

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Great Banquet

Part 10 - July 29, 2007

[VIDEO: CHUCKANUT MANOR]

Imagine being invited to lavish dinner. You say, "Yes!" to the invitation because it sounds fun, it sounds filling, and it sounds free! But, when it comes time to go, you can't find your black socks, your favorite rerun is on TV, and you had a pretty big lunch. It wouldn't take much effort ... but it would take effort.

In the parable of The Great Banquet, Jesus tells about a group of guests who assumed there'd be plenty more parties to attend. He was speaking to Pharisees and experts in the Law.

[One of them] said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." 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.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' 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.' 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'" - *Luke 14:15-24 NIV*

I *misremembered* this parable as speaking to those who *refuse* the invitation to come to God's Kingdom (represented by the banquet). But just the opposite is true. It's speaking to those who've *accepted* His gracious invitation.

A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. - *Luke 14:16 NIV*

In the well-to-do circles of Jesus' day, invitations were sent in advance (think: R.S.V.P.) to know how many to prepare for. In the day's before refrigeration, the animals were butchered, and the fresh ingredients were purchased and prepped on the day.

This is also before telephones and clocks. So, just before the meal was to be served, a messenger was sent out to the guests to let them know that everything was ready.

At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready." - *Luke 14:17 NIV*



This changes everything. They had accepted the invitation; this was just the call to come. Commitment must be followed by action. Jesus is telling this story at a banquet (just like the one in the parable). So, let's back up to the beginning of chapter fourteen, and see who is on the guest list:

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him ... - *Luke 14:1-4 NIV*



It's the "Sabbath" and Jesus is being "carefully watched". They laid a trap. The man with dropsy was planted. A diseased man would've *never* been invited. Do you know what "dropsy" (i.e. edema) is? It's swollen tissue, often in the extremities.

Jesus turns the tables on them and asks what He should do. If they say *not* to heal the man, they'll appear heartless; if they say to *heal* him, they'll violate their strict religious code. So, they clam up, and Jesus puts up. And the mood continues to get more and more tense, and less and less friendly.

And then, one of them spouts off an old Jewish cliché:

Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. - *Luke 14:15 NIV*

They believed this would take place on earth when the Messiah came; they thought it was exclusive to Jews; and because of their link to Abraham they thought they were *guaranteed* a seat. Quite a statement to make when Christ is sitting two seats down!

And this prompts the parable. The banquet is a metaphor for the highly anticipated and Heavenly celebrated arrival of Christ. The first invitation came through Moses and the prophets, and the "call to come" came through John the Baptist and Jesus. He just performed an unquestionable miracle in their midst! But, the chosen people, who boasted of their invitation, are refusing to join the party: "They all alike began to make excuses".

Let's look at the excuses Jesus uses in His story:



I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. - *Luke 14:18 NIV*

He's preoccupied with his property. His possession possessed him. What, he couldn't wait till morning?



I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. - *Luke 14:19 NIV*

That's lots of ox. One person could only work one yoke; this guy was head of a big farming enterprise.

His profession took precedence, and he allowed a paycheck to rob him of true wealth. Who buys oxen without test-riding 'em first?!



I just got married, so I can't come. - Luke 14:20 NIV

He put a human relationship over his heavenly one; which is a recipe for disaster in a marriage. Weddings were planned a year in advance! These excuses are legitimate ... but they're not *sufficient*.

Q: If you've *received* Jesus, do you respond with action when His messenger says that everything's ready for your participation? Or, do you tend to make excuses when the Spirit calls you to prayer, worship, meditation, fellowship, or evangelism?



"But, Lord, my things." "But, Lord, my schedule." "But, Lord, my friends and family." "But ... But ... But ..."

Well, according to this parable: We've got to get off our "buts"!

And we're told how God feels about our big ol' "buts":

Then the owner of the house became angry ... - Luke 14:21 NIV



The warning is both startling and alarming: Even though I've accepted the invitation, if I don't respond, I'll be replaced! The host went to incredible effort and tremendous expense; he's not about to let his preparations and provisions go to waste.

Go out quickly ... and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. - Luke 14:21 NIV

These were the religious outcasts (like the man with dropsy). It was assumed that the suffering of these "undesirables" was God's punishment for a sin they had committed (possibly in the womb!).

And Jesus shatters this thinking: In *His* Kingdom, at *His* banquet, the unacceptable are made acceptable simply by *responding* to His invitation. No matter who you are, or what you've done, your presence is requested!



Plan "B" (in the parable) was God's Plan "A" all along! Do you know why? Because: God hates ungratefulness. And don't think He doesn't notice it. Remember when Jesus healed the ten lepers?

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him — and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" - Luke 17:15-18 NIV



The host didn't chase after the invited, ungrateful guests; He sent his servant to those who'd be willing, eager, and grateful! This parable gives us a fantastic definition of what true evangelism (i.e. witnessing) consists of: Servants telling the hungry where to find food. The lost aren't commanded to come to the church; we're commanded to go to them.

And, in the parable, the servant does just that, and then reports back that there're still some empty seats.

Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full." - *Luke 14:23 NIV*

This adds to those seen as under God's curse, the Gentiles, who were seen as being God's enemies. Notice the phrase: "make them come in". This statement was misused in the past to justify physical force to compel people to be baptized and to join the church. That's counter to the whole spirit of Jesus!

Mid-East etiquette required those of low social status to refuse invites from those of higher status. These invitations were understood as polite gestures, not intended to be accepted. These outcasts would be skeptical and unsure. They'd need to be persuaded and convinced that they really are wanted and welcome. But once they got there, the atmosphere would be *electric*! This is how He wants His house: filled with joyful hearts. We're called to keep inviting, encouraging, and welcoming.

I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet. -
Luke 14:24 NIV



It was common for a host to send portions of food to those who were unable to attend. But, because the refusals were offensive, everything was to be divided among the grateful responders. There'll be no "Take Out" in the Kingdom. You have to commit; you have to act; you have to come in; and you have to receive. "Everything is now ready" ... are you?

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. The Lord will NOT welcome the lame ... excuses.
2. God wants us to persuade people into those empty seats.
3. If we don't respond there'll always be another invitation.
4. Only the Lord can save our "buts"