

The Hospitality Of God (1)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 November 2021

Preacher: Nate Taylor

[0 : 00] Well, please do, if you have your Bibles with you, open back up to Luke chapter 14. Luke 14 is what we're going to be looking at tonight.

I think a little context is always helpful as we come to a passage, especially if you're just jumping in in the middle of a whole lot that's been going on beforehand. So it's the Sabbath, and Jesus has been invited to a dinner party, as I mentioned earlier, at a house of a ruler of the Pharisees, not just any Pharisee.

He's a ruler of the Pharisees. And so it's probably a pretty nice soiree that's going on. And skipping some details that you can fill in later, but Jesus, he ends up actually, before he tells this parable of the great banquet, he tells a parable of a wedding feast.

Why? Well, because he's noticed at this gathering that people at this dinner, they're trying to sit in the place of highest honor. They're kind of scrambling and elbowing to get to that place.

And so he tells a story about reversal and the need for humility, and he ends it by saying, for everyone who exalts himself, he'll be humbled. And he who humbles himself will be exalted.

[1 : 18] Awkward. Awkward. You can imagine the guests, they start, like, whispering to each other and cheering, I think he's talking about us. And then Jesus kind of spells it out for them and tells them he is indeed talking about them.

He says, don't invite your rich friends to a party, because what's going to happen? You're going to be tempted to think, oh, they can repay me for this. He says, instead, invite those who can't repay you, who can't repay you, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Awkward. Have you ever been at a dinner party where a conversation kind of turns awkward? There's always that one person who tries to cut the tension.

And they do that by trying to say something that everybody can agree on. And so this one guy, he kind of puts his foot forward and he says, blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

To eat bread is a Middle Eastern idiom for, you know, table fellowship. To share a meal would be to have fellowship, deep intimacy with one another. Right? It's a pretty tame statement. He's trying to say, like, hey, we can all agree on this.

[2 : 26] It's getting a little awkward, Jesus. We can all agree on this. Right? It'd be like if you were at a dinner party with a bunch of Glaswegians and the conversation got awkward and somebody's just like, let's make a joke about Edinburgh.

Like, at least we can all laugh at that. Right? Can we all agree at that? Sorry, Callum, wherever you are. And so Jesus is saying, love those different than you.

Those overlooked and the marginalized. They are never going to be able to pay you back in the way that you're used to. And he says, spend your time and your money there.

And this guy goes, yeah, yeah, yeah. Love everyone, right? Blessed is everyone who's going to eat bread in the kingdom of God. And Jesus sees they still don't get it. They're uttering these spiritual platitudes that have not actually connected to the heart.

And so he tells another story. That's where our text is. But before we get into it, let me pray for the preaching of God's word. Father, may these words be your words.

[3 : 32] May our ears hear your truth. May our hearts grasp the ridiculously good news of your love and your forgiveness.

And what the kingdom of God is actually like. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Remember hearing a pastor point out, if you lived between the 2nd and the 16th century, pretty big span of time, and you lived as far east as modern-day Iraq, possibly India, you lived as far west as modern-day Spain, if you lived as far south as modern-day North Africa, and if you lived as far north as this fair country of Scotland, and you were going on a journey, there's no cars or anything like that, and so you would most likely be walking.

For whatever reason, your journey, you were walking along, and it was many days, and you would be tired. And every day, after the sun reached its highest, and it got to the afternoon, you were walking along, you would be scanning the horizon for one thing.

Do you know what that would be? A church. You'd be looking for a church. And sometimes these churches were cathedrals, sometimes they were small chapels, a lot of times they were monasteries, these groups of monks would be there, and part of their rule of life, binding how they were going to run these churches and monasteries, was that they would take in traveling strangers, which is why you'd be on the lookout for one.

No matter what else you knew about the church, you knew this. That is a place where they would show me welcome. Well, they'll take care of me, body and soul.

[5 : 18] Well, they'll welcome me in as one of their own, and I'll find food and rest, and be set off with their blessing. This practice of hospitality, because that's what the word hospitality means, love of the stranger.

Hospitality means love of the stranger. And it was so vital to their life, that they actually had all of these manuals that were written about how to practice hospitality as the body of Christ, or as the group of monks or nuns.

Hospitality. That's what we're going to be talking about tonight, and we're going to be talking about for the next three weeks in the evening. Hospitality. Welcome. There's a lot of different variations of it, but that's what we're going to be talking about.

And nowadays, if I sent you to a bookstore, and I said, I would love for you to go find a book on hospitality. Do people still go to bookstores? Or just go on Amazon? Are there actually bookstores? Not many bookstores in America anymore.

But if I sent you to a bookstore, where I said, go look in the hospitality section, find a book on hospitality, what you would probably bring back to me would be what? Something about, you know, what type of forks to use, how to make the perfect meal to make your guests feel welcomed, how to keep the conversation going at a party.

[6 : 34] In fact, if you're in the hospitality sector, what does it mean? You work for a restaurant, a hotel, etc. But here's the thing. Biblical hospitality, it is not tea parties and place settings and bland conversation.

It's an important thing. So important that in the two places that the Apostle Paul lists the qualification for elders, those who are going to lead the church and rule it well and lovingly and set a good example for the whole flock, what does he say?

They should have a good marriage, a good reputation, be able to teach God's word. Of course, right? You know what else it lists? Both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They must be hospitable.

You ever think, when you hear the word hospitality, do you think, that is a vibrant expression of my faith? That's what the Bible says. One of the things I love seeing here in Scotland is old church buildings.

It's an American thing. Anything over 100 years old is utterly fascinating to us. And so as I walk along, I love looking at all these new church buildings.

[7 : 44] And if I'm walking by or if I'm driving by and I'm able to see, I always want to see what is the name of that place, what's the denomination. I kind of wonder the story and the history. I can't tell you how many times already I've come across them and it doesn't have any church on it, name on it, or denomination at all.

Instead, it's a bar or a nightclub or some sort of different hospitality. These church buildings are not used for worship anymore.

I don't know about you. When you see that happening in the culture, what can tend to be our temptation too is as we see things going that way, as we see other churches shuddering, we see a culture growing more and more antagonistic towards Christianity, writing it off.

Here's the temptation a lot of times. Batten down the hatches. Pull up the bridge. Shudder the windows. Let's take care of us and our own and let us please carry this precious truth on.

And what ends up happening is we miss hospitality. We don't want our churches turning into vapid entertainment, but we can't practice hospitality if our buildings and our homes and our hearts are closed to those different than us and new to us.

[9 : 03] What I want to claim from our passage in Luke 14, this parable, is that hospitality is a fundamental expression of the gospel. Where God is the host, where we are his guests, and then where we in turn are called to be hosts ourselves.

Okay? Hospitality is a fundamental expression of the gospel. Where God is the host, we are his guests, and we are in turn called to be hosts. If you're a note taker and you like outlines, there's three points.

First, the picture of hospitality. Second, the foundation of hospitality. And lastly, the practice of hospitality. The picture of hospitality, the foundation of hospitality, and the practice of hospitality.

First off, the picture of hospitality, it's the parable that Jesus tells. So he grabs the attention of his audience by saying, a man once gave a great banquet and he invited many.

It's still practiced in the Middle East and a lot of conservative areas even today. If you were going to have something like that, there would be what's called a double invitation. You would send out the first invitation and you would get your RSVPs.

[10 : 08] Much like what happens now if you're going to go to a wedding. Right? And the reason was is because it was very costly to throw a big feast like that and you needed to know the exact number on the guest list so you could prepare accurately.

So that first invitation has already gone out. And if you were to say yes to it, you would be duty bound to come and to show up. You know, they killed the fattened calf for you.

You wouldn't just ignore it and make an excuse not to come. In the same way, it would be very rude nowadays to RSVP to a wedding, say yes, and then just to not show up. So the host, he'd get everything ready and then a servant would go out with a second invitation saying, come.

Come. Everything is prepared. Now is the time of the feast. It's time to come and to have our celebration. And everything's going smoothly. The invitations are accepted.

The animal is butchered. The meat is cooked. The guests are summoned. And then all at once, what happens? It's a litany of excuses. There's this great commentary by a guy named Ken Bailey on the parables in the Gospel of Luke.

[11 : 14] And he lived in the Middle East for over 40 years. And a lot of the same practices and cultures and customs still go on now to this day.

And it gave him great insights into the parables of Jesus. And one of the things he mentions about these excuses, it kind of comes across, I mean, even if you don't know much about it, but especially in that culture is how ridiculously lame these excuses are.

The first excuse, just bought a field. Got to go check it out. He says, in that day, you would never spend money on a field unless you knew every square foot of it.

There's no way that you would spend money. It would be like the Western equivalent of canceling on your house. I just bought a new house on the phone. I need to go drive around the neighborhood and make sure it's safe.

Second excuse, can't come, just bought five oxen, I really need to go and examine them. Again, he says the excuse, it just wouldn't happen. Why? Because if you bought a team of oxen that are going to plow together, you need to make sure that they can actually work together.

[12 : 25] You would never buy any oxen unless you've actually inspected them. It's like saying, hey, again, it's on my phone, I bought a car, I need to go make sure it starts. Third excuse, I just got married.

Congratulations on your marriage, good for you. But it definitely wasn't that day. Because in a small town, they wouldn't have a great banquet at the same time as a wedding.

These things, a small town couldn't, it'd be competing. There wouldn't be enough people to go to both. There is absolutely no way. It shows that all the excuses to not come to the great banquet are not good excuses.

So what happens? Well, the host, he's naturally upset. this is the utmost rudeness imaginable from the guests. But what's his response? Determination to have people at his feast.

Those who reject the invitation, they are convinced the party cannot go on without them. But the host, he sends his servant to the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind, and brings them in.

[13 : 34] He sends his servant to the outcasts, the riffraff, the rag, the muffins. Says, come in. Come in to the feast. These are the ones that society would not think would actually be invited to banquets.

But still, there's room. There's still room. And the host, he urns, do you even read it? It's like he is mad. He is, he desires a full banquet.

It's not enough just to have some seats full. He wants all of the seats full that he has prepared. And so again, he sends out the servant and he tells him to go to the highways and to the hedges to bring people in from beyond the town.

Highways and hedges oftentimes would be ways to refer to the Gentiles. Those on the outskirts. Gentiles, which I'm guessing is mostly people in this room. Unless there's some people of Jewish origin here.

And the host tells the servant, what is he supposed to do to those who are at the highways and the hedges? Compel them to come in. Again, the commentator, Ken Bailey, he's very helpful on this because he says in that culture in the Middle East an unexpected invitation it must be refused.

[14 : 51] It's too much. It's too gracious. It's too unexpected of a thing. Too merciful and extravagant. Too presumptuous for you just to say, oh, okay, I'll come.

So it was up to the inviter who had extended an unexpected invitation to persuade and to compel the person invited to come. They had to insist on the genuineness of this outrageous invitation.

No, no, this is real. No, you are really a desired guest. Seriously, you. The host wants you. Come.

The offer is real. I will not stop until you come. All right, so that's the story, but what does it all mean? Well, the listeners, they'd be able to identify obvious themes from the story to this point.

The host is God. It's servant, and some commentators say Jesus, and later say maybe the church as they go out, but the servant being Jesus. And he's been going around announcing Jesus in his earthly ministry that the kingdom of God is here.

[16 : 00] God's rule and reign are being put on display, but not in the ways that people quite expected. The banquet is the long-awaited banquet of the Messiah. Isaiah 25, verse 6.

Listen to this. On this mountain, meaning from Israel, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples, all peoples, like the highways and the hedges, not just Israel.

A feast of rich food. A feast of well-aged wine. So God's work is going to bring in all sorts of people, and the picture of it is a feast.

And people at the dinner party who pick up on Jesus' drift a little bit, right? But here's the problem. In between the end of the Old Testament and where Jesus shows up in the New Testament, the leaders and the people of Israel, you know who they started to write out of the story?

The nations. The highways and the hedges. And not just that, but they said there had to be, you had to attain a certain level. You had to be like this.

[17 : 04] And so all of a sudden, you had to live up to their level and saying those are the only ones who would be worthy to eat at the Messiah's feast. But Jesus comes and he says, now is the time of the feast.

Time is now. And all of a sudden, there's all sorts of excuses. He eats with sinners. He can't be the Messiah. This can't be the feast.

He doesn't keep our laws in the way that we do. He doesn't pay enough attention to really important people. And the point of the parable is that they're missing out on the very nature of the kingdom.

And they're in danger of being on the outside of the kingdom to reject this invitation. And the invite is going to go out even further beyond the bounds of the villages to the Gentiles.

And they're going to come in because the host wants a full table at his feast. And this invitation, it goes out to those thought to be unworthy so that nobody misses the point.

[18 : 06] You can in no way compensate the host for this grace. It's such an extravagant invitation that you have to be compelled to come in.

Okay, this parable is for people 2,000 years ago. No, no, Jesus came to his own. His own didn't receive him. I'm not rejecting him. How does this apply to us tonight, here, in Glasgow?

Well, don't forget the setting of the parable. The hospitality of the host in the parable is supposed to be reflected in their hospitality and how they live their lives.

To accept the invitation means that the party guests become party hosts in turn. To celebrate God's kingdom in the right way would mean for those at the bottom of the pile they would actually hear it as good news.

How? How does this fit with all of scripture? Second point is the foundation of hospitality. The foundation to this parable and talk about hosts and party and guests and welcome and unexpected grace is all of scripture.

[19 : 13] Jesus isn't just making something up about God. He's not just saying something out of the blue that you wouldn't be able to know if you didn't read the story of the Bible. One, a story where God is the yearning host.

So now I want to lay a little bit more of a theological foundation. This is going to go on for the weeks to come. 30,000 foot journey through scripture, right? The Bible says that before the wind rustled in the leaves, before the smell of dew was on the ground, who existed?

God. And this one true God exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all of eternity, constantly giving this call of invitation and embrace.

Three and yet one. And so God, when he creates, the God of invitation and embrace, he creates the world. Why?

Well, those shorter catechisms for kids help us. Why did God create all things? For his own glory. Of course. Yes. What does that mean? It means God doesn't create out of need and dependence.

[20 : 18] He wasn't saying, I'm missing something in and of myself. I'm just not happy enough. I need some guests at my party. No, he creates out of fullness. Why did God create? Still, why?

Out of his good pleasure, out of desire because God wanted to. He wanted to. What other answer could there be, right? God created the world because he wanted to invite the world into his own loving life.

So this is what I want you to see. God, before we meet him as redeemer, we meet him as creator. And this act of creation is an act of invitation and hospitality. So everything that exists, those created in his image, mountains and valleys, skies and seas, wind, feather, and bone, they all exist at the invitation of God.

They exist as his honored guests. And when he creates man, he puts him in the garden and what does he do with him? He walks with him in the cool of the garden, delights in him, communes with him.

But man rejects this invitation, turns back on the host, goes and tries to dine on other things to fill himself. And yet, God is still a host, a yearning host, one who desires people to come to his table.

[21 : 31] And this is why you see in Abraham, he comes and he invites Abraham to come and to be a great nation. And he says, through you, Abraham, the hedges and the highways, the Gentiles, are going to be blessed through you.

He calls Israel out of slavery to come and to dine with him. And did you notice in that passage we read earlier in Exodus 24, what do the elders do on the mountain with God? They feast.

They feast with him. He is the one who is a shepherd who prepares a table for us even in the presence of our enemies. He is the one who cries out through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 55, come and dine on the richest of fare.

What is God like? God is a host. And he yearns to have people come to his banquet. And then comes this guy, Jesus, who is somehow both host and servant.

And his first words to his disciples are what? Come. Follow me. And his first miracle is what? A party has fallen flat. Wine has run out.

[22 : 35] And he creates the best tasting wine anybody has ever put to their lips. And he shows himself to be the true lord of the feast. And some of his favorite stories to tell are ones about lost sons who come back home and a party is thrown for them.

And he says on the night that he is betrayed, take, eat. This is my body. This is my blood. It's given for you. And some of the last words in scripture, we hear the call of hospitality again.

Come, for everything is now ready. The spirit and the bride say come. And let he who hears say come. And let the one who is thirsty come. Did you notice that? The spirit and the bride say come.

And let the one who hears, in turn, the guest becomes what? An inviter. A host. Come. They bring that same message.

A parable fits very neatly into the sweep of scripture. Our conviction as the church should be that we are gathering servants, inviting in all who would listen, showing hospitality in our church, in our parties, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our workplace, not just to those who can reciprocate, but also to those who have no plans and no means of doing so.

[23 : 56] We're called to imitate the servant Jesus. Okay. There's a lot of theology and explaining of a parable. How do we embody this message of God as a yearning host?

Last point. It's the practice of hospitality. And there'll be more in the weeks to come, but let me just mention a few things. First is, just ask yourself this week, do you have any margin?

It's easy to pack our lives full. Is there any margin in your life for you to invite people? Invite them to church?

Into your home? For coffee? Maybe this is calling for some things to go out of our life so we can be the church.

Second thing, you know, who isn't busy, right? Even if you try not to be busy, somehow you find things to do nowadays and you're always busy. This practice of hospitality and invitation by God's people, you know, I don't want you to think of it as just one more thing to tack on to your to-do list of so many things and you're looking at it and you're like, okay, there's like 25 things, number 26, be hospitable, get some imagination and I don't know, Nate told me to be hospitable and I'm trying to think of some way to do that in the next couple months.

[25 : 17] I mean, yeah, maybe, but also listen, listen, I want you to think of this as a framework. Where are you already? Where are the places that you hang out? Who are the people that you talk to?

Where is your time already spent? Who are the neighbors who you go on walks with? Where are the places that you frequent? Where do you work? Those are the places that the Lord is calling you to be hospitable and to practice these things.

It's not just one more task. Where can I show hospitality where I already am? What does it look like for me to imitate this call to invite people into my life, into my home, to invite them to the great banquet?

Third thing, invite someone to coffee or your home or a hike, whatever it is, in the next couple weeks. Invite them.

To give an invitation, it's a very Christian thing to do. Invite someone. Let's put this into practice. And let me say this too. Maybe don't just invite the person who's your first choice.

[26 : 28] Go down the list a little bit. It's not the easiest ones to hang out that God's calling us to be hospitable towards. As great as that is, you know, it's not that Jesus is saying don't hang out with your friends, but it goes beyond that and it goes inviting people into those places where you're already hanging out with your friends.

To invite them into that. Wouldn't it be great if you had a group of Christian friends? It's not like abandon them and go do something else, but what does it look like to invite a non-Christian into that? Hmm.

Last application. Compel them. A major component of hospitality is compelling people to the invitation.

You know, people, nowadays, we resist things that make us feel like we owe somebody. Right? We never want to feel like we owe somebody anything. So compel them that your offer of grace asks for nothing in return.

Demonstrate that it's a genuine invitation by not giving up. And you see, there's this overlap between hospitality and evangelism. There's a hospitality that happens of just inviting people into our lives.

[27 : 41] And there's a hospitality also that points them towards the great banquet. And how many times have you felt or have you heard from someone else? If they really knew me, they wouldn't want me in their home.

God doesn't want somebody like me at his table. I'm worthless scum. Maybe I can just get the crumbs underneath. I've messed up too much.

I can't repay it. Here's my encouragement towards you. Compel them. How? Well, in some ways, this takes you having the hospitality of transparency to say, yeah, me too.

Me too. You don't just share your home, but you share your story. And you know, if you're here this evening and that's you right now, you feel that you have to resist this offer of hospitality.

That sounds too good. The God who's always existed wants to bring me in as his honored guest, actually wants to feed me? No way.

[28 : 50] That can't be where true joy is. That can't be the good life. That can't be enough. I'm too undeserving. Oh, how I would long to compel you with the grace of Jesus.

I tell you my story. My struggle with that. That his grace is real and it's true and it's deep and it's for you.

He wants those from the highways and the hedges to come in. In the Jim Crow era and into the civil rights movement in the United States, segregation going on between whites and blacks, there was a book for African Americans called The Green Book.

I think a movie was made about it. I've never seen it. It was called The Green Book. And it was published in order to tell people of color if they were going to go on a journey, if they were to travel, where could you stay where you would be shown hospitality, where you would be safe?

Because a lot of times if you walked into the wrong place or walked into the wrong area of town, it would be quite dangerous for you. And this Green Book said, here's a place you can stay, you can eat, you will be welcomed as you're traveling.

[30 : 12] Here's my point in sharing that in closing. The church is to be the Green Book. It's telling people that they are welcomed, that they are safe, that they will be cared for.

And our homes are to be places listed along that where we share our things. It's going to cost us our time and our money. But we know the God who invited us in from the hedges and the highways.

If he did that for us, how could we not do likewise? Let's pray to him right now and ask for his help in this. Father, you are the one who welcomes us with kindness and clothes us with righteousness.

Your righteousness. We pray that you would compel us by your grace to hold fast to your promises of welcome. That you would grip our hearts with the love for those made in your image.

That you'd grow us in an ability to show welcome and love the way that you do. That we'd be bold to extend this invitation of grace. That we'd invite people into our lives.

[31 : 23] Into those areas that we like to corner off and to keep in our safe little treasured space.
That we'd invite others into that. That we'd show the hospitality of Christ.
That we'd welcome strangers and in doing so that we'd be welcoming you. Spirit we need
your help in this. In Christ we pray this and ask this in your name.
Amen.