**THE GREAT BANQUET IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

August 2, 2015

Luke 14:1-24

Key Verse 14:23 “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.’”

In today’s passage, we see that God is preparing a great banquet or party. Many times God is presented as a tyrant who is stern and demanding, and that following God means a joyless existence. If you look at many believers, you would think that the Christian life is a funeral. Yet if you consider how God is constantly presented in the Bible, we come to understand that this is a false view, a distortion of the truth. In Luke’s gospel, there is a tremendous emphasis on eating, drinking, and banquet. I can count 32 times in 24 chapters in Luke’s gospel. Jesus is either talking about eating or he is eating at somebody’s house somewhere! Some of the most important teachings Jesus gives in Luke’s gospel are set at dinner parties. We will learn some of his teachings today. Most of all, we need to respond to God’s invitation to his banquet without any excuse. May God bless you to accept his invitation humbly and enjoy the heavenly banquet with Jesus forever.

**First**, Jesus teaches the religious leaders mercy. Look at verse 1. “One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.” The motive to invite Jesus was clear from the start. They were watching Jesus carefully to find something to discredit his work. Look at verse 2. “There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body.” O my goodness! They made the man sit right in front of Jesus. This poor, suffering man, was being used by the Pharisees as a setup to catch Jesus. They watched Jesus to see if he would heal the sick man on the Sabbath. Jesus was not intimidated. Jesus made a preemptive strike with a question in verse 3b, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” “But they remained silent.” Their silence reveals their mercilessness. Jesus took hold of the man, healed him and sent him away. Jesus risked his life to heal one suffering man. Because of Jesus’ compassion, this man began to have a new life free from his swollen legs and hands. Jesus did more than heal the man. He also taught the Pharisees the mercy of God. Look at verse 5. “Then he asked them, ‘If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?’” That’s right. One would waste no time in pulling it out. The animals were worth a lot of money to them. But they did not care about this man. Jesus wanted to teach that people are important to God. You would think this would be obvious. But, religious people sometimes forget this simple reality – people are important to God. Religious people sometimes get sidetracked doing “religious things,” mistakenly believing that this is what pleases God. The Pharisees had forgotten this simple fact, because they got caught up in being “righteous.” To the Pharisee, the most important thing in the world was to keep the rules. M. David Chung shared that he used to get angry at Bible students in the past when they did not accept his teachings. I also did the same. When Bible students whom I invested my time and energy did not show any sign of commitment, I got angry and cursed them. It was not work of mercy.

**Second**, Jesus teaches them humility (7-11). In this part, Jesus deals with the problem of pride and teaches the religious leaders humility. Look at verse 7a. “When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table.” It is our human nature to seek honor and human recognition. The seats next to the host were the seats of honor. Jesus told them to humble themselves. Look at verse 10. “But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.” The citizens of the kingdom of God must learn how to humble themselves. Jesus is a good example for us to follow. Though Jesus is God, he humbled himself and became a servant of all (Php 2:6-8; Mk 10:45).

**Third**, Jesus teaches them generosity. (12-14) Jesus saw that the members of the dinner party were all the people of rank. Only VIPs were invited. What did Jesus say to the host? Look at verses 13,14. “But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Jesus wanted them to invite the needy in order to practice generous serving. It is natural for us to invite our friends and relatives, church members. Jesus did not say that we should not invite them. We should invite them to have fellowship among our friends because we love them. It is a good thing. He also encourages us to invite the needy people who need our love and attention. Inviting others who cannot invite us back is not easy in this pragmatic generation. “Give and take” is a normal course of life today. Though a return invitation from them is not possible, there awaits a different, better reward: God will repay with blessing in the resurrection. These days many spiritual leaders are saying that Christianity is becoming churchianity looking inwardly to serve each other like a social club. Christians must look outwardly to reach out to the outside people who need God’s help. Let’s show genuine love for the students who cannot invite us back for a dinner. More than that, we need to serve them with one-to-one Bible study. Do your one-to-one students pay you? No. Do they buy lunch for you? No. Do they reward you? No. But they need your help because they suffer from broken relationships and wounded hearts. As Jesus served us free of charge, we must serve them free of charge until they are healed and find new life.

**Fourth**, the great banquet in the kingdom of God. Look at verses 16, 17. “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.”’” Here a certain man refers to God and the great banquet to the kingdom of God. In Matthew 22:2, this banquet was a wedding feast of the king’s son. In the Jewish wedding it takes one year to prepare for the wedding ceremony. After the engagement, the bride and groom invite all the potential guests with a decorated invitation letter. Then the invitees accept the invitation and then awaited the servant’s message to announce the celebration’s start. They said, “yes” to an R.S.V.P. request. A great thing about God’s invitation is that we do not need to bring anything. Whenever we are invited to someone’s home for dinner, we always ask, “Is there anything we can bring?” That’s a polite thing to ask, but when you are invited to God’s salvation banquet, there’s nothing you have to bring, and there’s nothing you can do, it’s all been done. As Jesus said in verse 17, “Come, everything is now ready!” He provides the appetizers; we only have to bring our appetite. He provides the meal; all we have to bring is the mouth!

God’s favorite words is “come.” All throughout the Bible he invites people to himself. Matthew 11:28 says, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.” On the last page of the Bible, God gives one final invitation: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘COME!” And let him who hears say, ‘COME!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him COME...” (Revelation 22:17) From Genesis to Revelation, God has been holding out his arms to sinful people, saying, “Come to me, I love you, and I can help you.” It’s hard to believe anyone would decline his invitation, but many did and many do. In verse 18 Jesus said, “but they all alike began to make excuses.” Remember, the invitation to the banquet had already been extended and accepted much earlier. But these people began to make lame excuses at the last minute. In the Middle East, to decline an invitation from a great man is like a slap in the face, an insult. In verse 21, we are told the owner of the house became angry. God is still angered by the empty excuses people try to make. There were three excuses given in Jesus’ parable. They are the same excuses people are giving to God today. On the surface, they may appear to be legitimate reasons, but when you examine them, you’ll discover they are empty excuses they gave simply because they didn’t want to attend the party.

Excuse #1: I’ve got to take care of my stuff! The first man said he just bought some land and he had to go examine it. Now, how many of you would buy a piece of property without seeing it first? This man represents people who are so possessed by their possessions they are controlled by them. They spend their lives buying more and more stuff and then they have to spend all their time protecting and maintaining and using all their stuff. Jesus said, “Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.” (Luke 12:15)

Excuse #2: My job keeps me too busy! The second fellow indicated he just purchased five yoke of oxen, so he was going out to test them. These wedding feasts were always held in the evening, so do you really think this guy was going out into the dark to practice plowing with his new oxen? It’s a lame excuse. These are people who don’t have time for God because they stay so busy with their jobs. They are so consumed by their work.

Excuse #3: My family takes up my time! He said, “I’d like to come, but my wife won’t let me.” But we know this is an empty excuse. It was unheard of to invite a man to a wedding feast and not invite the wife. They were BOTH invited, but he just didn’t want to accept the invitation, so his marriage was a convenient excuse. Now, spending time with your wife and family is important. However, family can even get in the way of serving God. Jesus said you cannot follow him unless you love him more than your mother or father, or brothers or sisters, or wife or husband or children. Today, there are many Canadians who choose not to worship God on Sundays because they use their Sundays for family outings. The very best family outing is to take your family to worship with you. You can’t use your family as an excuse for not coming to God. Actually, no excuse is acceptable to God. There is no legitimate reason for not accepting his invitation.

How did you feel if someone did not show after you prepared a lot of food? How did God feel when his people rejected his invitation? We must understand God’s broken heart when we reject his invitation. What happened next? Look at verse 21. “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.’” God did not cancel or delay his banquet but his banquet was on schedule. God did not stop inviting his people; the invitation was extended to the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. They represent sinners such as the tax collectors. The verb bring in, in verse 21, is important. They would have to be brought in because they would resist it. They felt undeserved. They said, “I don’t want to come to a dinner because I am going to be obligated to provide one in reciprocation. I cannot do that. I am not worthy to come into that place.” They would have to be literally persuaded to come because it was so against the convention that they were used to.

The servant said, “Sir, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room” (22). Look at verse 23. “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.’” Here “compel” means- to constrain by threat, entreaty, force, or persuasion. Now you have to compel these people. They know they don’t belong there. Those people don’t even have houses inside the city. They are not allowed in the city. They live outside the city. They are the highway people. They live in the brothels, the inns, the roadhouses and along the road and in the trees and in the bushes. These represent the Gentiles. We the Gentiles were by nature objects of God’s wrath. But by God’s one-sided grace we were invited to God’s banquet. God is not willing for anyone to perish, but wants everyone to come to Jesus and be saved. The church is under orders. Evangelistic inactivity is disobedience. God wants his house to be full. Our God with his burning love for souls will never settle for his house half full. Our Lord is clearly not pleased with: an empty banquet table (Luke 14:15-23); fishing without catching (Luke 5:4-11); sowing without reaping (Matt. 13:3-9); a fig tree that bears no figs (Luke 13:6-9). The love of God is great; it requires a multitude of guests and will not tolerate empty seats. Our Lord seemed to be very much concerned with numbers. The fish in the miraculous catch were counted (John 21:11; 153). The leftovers after the feeding of the five thousand were counted. And the five thousand themselves were counted! Converts at Pentecost were counted. And in the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd would never have known that one of his flock of one hundred was lost, unless he had counted them!

It is very important to learn how to persuade others to come to the banquet. If you can convince others that we are onto something that’s full of joy and meaning, they’ll follow us. There is statistics about how people first came into church. The Institute for American Church Growth asked 10,000 people about how they joined the church; Special need, 2%; Walk-in, 3%; Pastor, 6%; Visitation, 1%; Sunday school, 5%; Evangelistic crusade, 5%; Program, 3%; Friend/relative, 79%. One preacher said, “If you want your neighbor to know what Christ will do for him, let the neighbor see what Christ has done for you.” When Christians live the gospel, sinners will listen to the gospel. Let’s reach out to a world in need with the word it needs.