you reject the invitation, you shall not enter the kingdom of God. You will be cast out into outer darkness. Hell.

And foolishly, so many make excuses. Verse 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.' 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.' (Luke 14:21-24)

The kingdom of God is like that. At first, God invited just a few: the Jews. But they turned down the invitation. They rejected Jesus, who was the servant sent to tell them that everything was ready. So when the Jews rejected the invitation, the invitation was opened up to the whole world

"Fill this place up, because no one who excludes themselves from coming will get in."

In other words, "No one who is a fool belongs in the kingdom of God!"

But you know, God is in the business of taking fools and turning them into people of faith. Proverbs 28:26.

Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.
(Proverbs 28:26)

By show of hands, how many of you have ever trusted in your own mind? Trusted in your own plan? Even if you knew it wasn't that good of a plan? That's all of us, right? So Proverbs says that we were all fools. But the beginning of the book of Proverbs personifies wisdom, and it's clear from a New Testament perspective that whenever the book of Proverbs talks about wisdom, it's talking about Jesus. So look at what it says. "Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom," he who walks in Jesus, "will be delivered."

We've all been fools. But God takes the foolish of this world and delivers them through faith in Jesus. In fact, that's exactly what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

God chooses the foolish to shame the wise...so that those who consider themselves wise would see how foolish they are. That's why God has been saving millions of people from every nation, tribe, language, and people, to make the Jews jealous, so they would stop boasting in their works, and boast in the Lord. In fact, the Bible even promises that the Jews will get in, after they repent and trust in Jesus. Check it out. Romans 11.

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. (Romans 11:25-31)

All Israel will be saved, after they repent. After they've recognized their foolishness. And after they see that only by grace can they enjoy the great banquet. And the same is true for each one of us.

You see, Jesus seems to be saying that if you feel like God has invited you because of how awesome you are, then you're refusing the true invitation, and you don't yet get in. The people who get in are the ones who weren't even worthy of an invitation, the lost, and Jesus seeks them, and drags them in. He compels us, not because we're worthy, but because He's good.

You know, it seems like a lot of people act as if they can enjoy the great banquet by voting a certain way. As if we can have heaven on earth simply by electing certain people or having a certain party in the majority. But our citizenship is not of this world. Listen, I think it would be a mistake not to vote. As Christians, we ought to vote not for parties, but for principles. We ought to vote for people who share our values. We ought to vote because we are to seek the good of the people around us. We ought to vote because not voting is a type of voting, which will still affect the outcome. We ought to vote because if we don't vote, it will almost surely lead to the acceptance of sin as a valid way of life in our culture. If we don't vote, it will lead to more persecution of believers, the degradation of society, and a culture in which everything we believe and practice is called hate-crimes and punishable in court.

I think it would be a huge mistake not to vote, but I think it would be an even bigger mistake to vote for anyone because you think even for a moment that it will usher in a greater kingdom. Don't put your hope in this world. It will disappoint you. Hope in Christ. Because only through Jesus Christ can we enjoy the Great Banquet.

So now it's finally time to reveal the great feast I prepared for us. But you may have guessed by now that I didn't really prepare this great feast. Jesus did.

[Reveals the bread and juice]

I hope that you're not disappointed with the feast that we have. Because this feast, the body and blood of Jesus, is the great banquet. Knowing Jesus allows us to enter eternal life, and knowing Jesus is eternal life. The body and blood of Jesus forgives us of our sins, and so we give thanks for His body and blood until He returns.

And, like we always say, this is not the body and blood of Jesus. And yet, in a very real way, if we refuse to gather together as a church to remember His body and blood, then we refuse Jesus, and we excuse ourselves from the great banquet. The same is true of baptism. Baptism itself doesn't save you, but it's a public confession of what Christ has done for you, and if you refuse it, then in a very real way, it's like you're refusing being identified with Jesus Christ.

All I'm saying is that it matters that we joyfully give our lives, because Jesus gave His life for us. And if you're thankful for Him, then you'll stop making excuses, and simply follow Him.

That doesn't mean you'll get it perfect, because you won't. None of us do. But it does mean that you'll at least want to follow Him. Follow Him in whatever He asks you to do. For some of you, it may mean trusting in Jesus for the first time, or the first time in a long time. For others, it may

mean getting baptized as a public confession of your faith. And for all of us, it means remembering the body and blood of Jesus, given for us, and because of that, that we will be blessed in the kingdom of God.

Lord Jesus, thank You for giving Yourself for us. Help us to rest in Your sacrifice. I pray that everyone here would trust in You and follow You. Compel them to come in, that they would taste your great banquet. In Your name, Amen.