

I. Introduction

Good morning! This photo is from the Returnees party last July; you can see that we had a lot of fun. Most people love parties. Food and fellowship bring joy to our hearts and help us to know and love one another more. We can find many parties in the Bible. In the Old Testament, they pretty much had a party every time there was a wedding, a victory in battle, a new friendship, or a new alliance between leaders.



God also loves parties. The festivals at the temple in Jerusalem were times of worship, but they were also big parties with lots of eating and drinking. The Bible even uses a banquet as a description of heaven in several passages. And, when you read the gospels, you may notice that Jesus is always eating and drinking with all kinds of people. Jesus went to parties hosted by tax collectors, Pharisees, disciples, and relatives. This painting by Paolo Veronese (1563) shows his idea of the wedding party at Cana, when Jesus turned the water into wine. I think they definitely had a lot of fun.



Take a look at Isaiah 25:6-9. Here the prophet is describing heaven as a feast. This is important background for Luke 14, and also, by the way, for the last three chapters of Revelation.

Isaiah 25:6-9, “[6] On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine -- the best of meats and the finest of wines. [7] On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; [8] he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.” The Lord has spoken. [9] In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”

Sounds like a big party to me - a party celebrating and giving thanks for the salvation that God freely gives to those who trust in Him. Isaiah penned these prophetic words more than 700 years before the time of Jesus. So, all of the Jewish people in Jesus’ time would have been familiar with this image of heaven as a great feast. With that in mind, let’s read **Luke 14:15-24**. As you remember from last week, Jesus is a dinner guest at the home of a prominent Pharisee.

II. Scripture Luke 14:15-24 (NIV)

[15] When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." [16] Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. [17] At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' [18] "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.' [19] "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' [20] "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' [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.' [22] " 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' [23] "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. [24] I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' "

III. Teaching

Last week, we saw how Jesus taught the Pharisees saying (**Luke 14:13-14**), “**But when you give a**

banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, [14] and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” In today’s passage, we see the response that one of those present had to Jesus’ words. **Luke 14:15, “When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”**” In saying this, the man is praising God, but the nuance is that he is assuming that he will be one of those blessed to eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

One key point of Jesus’ answer is that this man, and others present, had a false confidence about their salvation. Now, we can be confident in our salvation if we trust in the Lord and in His love and grace. The Lord promises salvation to those who place their faith in Him. But, the Pharisees tended to think that they would go to heaven by their works and by their status as descendants of Abraham. But the Isaiah passage we read emphasized trusting God, and today’s passage in Luke emphasizes responding to God’s invitation. So, Jesus is warning them that they will not be at the heavenly banquet unless they change their ways. **Luke 14:16-17, “Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. [17] At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’”** The, “certain man,” points to God, and the great banquet takes place in heaven. The, “many guests,” are the nation of Israel. In those days, invitations often came in two parts. The first part was the advance notice to people that they were invited to a banquet on a certain day. The second part came as an announcement that everything was ready. All of the cooking and preparation for a large banquet took time and you didn’t want the guests to come until everything was ready.

As Jesus began to speak, the Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting at the table may have been pleased to hear Jesus using the familiar image from Isaiah 26. However, they probably became anxious quickly as Jesus continued. **Luke 14:18-19, “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.’ [19] “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’”** In case you haven’t noticed, these are poor excuses. In fact, these are worse than poor excuses; these replies are insults to the person who is hosting the banquet.

With these words, Jesus is rebuking the Jewish leaders present. Jesus is agreeing that, yes, you are all certainly invited to the great banquet in heaven. But in the end, you won’t be there. You won’t be there because you love the things of this world more than you love God. This is a warning for all of us as well. It is wonderful to hear that God loves us and that He invites us to have a loving relationship with Him. Many people are happy to hear that God wants them to be saved. The words of **2 Peter 3:9** speak wonderfully of God’s love. **“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”**

God loves each person and He desires for all to be saved. But the time comes when we must respond to the Lord’s invitation. And then we must make a choice. Those who love the things of this world more than they love God will make excuses. But those who love God will leave the things of this world behind and go into the great banquet and rejoice with the Lord.

Everyday there is always something that seems important. It is easy to find excuses. But be careful. We need to examine our lifestyles and our hearts. What are the things that keep us from spending time with the Lord and responding to His invitation? It may be a good thing, or a not-so-good thing, but if it keeps us away from God, it is disaster. Fields need plowing and oxen need to be cared for. Business needs to be taken care of; our jobs are important. And it is even okay to take some time for fun. But the Kingdom of God must come first if we love the Lord.



Luke 14:20, “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’” At first glance, this might at least seem like a better excuse than fields or oxen. But in the end, it is just another excuse. If this man really loved his wife, then he would take her along to the banquet. If we know the love of the Lord and the wonders of salvation, then we will want all of our family to come along with us in responding to God’s invitation. It is so sad that some people use family as an excuse to not follow the Lord. If we use family as an excuse to refuse Jesus’ invitation to heaven, then we will bring disaster on our family and ourselves. There is a better way. Come to Jesus and bring your family also. Then you can celebrate together at the great party in heaven.

Luke 14:21, “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 is loving; but God is also righteous. And God is right to be angry when people refuse His generous offer of the free gift of salvation through faith. With these words, Jesus is warning the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God will be filled with others if they refuse to come to the banquet because they love the things of this world. Heaven will be filled; the banquet hall will be full. Notice though that in verse 21 the owner of the house is still sending his servant only to places within the town. Here the town can be seen as representing Israel. The servant is bringing all of the Jewish people that the Pharisees looked down upon into the banquet hall. In the thinking of the Pharisees, poverty and physical handicaps were signs of judgment from God; the Pharisees saw these people as sinners. But in God’s eyes, these people are precious, and now these are the people who are sitting at the table for the feast.

Luke 14:22-23, “‘Sir,’ the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ [23] ‘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.’” Many have come in, but there is still room. Finally the master sends the servant out of the town to the country roads and far places. After this, Jesus gives a final strong warning to the people at the table with Him, but the parable ends here, before the servant returns from this mission. Why? Because the servant has been sent beyond the Jewish town into the country roads; in other words, the servant has been sent to the non-Jewish nations - that’s us. God is still seeking people today to come to His great banquet in heaven.

Some of you have been listening and thinking this passage is about salvation and has nothing for you because you already know Jesus. But in the Bible, those who know God are also called servants of the Lord, and so we are included here as the servant who is sent out to bring others into the banquet. If you know and love the Lord, then you will naturally want to share the love of Jesus with others. But there is an urgency here that might surprise some of us.

The wording is very strong **Luke 14:23** says, **“make them come in.”** Unlike the Jewish people who had long ago received the first invitation through the prophets of the Old Testament, the non-Jewish nations had not yet heard anything about the heavenly banquet planned by God. A gentle invitation would not be enough to bring them in. Powerful persuasion is required. A clear and compelling presentation of the Good News of Jesus will be essential to convince them. These words are no excuse for violence; no one can be forced to believe in God. But more than a gentle invitation may be required.

Do you remember the story of the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19? (Painting by John Martin, 1852) God sent angels to warn Lot and his family so that they would be saved, but Lot found it very difficult to leave the town. A gentle invitation and even words of warning and persuasion were not enough. Finally, Lot and his family had to be led out by the hand. **Genesis 19:15-16, “With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, 'Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.’ [16] When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.”**



If we believe that people need to be saved from the penalty for their sins, then we should be willing to take them by the hand and lead them out of the place of destruction. When words alone were not enough, the angels grasped Lot and his family members by the hand and lead them to safety. When **Luke 14:23** says, **“make them come in,”** this is the image I think of.



If you have friend or family that you have been sharing with, but they just can’t seem to understand about Jesus, then maybe you need to gently take them by the hand and lead them. We lead people to Jesus because we love them. This can be a figurative image about the need to be bolder in your witness, or it can be quite literal. Some people will not come to church or to a small group Bible study, or to Alpha, or even to a Sunday School picnic, or a Returnees party unless you literally take their hand and lead them. Just say, “Hey, this is important. I’m going and I want you to come with me.” Or, tell them, “I am going to read the Bible now and I want you to sit down with me so we

can read it together and talk about it.” Take their hand and lead. That’s how the angels saved Lot and his daughters.

IV. Conclusion

What holds us back from a deeper relationship with Jesus? What excuses have we been using to avoid answering Jesus’ invitation to a deeper relationship? We need to challenge ourselves regularly to let go of things that hinder our response to Jesus. No more excuses. It is time to put the Kingdom of God first in our lives. We also need to challenge ourselves to be bolder in sharing with family and friends. Begin with prayer. Pray bold prayers for that person for a few weeks. Then invite them. Then invite them again. And then, if they haven’t responded to the invitation, take them by the hand and lead them. Lead them to Jesus.

Revelation 19:9, proclaims, **“Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”** God is going to throw a wonderful wedding party for Jesus and His bride, which is the church. Answer the invitation. And be sure to bring your family, friends, and loved ones with you. It is going to be a very big banquet table and the Lord wants every seat filled.

V. Closing Prayer

