

Luke 14:13-23  
RSVP'd  
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This summer, we're looking together at a series of passages from the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus paints a picture of what God is like. He does this so that the lives of his hearers will be changed. Did you know that that's our goal whenever we gather? If you thought it was for Jim Leep's good coffee, well, I'm sorry to burst your bubble. Our purpose, when we gather, is to have our lives changed by what God has to say to us.

What we'll see this morning is that Jesus doesn't tell others about God in abstract equations or in philosophical theories. Jesus tells us what God is like using vivid images that are relatable. And this morning, the picture he paints of the Kingdom of God is that of a great feast prepared by a kind and benevolent man.

Before we begin, I want to ask you an important question: is there anyone here who has ever thought to themselves, "I don't think God could love someone like me?" Maybe you went through a time when your actions led you away from others and from God and you found yourself thinking, "That's it for me." Or maybe you've created that mental ledger and thought the bad far outweighed the good.

If you've ever thought anything like that, this morning's story is Jesus' way of picturing God—especially who God wants to be with him.

Jesus was invited to the home of a religious leader. Now in this day when a Rabbi was invited into the home of a religious leader, it wasn't just to support their ministry, but to investigate his teaching, his theology, his politics in order to make sure everything was kosher. Perhaps in a similar to the way in which someone running for office would be invited to someone's home to examine his or her politics.

Jesus was becoming popular; more and more people were beginning to pay attention to his teaching. And this religious leader wanted to have him in his home to see what Jesus thought about God. Now in the first few verses of Luke 14, Jesus talks about whether or not it's lawful to heal on the Sabbath, then he goes on to teach about humility—when you're invited to a wedding feast don't sit at the place of honor. These Pharisees liked the places of honor in their towns; Jesus said, "don't do it."

Then he says this in verse 12: **"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 will be repaid. 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."**

Have you ever been at a meal or an event when something is said that stops a conversation in its tracks? Politics. You can almost hear the conversation come to a screeching halt and everyone's tenses, right? Donald Trump...Hillary Clinton. Are you getting nervous already? Jesus is, in effect, telling this host who he should and should not invite to his meal. Awkward.

Then picking up at 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!”**

This guy is absolutely right, but he’s also just trying to break the tension. Imagine you’re at dinner tonight with friends and someone brings up politics, but then someone else responds, “Politics is crazy, right?” It breaks the tension. That’s what this guy is doing.

But more importantly, what he’s doing is he is inviting everyone around the table to consider the Kingdom of God as being like a great feast. If you will permit me, I want to invite you to consider this image with me.

I think it is one of the most beautiful gifts God give us that the thing that we all need desperately to live, food, is also something that can bring such immense pleasure. Rib eye, grilled to perfection, twice baked potato—with bacon. If you’re a vegetarian, I’m sorry, imagine broccoli. There is a passage that all those around the table would have been familiar with from the Prophet Isaiah. In Isaiah 25, the prophet gives a picture of what the Kingdom of God is like by describing what’s called the Messianic Banquet. At the end of history, the final fulfillment of the kingdom was understood to include a great banquet with the Messiah.

Isaiah 25:6 says, **“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.”** This is how the prophet Isaiah imagined it would be when God brought people into his kingdom for a meal. A feast of rich food, Filet Mignon grilled to perfection—not the little 6 oz mini filet, but a King Cut grilled to perfection. Well aged wines. At this meal, everyone will be having a great time. Can you remember a meal like this in your life? Maybe it was a wedding celebration, or a graduation dinner, or a really special birthday gathering when you had good food and wine, and you were telling stories and laughing and it was filled with joy.

That’s how we’re to picture this meal. But Isaiah’s picture is glorious not just because of the good food and wine that is served. Listen: **“On this mountain he will swallow up the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.”** In the Canaanite culture, death was called Mot and Mot was the ultimate enemy. And what Isaiah is picturing here is that even Mot, death itself, will one day be swallowed up forever and God himself will wipe away every tear from every tear stained face.

Listen, I don’t know about you, but I’ve seen in the news lately, a lot of tear stained faces. My heart breaks for people around the world who day after day experience the pain of war, of famine, of heartache. Day after day, there are people who walk death in addiction and depression. And I don’t often know what I can do to change these things, they seem so far beyond my control. But do you know whose control they are not beyond? God’s. And you and I, we can hold on to these images, we can keep this hope alive in our lives, we can remind one another, and allow these verses to give us strength as we’re reminded that one day God will do what we, what the United Nations, what President Obama or whoever follows him, what no nation or leader on earth can do: God will comfort the afflicted and bind up the broken, God will dry every tear-stained cheek when he swallows up all this pain forever, and it will take place at this great banquet.

This is where either in your heart or aloud you say “amen”; it’s ok if it’s aloud.

This feast, this banquet that Jesus describes, is a picture of the Kingdom of God. But do you know that there are still reasons why we say to ourselves, “ehh, I’m good.” Or “that’s nice, maybe when I’m old.” Or “maybe if I my schedule wasn’t so full.” Jesus goes on to tell a parable that tells of how frequently and cavalierly we make excuses for not accepting the invitation to the meal.

Listen: **But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.”**

This kind welcoming man wants to invite people into his home, to share with them and get to know them. Jesus tells this story, not just about some nice guy, but he’s telling them about what God thinks and what God wants. God wants them to come into his presence and know them, and give them this wonderful feast.

And in this day when a person was preparing a feast they would begin weeks in advance. They didn’t have Kroger back then. You would begin by extending an invitation long in advance, then you would go around to the local shepherds and farmers to buy the good meats, like lamb and beef and vegetables. Preparations would begin long in advance. So there would be time in between when the invitation was accepted and when it came time for the meal.

**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.’**

Jesus tells this story because the people around the table that day were absolutely sure they would be there. They’re not asking about the people who aren’t there, they’re asking about the people who they will have to share the meal with—will they be our kind of people?

Here’s what Jesus says as they make excuses. But then Jesus says, **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.’**

In this day, a real estate transaction would take a long time. What this guy is saying would be the equivalent of one of us saying to our spouse, “I’m going to be late for supper because I just purchased a new house over the phone, and having signed the check I now need to go over and check it out.” It’s absurd!

Ken Bailey tells us that in Middle Eastern culture, offering an implausible excuse for not coming to a nobleman’s dinner is an insult of the highest degree.

This man’s long term plans conflicted with the invitation to join the banquet. Do you know that sometimes we make long term plans that conflict or at least don’t involve God? And when we make those plans we are, in effect, saying to God, thanks but no thanks.

The second man says this: **‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’** Buying five yoke of oxen means this man has a farming business that is booming. Five yoke is 10 oxen and he is investing in growing his business. So what he says to the host when he turns down the invitation is that “my busy work schedule doesn’t allow me to join you at the meal.” Does anyone here know the feeling of having such a busy work schedule that you are

not able to slow down and enjoy the good things in life that are put before you? We do this all the time.

Finally, the third says: **‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’** When I was single, I could make my own schedule, but now that I’m married, the person who I’m with isn’t that interested, so I don’t think I can make it. My relationships are preventing me from coming to the banquet. This excuse was equally absurd because shot-gun marriages didn’t exist in the first century. The marriage preparation period was a year, and no one would have been able to accept the offer of the invitation and then turn around and make the excuse, “Surprise I got married and now I can’t come.”

This moment is Jesus saying to the people gathered there with him, and to us, that you think that because of the things you do that you will be at the banquet, but the excuses you make—my schedule is too full, my work life is too busy, the relationships I have—keep me from the banquet.

If there is someone here who is thinking to themselves, “You know, I just don’t feel very close to God right now.” Could it be because you’re too busy to spend time with God? Have you made so many plans, or have too much work, that you can’t just sit peacefully and enjoy being in the presence of God. Jesus paints this picture to ask us: do you make excuses for not spending time with God?

But then the passage goes on. Verse 21 says: **So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry.** The master became angry because the good thing he offered, a delicious meal, with good fellowship and lively conversation is spurned. God becomes angry when we choose not to enjoy time in his presence. God wants to be with us that much.

It continues: **He 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.’**

What Jesus is saying here is very controversial. These men who invited him to dinner wanted to test Jesus to see who would be welcome at the Messianic Banquet. In their minds only the pure, holy, observant Jews were welcome. But what Jesus says is that all people (what does all people mean?) are welcome: the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame will be welcomed at God’s table. There was a very popular book at this time called the Book of Enoch, and in it a similar picture is painted, only those with infirmities and those who are gentiles are killed at the banquet and only the strict Jews sit at table. This was a really popular book at this time. But Jesus says, “NO! All people will be welcome at my table.”

Now this could be a runaway idea here, don’t think that God doesn’t care about how we live, that we can just do whatever we want and God will be just fine with it. God hates things like greed, like self-righteousness; God wants to change you, but there is also always a seat for those who want that change.

Do we live in such a way that says that there is no room for them here? Or do we live in such a way that says that the poor, the blind, the lame are welcome at our tables?

I want to offer this challenge in closing:

1. If you worry that you might not be welcome at God's table, if you have a past that you're dragging along like an old piece of luggage, put it down and come to the table, you are welcome. You are always welcome here.

2. If you are someone who is present with God and accepts his invitation to come to the banquet, I want you to find the poor, the blind, the crippled (metaphorically) and invite them to your table and watch how God will begin to change you. Prepare your finest meal for someone like this, and in this way you'll show others what the kingdom of God is like, and in this way God will show you the expansiveness of his kingdom.

**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.'**