



Thanksgiving Eve
November 21, 2012
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Thanks for Inviting Me, But... Luke 14:15-24

Imagine this is your Thanksgiving table, and you've invited a whole slew of your friends. You sit down with your spouse and it goes something like this...

Megan: *Where is everybody?*

Larry: *Oh, you didn't get that email? Art Heitlauf bought a new piece of property to hunt on out near Spokane and he's gonna see if there's anything worth shooting on it. I don't know why he didn't check that out before he bought it, but yeah... I'm no hunter, so what do I know... What about the McGraths?*

Megan: *JoEllen called me earlier. Mark bought a new sea plane. So they wired over the money yesterday. They thought it'd be a good idea to check it out in San Diego today.*

Larry: *Ridiculous!*

Megan: *At least our friends are coming in from out of town. I'm glad Heidi and Jimmy were able to visit even in their first year of marriage. (PAUSE)*

Larry: *(Takes out his phone...) It's a text from Jimmy. He says they were driving and got past Portland, but they stopped at a B&B.*

Megan: *Oh come on, Heidi and Jimmy!? Enough already! This is the worst Thanksgiving. Nobody's coming now.*

Who would you invite to this fully prepared Thanksgiving feast? What would you do with all of the leftover food? Jesus tells a story in Luke 14 about somebody in a very similar situation. Let's read it. (Read Luke 14:15-24)

Jesus is at a dinner party when we pick up this conversation in verse 15. It's a dinner party that Pharisees are hosting, and they've already gotten more than they bargained for. By the time we get to this parable about the Great Banquet, Jesus has already challenged their authority to interpret Scripture, healed a man they considered unclean, corrected them on their behavior as guests and corrected them on their behavior as hosts. So verse 15 opens with what is culturally understood to be a polite, conversational segue, as if the guest is trying to bail Jesus out and get him set on the right track. It's as if he's leading off Jesus' teaching in verse 14 by saying, "Won't it be great when all of us righteous people will be resurrected? Tell me about that, Jesus!"

Look down at verse 15. When the guest who shouts out “Blessed are those who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God” does so, he’s likely referring to a well known passage in Isaiah 25 that refers to a wonderful feast that God puts on for the world. Let’s read it, 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;
- ⁹ he will remove his people’s disgrace
from all the earth.

What a wonderful vision! We know from this passage that when Jesus talks about a feast in the Kingdom of God, he’s talking about what it will be like to be in fellowship, in the very presence of God, at the end of time when all who have died are resurrected to live forever with God. Just like these men sit around a table reclining with Jesus, the expectation we have from the Bible is that being with God forever is going to be something like a tremendous feast that we have here on earth. We’ll enjoy God’s presence and all his riches. God paints for Isaiah a picture of the heavenly feast as all the nations coming together under God and celebrating his goodness, much like the one we see at the end of the Bible in Revelation 21.

But there’s a twist here. This guy who says “Blessed are those who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God” doesn’t actually believe that all the nations will eat at this feast he’s talking about. He believes that only a chosen few will eat at this feast, particularly the chosen ones of Israel. He assumes they’re in, and that they’re the only ones in.

We know this because between the time when Isaiah 25 was written and when Jesus came on the scene, there were a number of rewrites of Isaiah 25! We have three examples of Jewish literature that quote Isaiah 25, but instead of including all the nations, they exclude them! Or worse, one of these rewrites actually made the feast a ruse to attract the nations to, and then God strikes all the nations with lightning while they are feasting. Wow, talk about jealousy!

So the Jews in Jesus time had serious problems with Gentiles coming into the Kingdom of God. They said, “NO! Only those who are chosen, who follow God’s rules, who are not impure, and who are IN can be at this feast!” And you see

when you read the Gospels that anytime Jesus suggests otherwise, he gets some flack.

Jesus knows that when this guy says "Blessed are those..." he's using insider, exclusive language. Jesus wants to reorient their idea of the Kingdom of God-- and to turn it upside down. To correct the misunderstanding of the whole/broken, insider/outsider, righteous/unrighteous distinctions. So he tells this story about a man putting on a feast, inviting some guests, and totally getting the cold shoulder from the insiders.

Before we head into verse 16, let's get a bit of context from the year 30AD. When someone put on a great banquet like this they would send out the equivalent of an RSVP. "Hey, I'm going to have a feast and I'd like you to come." Then, based on how many people were coming he would prepare food. If there weren't too many people coming he might put out chicken, but if it was a big meal he'd slaughter the fatted calf. So verse 16, Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests." They all said yes. The host goes and makes the giant-sized feast. Verse 17, "At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'" So when these guys start making excuses the host already has a table full of food ready for them to eat at. It's kind of a jerk move.

Now lets take a look at the lame excuses these guys give Jesus. Yes, they're all lame excuses and we'll tell you why.

Verse 18, "The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'" Well, back in those days when you bought a piece of property, you were certain to have checked it out before you bought it because it's pretty arid there in the Middle East. You're going to see how much sun it gets, how many rocks are in the ground, that kind of thing. And this process would take months of haggling, because that was the culture. So to say, "Oops, gotta go check out this field I just bought!" was a pretty obvious lame dodge to not come to the feast.

What about the second guy? Verse 19, "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'" Well the same deal applies here. Nobody in the Middle East just buys oxen sight unseen. It would be like buying a used sea plane over the internet without checking it out first. You want to take it for a spin first, right? Well, the same applied to oxen, you want to make sure that they both pull the yoke at the same time, that they're strong oxen. So, lame excuse right?

Now this third guy, his excuse is lame and also incredibly rude. Verse 20, "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'" We struggled to find a way to

put this nicely for the church context, but basically this guy is saying, "I'm not coming because I'm too busy... having conjugal relations with my wife."

Get this, you know it may not be too surprising to find that one of your guests might not be able to make it to something they said they would. But isn't it weird that every guest the host has invited at this point turns him down... and in such rude ways?

Clearly these guys don't like the host of the banquet. In fact, they all seem to hate him! They have totally left him high and dry, with food waiting on the table... food that can't go into a freezer or a fridge. It's all going to rot and the host is going to be left alone at this table by himself.

Here's why we think they hate him: because they knew that he was the kind of host to invite outsiders. They knew this host could invite people they weren't comfortable with. It wouldn't be a feast that brought them honor. Actually, it'd be a feast that would level their status down. And his guests are not interested in the feast because of it.

What if you were invited to a dinner with someone you really admire. Let's say Dawn Davis, our church's Director of Finance, is invited to have dinner with Dave Ramsey, the author of Financial Peace University (She was recently, by the way.) Let's pick on her for a second. She said yes! But then she thought about it—I know I said yes, but you know—Dave's the kind of guy to invite all kinds of people who don't know what to do with their money. I want to talk to Dave about how well my family and Chapel Hill has handled our money. I don't want to be around all those other kinds of people. People on *Baby Step #1*. You know what, I'm going to call up all the church financial planners invited and hatch a plan to show Dave just what we think about this dinner. We'll show him just how unpopular his decision is. Then he'll come crawling back to us. We're the ones who get people to sign up for FPU.

And if you think about it, the Pharisees Jesus was with were much the same way. They're having dinner with him here in Luke 14, but they're the ones who are accusing him of being a winebibber, of hanging out with sinners too much. And they get really uncomfortable when he talked about Gentiles or the poor. These are the guys who rewrote Isaiah 25 to be favorable to themselves after all. And just like the guests of the host in this story, they didn't like Jesus because of who he was willing to hang around, because of who he was willing to invite into his presence.

Now put yourself in their shoes. What if Jesus showed up at your Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow, and he brings with him prostitutes and homeless people and alcoholics. Would you be embarrassed that Jesus spent a lot of time with prostitutes and drunkards? Would you try to set him straight, maybe pull him aside and say, "Jesus, this isn't that kind of party"?

Now put yourself in the shoes of the host in the parable. What would you do if you were the host of this feast and your guests didn't like you? Would you get angry? Would you sulk? I imagine myself sitting at the table, alone, muttering to myself while I try and eat all the food. But what does the master do? His anger turns to grace, and he finds who else might come to his feast. (REPEAT) That's amazing.

The host of the great feast turns his attention away from those who assumed they were in. They don't want to come to this feast! And fixes his attention to those who assumed they were out, and he compels them to come in.

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 compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.'

Remember, while this parable is about a feast, don't get distracted by thinking about who is coming to your Thanksgiving table. The feast is about joyful fellowship with God forever. Who do you consider to be outsiders, those not invited to be with God forever? Who do we as the church act as though could not possibly have an invitation from Jesus? Last Sunday we learned about the Samaritans who the Jews utterly rejected and would have no association with. Pastor Mark encouraged us to be available and accepting of those in our lives we don't give time to or push aside. Those we assume to be outsiders.

We traveled for a wedding last spring. A sorority sister of mine was getting married, and we were so glad to be with friends! Around 2am we were in a rough part of town, enjoying their company though as seminarians we were a bit out of our element. I haven't been to a wedding of believers where we end up at a bar at 2am, you know what I mean? Things got really rough. Larry witnessed his first bar fight. I was in a really dangerous position trying to walk back to the hotel with a friend who needed some assistance. I was uncomfortable and downright scared, really. Just 3 months ago one of my friends, who was there at that wedding, committed her life to following Jesus. One of her very first questions to me was, "How could you have hung out with us at that wedding? She wanted to know if it bothered me that our friends practice homosexuality. Why would you hang out with us, when we drink that much?" All I could say was, I love you. I want to be with you. I would not have been anywhere else that night. It's where Jesus would have been. She thought being a Christian meant distancing herself from our "outsider" friends. But no! Jesus has flipped our world upside down. He loves all peoples and wants us to be with those assumed to be outsiders. God loves them!

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.'" There's an interesting word here in verse 23, "compel." It has a kind of forceful sense to it, like the servant is going out and putting people in headlocks and telling them, "Come to my party!" It's not quite like that actually, but the servant would have had to persuade people that they were actually invited to this party. Let's put it this way. If you were walking down the street one day and someone in a butler's suit comes up to you and says, "Dear sir, the eminent Bill Gates has invited you to a most excellent party. Would you please come along?" Wouldn't you have some doubts? "Seriously, Bill Gates?" That butler would have to compel me to come to the banquet.

Sometimes we're on the other side of that invitation; it's us that need to be compelled. We don't believe we are worthy of such an invitation into joyful fellowship with God. We think, "What do I possibly have to offer? I'm too dirty, too sullied, too messed up."

Maybe we think, "I've got to get myself in order first before I can come. I need to go to church a little while. I need to have all the answers. I need to stop sinning." But Jesus is inviting us in based on no merit of our own at all.

We are not insiders because we earned it or because we have something to offer in return. We aren't outsiders either, unable to come in because of our addictions or illnesses or past relationships. We come only because of the invitation of Jesus.

We want you to come away from this parable with two things. The first one is this: we are invited to the feast. God the Father is the host. He says to us, "Come to my feast. There are no strings attached and no need to repay, just come." It is the very heart of God that he wants everyone to come. It always has been. Remember Isaiah? He was preparing a feast for all the nations. And Jesus has already prepared it all. The work is finished on the cross, and it is time to come and join God in joyful fellowship both now and eternally.

The second thing is this: we are people who invite others to the feast. God intends for us to be like him as a host, inviting everyone—no such thing as insiders and outsiders. Remember from Sunday? He wants us to be like the servant, going out into the highways and byways, finding the people who think they are out, and the people who think they are in, and reminding them that they are all invited to the feast only based on the heart of the host, the heart of God who says, "Come."