

**Luke 14:15-24**  
**A Banquet Invitation**

Jesus was not known for His sense of humor. He had many other wonderful human qualities. He was known for His compassion and His commitment. He was a powerful speaker who was comfortable both addressing the masses and discipling a select few. He understood the importance of maintaining His focus on the most important things, but He also was sensitive to the needs of the moment. He was generally non confrontational, but He was unafraid of men. He was sensitive to His listeners, but He never shirked His responsibility to proclaim the truth. Indeed, Jesus had many fine qualities, but He was not known for His sense of humor.

**The Context**

Jesus was still at the Sabbath day meal of a leader in the local synagogue. His invitation there had been a setup to try to draw Him into healing a man on the Sabbath, and thus violating the understanding the Pharisees had of the Mosaic Law. Though He had, in fact, healed the wretched man, Jesus had stood His ground against His adversaries. Taking the initiative, Jesus spoke to them and challenged them first as to whether it was even sensible to do a good work on a holy day, then reminded them that they would do for their animals what Jesus wanted to do for the sick man.

Then Jesus continued to press His point by using a parable to illustrate the Pharisees own selfishness and greed. He pointed out their desire to be self-serving in their actions. He chided them for their desire to be the center of attention and to have others think highly of them. He concluded with a reference to “the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14). At that time, rewards would be given in accordance with the heart and actions of each individual.

Curiously, His audience, the elite religious leaders of the area, would have taken His reference to the resurrection as a compliment. They would have naturally assumed that He was referring to them. They believed that their efforts were earning them salvation and eternal reward. This was the reason for their meticulous keeping the Law and adherence to the religious rituals and sacrifices of their religion. The idea of a resurrection of the righteous to eternal reward was embedded in their thinking, and it was often described using the illustration of a great banquet.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You have anointed my head with oil;  
My cup overflows” (Psalm 23:5).

<sup>6</sup>“The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;  
A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,  
And refined, aged wine.

<sup>7</sup>And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,  
Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.

<sup>8</sup>He will swallow up death for all time,  
And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces,  
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;

For the Lord has spoken.  
    <sup>9</sup>And it will be said in that day,  
Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us.  
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;  
Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation” (Isaiah 25:6-9).

With that understanding, it is not surprising that a voice rang out from the back of the room saying “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (v. 15). Was the voice genuine? Was it superficial? It is not known, nor does it matter. Whether spoken as an affirmation or in jest, this was a proverbial saying that affirmed what the Pharisees and legal teachers believed about themselves. It may even have been intended as a rebuttal to Jesus’ assertion that those people were too proud and self-righteous to inherit eternal life. They took pride in being of the seed of Abraham, “we are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone” (John 8:33). That was all they believed they needed.

We must pause here to appreciate the fact that Jesus did not tolerate wrong thinking. He did not allow people to believe they were well when they were in need of a savior. He did not foster a spirit of complacency in those who were lost. He told the truth. He knew the consequences of error.

<sup>26</sup>For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup>but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. . . . <sup>31</sup>It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26-27, 31).

### **The Invitation Given**

Jesus responded to the outburst by telling a story that must have made His audience smile - at least at first. For though seeming to tell a story that bordered on the ridiculous, Jesus offered a very instructive parable. It was about “a man [who gave] a big dinner, and he invited many” (v. 16). The words big and many emphasized the extravagant nature of the event. This was no small supper party for a few close friends. This was the event of the year in that town. The man had wealth, connections, and occasion to host an event that would be talked about for some time to come. In the quiet little villages of Judea and Galilee, this was an event not to be missed.

With the custom of the time, the invitations would have been delivered in two steps. The first would have been sent to inform the guests that they were invited. This would have been general in nature, not specifying the exact date and time of the celebration. Rather this invitation would have told the lucky recipient that so-and-so was inviting them to an event, and they ought to look forward to more details later. As soon as all the preparations were made, then those guests would be specifically told to come and enjoy the party. This was why the man “at the dinner hour . . . sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘come; for everything is ready now’” (v. 17).

It strikes me that this is much like the second coming of Christ. Believers know that He is coming back, but the exact date and time are not known. Much like the invited guests, there is a great banquet awaiting those who are ready to attend.

### **The Excuses Made**

Everything was ready. The seats were arranged, the food was prepared, the entertainment was scheduled. All that was needed was for the guest to arrive. Yet, as Jesus told the story, that was where things went wrong.

As the slave arrived to deliver the details of when to meet, “all alike began to make excuses” (v. 18). This was inconceivable. They had all previously said they would attend. No one would want to miss out on such an event. The honor of receiving the invitation had set those guests apart from the masses who were not included. These people lived in a self-aware world where status was all-important. To not attend such a celebration was ludicrous. The people listening to the story must have guffawed with wonder at the idea.

The snickering must have increased when Jesus related the excuses that were given for not attending the festivities. The first man told the slave “I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused” (v. 18). This was absurd. In the first place, the land would always be there to look at. Secondly, who would buy a piece of land without having examined it to begin with. Looking at a piece of farmland could not possibly be more important than attending a banquet.

The second excuse was equally illogical. “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused” (v. 19) the second man told the slave. Again, no doubt the man had tried out the oxen to make certain they were worth purchasing. He did not need to try them again. And in any case, a person who could afford five yoke of oxen (a very huge investment) could also afford a slave or two to test them out if needed. There was no need to miss the banquet.

The third man was even more ridiculous in his excuse. When Jesus said the third man replied “I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come” (v. 20) the room must have burst out in laughter. The Pharisees, who were the main members of the audience, had a very low view of women. In the first century anywhere, but especially in Jewish culture, women did not tell their husbands what to do or where they could or could not go. The idea that a wife would keep her husband from attending a feast was as funny an idea as any that could be imagined. To be sure, there were some requirements of the Law for a young married man, “when a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken” (Deuteronomy 24:5), but going to war and going to a dinner were two different things.

Let’s pause here to reflect that it is never ignorance that damns men’s souls; it is their will. While open sin slays its thousands, lame excuses slay their tens of thousands.

### **The Invitation Renewed**

As Jesus continued with the story, “the slave came back and reported this to his master” (v. 21). It must have been an awkward scene as the slave humbly and apologetically tried to explain why he had returned without any guests, but only with pathetic excuses. His master was not impressed. Quite the contrary, “the head of the household became angry “ (v. 21). Of course he did. He had gone to great expense to

prepare the banquet. He could not believe he was being treated with such disdain. This was an insult to the highest degree. He could not comprehend why his generous invitation to a feast had been ignored for such pathetic reasons.

He could have insisted. He could have sent his slave back out to plead with the intended guests begging them to come. He could have just sulked and thrown all the food away. But he had spent too much money. Such a feast would have cost a significant amount of his income. So instead, he ordered his slave to “go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame” (v. 21). To Jesus’ audience, this must have seemed as silly as the excuses. No Pharisee would even acknowledge such people if they passed on the street. The idea of inviting them into their home was absurd. Not only that, but the people themselves would need to be persuaded. They knew their value in that society. They understood the social mores of the culture. Upon first hearing of the invitation they must have wondered if some trick was involved - if some ploy to humiliate them was afoot. They knew as well as the Pharisees that the idea of a Pharisee hosting a banquet for the dregs of society was ridiculous. And some would have to literally be brought in (the lame and blind for example).

Remember that this was a social system based on reciprocity. You did for others what they could do for you in return. That had been the point Jesus was making when He had been interrupted. People were reminded that when they “<sup>13</sup>give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup>and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you” (Luke 14:13-14). The Pharisees had not agreed with this social construct. To them, the idea of inviting those who could not return the favor was as absurd as the excuses the men had given as to why they could not attend the banquet in the first place.

The slave did as he was commanded. He went out into the village and surrounding area and rounded up whoever he could persuade to come. He sought out the worst of society. He looked in alleys and out-of-the-way streets. Finally he had a crowd and they returned to the home of the host. But despite his efforts, “the slave said, master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room” (v. 22). Since there was room, “the master said to the slave, ‘go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled’” (v. 23). This man did not just want a few people, he wanted his house filled, even if it meant its being filled with the worst of society.

The slave now looked for those beyond the pale. Not just the lower classes, but those who were so socially removed that they lived outside the village itself. They lived in the seedy dwellings to which no respectable person would go. It must have been difficult to find them. These people were used to keeping to the shadows. They knew that far from being welcome in the home of a Pharisee, they were not even welcome within the city gates. And unlike the poor who could be persuaded to attend the banquet, these people were so reluctant to show themselves that they had to be compelled to come in.

### **The Consequence**

Finally, the house was filled. The banquet went on as planned. Food was eaten and entertainment was enjoyed. The poor, crippled, blind, lame and outcast guests must have enjoyed a party beyond their wildest imaginings. Never had they eaten so well. Never had they sat so comfortably. Never had they been waited on with such attention.

But what of the original invitees. The host was adamant, “none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner” (v. 24). This, at least, was a part of the story where the Pharisees would have stopped snickering and nodded their approval. While no doubt shocked at the host's solution to his problem, they would at least have acknowledged that those who had offered such feeble excuses deserved to be excluded from polite society in the future.

Now Jesus turned from telling an unbelievable story to making a very believable point. The use of “I tell you” (v. 24) emphasized the application of the story to the audience. That the word ‘you’ is plural indicates that Jesus is speaking to His audience and not the master to his slave. They had heard Jesus use this phrasing before. It was always His way of focusing the attention of the audience on His main point.

When teaching about persistence in prayer, “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs” (Luke 11:8).

When proclaiming woes against the Pharisees, “I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation” (Luke 11:51).

When speaking of the challenges of discipleship “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division” (Luke 12:51).

When emphasizing the importance of repentance “<sup>2</sup>Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? <sup>3</sup>I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:2-3).

These are but a few examples. Jesus was serious. He had a point to make. He was talking about the kingdom of God.

In the story, the host naturally represented God, and the banquet was His invitation to eternal life. Those guests who had received the first invitation were the nation of Israel. In biblical terms, this invitation had been given by the prophets. The Jews were the chosen people, the “<sup>4</sup>Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises” (Romans 9:4).

The time for the banquet to begin was represented by the advent of the Messiah. This was proclaimed by John the Baptist who announced that “<sup>16</sup>as for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:16-17). However, like the guests in the story, Israel rejected this second invitation. Wrapped up in excuses of self-righteousness and descent from Abraham, the Pharisees saw no need to heed the message of the coming of the Messiah.

Ultimately the excuses offered involved physical possessions and personal relationships. These have ever been used to reject Christ. Always there is something, or someone, more important. Jesus understood this and was explicit and emphatic in His understanding of discipleship, “<sup>26</sup>if anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his

own life, he cannot be My disciple. . . <sup>33</sup>So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions” (Luke 14:26, 33).

The nation of Israel had accepted the promise of the Messiah but rejected the person of the Messiah. They had believed the prophecies but rejected the Savior. As in the story, they had said ‘yes’ to the first invitation but ‘no’ to the second. They liked the idea of a banquet, but were unwilling to make the commitment to attend when it really mattered. The judgment of the host was absolute, “behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Luke 13:35).

The reality of this judgment came to Israel in AD 70 with the destruction of the temple under the Roman general, and soon to be emperor, Titus. The judgment continued with the diaspora of Jews around the Mediterranean in the centuries that followed. It has continued through two millennia as Jews have been singled out for persecution. The words of Jesus have been borne out dramatically, “he who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

But this wrath is not physical only. It is eternal. As Paul put it,

“<sup>6</sup>For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup>and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, <sup>8</sup>dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup>These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

But what of those who did attend the banquet. Who are they really? They are the spiritually humble and weak. Those who know who they are in the eyes of a holy and righteous God. Some suggest the illustration is so specific as to mean that the first group represented by the town are the Jewish remnant, and the second group of those beyond society are Gentiles. Perhaps so, but what can be relied on is that those who eventually come to the banquet are those like the tax collector who were “unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’” (Luke 18:13).

### **Takeaways**

Let us rejoice that God has provided generously for our salvation here and eternal life in heaven. Nothing we need now is withheld, and nothing our purified hearts in heaven will want will be held back.