

How to Enjoy God's Banquet

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Date: 17 March 2024

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[0:00] And as you are seated, it would be great if you could grab your pew Bible or regular Bible and turn back to Luke chapter 14 as we come close to the end of our series looking at Luke's gospel because Easter is almost upon us.

It's quite early this year, isn't it? And we'll come back to Luke's gospel at the beginning of next year. But last January, there was an article online that talked about the nine things you should stop doing when at a dinner party, according to the etiquette experts, because apparently there are a lot of dinner guests out there who behave badly, like this one who went to a house and took one bite out of every apple in the fruit bowl and put them back.

Can you imagine having a guest like that? Or another guy at university brought his mate over for dinner and they had his mum's chilli and the mate said at the top of his voice, this is not good.

Do you have anything else for me to eat? And the friend goes on to say, it's a bit hard to see on the screen. Needless to say, we weren't friends after that. No one insults mum's chilli. I wonder if you've ever, though, been at a dinner party and seen a guest behaving badly.

Or perhaps you've been a guest and you were insulted by the host. Or today, Jesus faces both. But first, let me briefly recap last week, which actually prepares us for this week.

[1:26] You see, last week, Jesus introduced the language of feast. In chapter 13, verse 29, he talked about people coming from every direction of the world and taking their place at the feast in the kingdom of God.

And Ricky rightly highlighted how this feast will be better than we can imagine. And so if you remember his illustration from his son, Kai, about his toy Volvo, it's like our earthly banquets are the toy Volvos and God's banquet is the real Volvo.

But no offence to Kai, I think we can do better than that. God's banquet, it will be like a real Ferrari. A Ferrari of a feast.

I saw one of these up at Shopping Town last week, actually. I was very tempted to take a selfie, but I didn't. I was worried about security. Or as our first reading put it, on this mountain, God will provide a feast of rich food for all peoples from different nations, east, west, north, south, and so on, and describes it as the best of meats and the finest of wines.

In other words, it will be better than the best banquet with friends you have ever had. And we also saw last week that those who enjoy this feast are those who enter the narrow door, those whom Jesus knows.

[2:56] But who exactly are those? What kind of attitude are we to have if we want to be known by Christ and invited to take our place at his Father's feast?

Well, this week we see. For Jesus will use the bad banquet behavior he sees to show us the attitude that we are to have in order to take our place at God's feast.

And the first group behaving badly are sadly the Pharisees again. So point one, verse one. One Sabbath when Jesus went to eat in a house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.

There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. Edema, we call it today, I think. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?

But they remained silent. And so taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. Here in verse one, we're told that this is an important banquet.

[4:07] And we know it's important because it's at the house of a prominent or ruling Pharisee. This is the boss's place, in other words. Plus, it happens on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was a special day. And so, you know, a special day at the boss's house. This is an important banquet, isn't it? It's the kind you dress to impress for.

But notice also at the end of verse one, what the Pharisees and experts in the law were doing. They were watching Jesus carefully, weren't they?

Why? Were they worried that Jesus had an allergy and so were genuinely looking out to care for him? Or on the flip side, were they worried Jesus would steal the silver and so were keeping an eye on him?

Well, no, of course. They were watching to see if he'd break the Sabbath again, like we saw two weeks ago. Remember, for them, healing was work.

[5:06] And God's law said you weren't allowed to work on the Sabbath. But what makes this behavior bad is that they've actually set Jesus up to tear him down.

Verse two literally starts with, And behold, which I've got in the yellow there on the screen. The word behold that Luke actually uses kind of makes it sound like this man just suddenly appears out of nowhere.

And he does. I mean, this is an important dinner party at the prominent Pharisee's house. Do you really think this kind of man would normally be on the guest list? Of course not.

But he's planted there. What's more, verse three, Luke literally writes, Jesus answered the Pharisees. But they haven't actually said anything.

So why does Luke use the word answer? Well, again, because he's responding to this setup, you see. Jesus is invited to this banquet simply to be torn down, which is not dinner party etiquette, is it?

[6:11] You don't invite someone to your house simply to tear them down, do you? It's bad banquet behavior, and it backfires. Jesus asked them in verse three, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?

Certainly Jesus thinks so, because in verse four, he heals the man and sends him on his way, doesn't he? But why is it lawful? Well, because the law was about helping God's people to love.

You remember the two great commandments? You know, you all know the two great commandments, don't you? Love your maker and love your neighbor. They're the two great commandments.

But can you remember what Jesus says in the very next verse? He says, All the law, including the Sabbath law, hang on, depend on, come from, are shaped by these two love commandments.

In other words, love is at the heart of the law. And so is it loving to heal this man? Yes, of course it is. And so it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, you see.

[7:22] Deep down, I'm guessing the Pharisees knew this, or at least they should have. I mean, after all, they're called experts in the law, aren't they? They should know.

But verse four, they remained silent. The plan has backfired. They've got nothing to say, especially when Jesus points out the hypocrisy in verse five and six.

Then Jesus asked them, if one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out? And they again had nothing to say.

It seems they are happy to do work on the Sabbath if it's loving their own family or farm animals, but not when it's loving others. They're hypocrites, aren't they?

Their plan has backfired and shown them who they truly are. And so verse six, they're not able to answer him because Jesus' logic is sound and they don't want to admit they're wrong.

[8 : 22] It's as though they, you know, in the States where they have the Fifth Amendment, you know, they plead the Fifth on the grounds that my answer might incriminate myself. It's what they're doing here. But why won't they simply admit they're wrong?

Well, none of us like to do that, do we, if we're honest? Especially if it's embarrassing or especially if it compromises our social standing in front of others.

And that's what it would have done for these guys here. I mean, they're at their boss's house, remember? And they're Pharisees and experts in the law, the leaders who are supposed to get it right. And so to say that they've got it wrong would have been embarrassing.

They would have lost some social standing. They would have lost face, if you like. And so they choose to make their social standing more important than the truth of Jesus.

And what they really need is humility. Humility to accept that they're wrong. Humility to accept the truth of Jesus, even if it means embarrassment.

[9 : 29] Humility to put the truth of Jesus even above their social status. And I wonder if we, though, sometimes can fall into this same trap. You know, keep quiet about our faith so we don't lose face in the sight of others.

Whether it's family or friends or social clubs. Or perhaps a denier truth of Jesus that our world doesn't like. So that we can maintain our social standing with others.

And so when Jesus sees people like these Pharisees not being humble. And like the dinner guests trying to promote themselves.

He now tells a parable to encourage them to be humble. That while we may lose face in the sight of the world. We'll be exalted in the sight of God.

So point to verse 7. When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table. He told them this parable. When someone invites you to a wedding feast.

[10 : 33] Do not take the place of honour. For a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you. Give this person your seat.

Then humiliated. You will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited take the lowest place. So that when your host comes he will say to you. Friend move up to a better place.

Then you'll be honoured in the presence of all the other guests. Verse 11. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled. And those who humble themselves will be exalted.

And our dinner parties and wedding feasts and things like that. They're great opportunities for people to climb the social ladder. Aren't they? We call it networking today.

Don't we? And not all networking is bad I should say. But it is when it's selfish. When you're just out looking out for yourself. Trying to elevate your own status. And back in verse 7.

[11 : 35] That's what the people at the party were doing. Climbing the social ladder. By taking the places of honour. It would be like going to a wedding reception today. And swapping your name card.

You know how you get those name cards. Taking it from the back table. And putting it up on the front table. Near the bridal table. You know the place of honour with all the family. That's my seat now. But Jesus says you should be humble.

You should put others first. And let them take the seats of honour. Because such humility will actually be rewarded. It would not only save you from being humiliated.

But it will lead to you being exalted on the last day. So does that mean then? You know we just practice some fake humility.

You know. Next time you go to a wedding reception. Deliberately look for the table. The seat at the back. So that you know. Your host might get you to come up to the front. Or the next time you go out for a restaurant. And look for the most humble seat in the place.

[12:33] Usually the one next to the toilet. I hate those seats. You know those of you get to park next to the toilet. Look. No. It's a parable. Isn't it? It's making a point. And the point is verse 11.

We're to have humility. If we want to be exalted at God's better banquet. At the Ferrari of feasts in God's kingdom on the last day. And we know this is the point because of what Jesus goes on to say.

Verse 12 and following. Then Jesus said to his host. When you give a luncheon or a dinner. Do not invite your friends or your brothers or sisters or your relatives. Or your rich neighbors. If you do they may invite you back.

And so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet. Invite the poor. The crippled. The lame. The blind. And you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you. You will be repaid.

At the resurrection of the righteous. And so Jesus kind of continues this parable for the host. And again it's not as though we can't invite our friends and family to a birthday party.

[13:37] Or a daughter or son's wedding. Or something like that. Of course we can. The point of the parable is again about having humility. The point is we're not to invite them.

Simply so they will invite us back. That's looking out for ourself isn't it? I'm going to invite that person. Because they might have them to meet to their place. And they've got a nice place.

But I'm not going to invite that person. Because you know they don't have a very nice place. I don't even want to go to their place kind of thing. No, no. The point is we're to be humble. We're to put others first. Regardless.

Of whether they can repay us. Or invite us back. For if we do. Then we will be repaid by God himself. At the resurrection of the righteous.

On the last day. We'll be given a place of honor. At the feast in God's kingdom. As the man goes on to say in verse 15. Blessed is the one who will eat. At the feast. In the kingdom of God.

[14:34] And so we're to be humble in life now. We're to put others before ourselves. We're to help others out. Without looking for reward. For God sees.

All that we do. And will reward us. On the last day. Of course to enjoy being exalted at this banquet. You need to be there.

Don't you? And to be there. You need to accept the invitation. And to accept the invitation. You need to have the humility. To take it seriously.

Which is the point. Jesus now makes. Point three. Verse 15. So that one of those at the table with him. Is still the same scene. At the prominent Pharisee's house.

Someone there. Hears Jesus say these things. And says blessed is the one who will eat at the feast. In the kingdom of God. And then Jesus replies with another story. About another person throwing a banquet.

[15:31] 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. This certain man is obviously rich. He prepares a great banquet. Later on he's called the master. And the owner. Of the house.

And so who do you think this certain man represents? God. And God sends his servant Jesus. To invite many people. Now could there be a more important invitation than this?

To be invited to God's banquet? It makes the invitation from the prominent Pharisee. Seem almost pathetic by comparison. Doesn't it? And yet.

How do the people respond? Verse 18. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said I've just bought a field. And I must go and see it. Please excuse me.

[16:31] The another said I've just bought five yoke. Or ten oxen. And I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me. Still another said I just got married. And so I can't come.

They all make excuses. And it's not so much the dog ate my invitation excuse. It's the I have a more important social situation excuse.

And they're all new social situations. One becomes the new owner of a field. It's kind of like us becoming a new owner of a house. And we often want to drive past it while it's being settled.

And keep looking at it. And checking it out. And think where we're going to put the lounge. And the dining table. And that sort of thing. The next one is a new owner of ten oxen. And he wants to take them for a spin. Just like you might want to do when you get a new car.

And the third becomes a newly married man with a wife. And whether it's a new owner or newly married. They put their new social situation above God's invitation.

[17:31] Don't they? Which sounds a lot like the Pharisees at the beginning. Remember they put their social status as religious teachers above the truth of Jesus.

And so refused to admit they were wrong. Well here they put their social situation above the invitation of Jesus. And refused to accept his offer.

Which is rather absurd when you think about it. I mean this is an invitation to God's great banquet. The Ferrari of feasts. And so to reject it is as absurd as getting on an invitation.

Everyone loved the Queen. So I'm going to. Even though she's passed away. Getting an invitation from the Queen if she was still alive. And then saying oh no I'm sorry. I just got a new pair of toenail clippers.

And I must try them out. I mean it's absurd isn't it? More than that it's rude. To then place cutting our toenails as more important than an invitation from the Queen is rude.

[18:34] And so understandably verse 21. The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry. Understandably.

And ordered his servant go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town. And bringing the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.

Here God is rightly offended at such excuses. At such arrogance or hubris that thinks their new situation is more important than his invitation.

And so he sends his servant Jesus to others. To the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. Jesus is not saying that we have to be a poor person or a person with a disability to accept his invitation.

Rather they were the socially humble of that society. And so they represent the attitude of humility we are all to have. In fact, often those who are poor or do life tough often have more of a humble attitude than those who don't, do they?

[19:39] I mean, often a poor person is much more humble than a rich person, aren't they? But either way, they represent the attitude of humility we're all to have. To put God's invitation above whatever social situation we find ourselves in.

That we may accept and take a seat at God's feast. And those who are humble, were those Jews who are humble enough not to put their Jewish situation, or even their Pharisees and teachers, above God's invitation through Jesus.

And yet God longs to fill his house with even more people. That more may enjoy his better banquet. And so verse 22, after the servant does that, he comes back and says, Look, what you've ordered has been done, but there is still room.

So verse 23, the master told his servant, Go out to the roads now and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were originally invited but rejected will get a taste of my banquet.

You see, he sends his servant from the town to the roads outside and the country lanes from Israel to the nations, as it were, to even us here in Melbourne.

[20:58] And not just to invite people, but to compel people, to persuade and urge them to accept his invitation through Jesus, that we might take our place at his feast.

For God's heart longs to fill his house with people who will enjoy his Ferrari of a feast. The best banquet imaginable.

While those who first were invited, those Jews who first met Jesus and yet rejected, will sadly not get a taste. I mean, it's hard to get a taste of a banquet if you reject the invitation to it, isn't it?

In verse 15, the man says, Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. And Jesus' response here in this story is basically, make sure you humbly accept the invitation first.

Make sure you humbly accept the invitation. So the first application for us must be, have we? Are we among the humble who have accepted God's invitation through Jesus?

[22:05] Jesus says, Believe in me as your king who died for your sins, and you will be forgiven and given a seat at my father's feast.

And so have we, whether you're in this room or online, have you believed in Jesus? Or are you making excuses, putting your social situation first?

For example, thinking, well, what will my work colleagues say? Or what will my friends and family or spouse think? But can I urge you, don't put your social situation above God's invitation like these people did.

Believe in Jesus today. And if you're here and want to, and want to know how, then speak to me after the service. I'd love to chat with you. Because if you don't believe, then you won't get even a taste of God's banquet.

And for us who have already accepted, then how are we to behave? Well, we're to continue to have this humility, aren't we? Unlike the Pharisees, we're to humbly put the truth of Jesus, even above our social status.

[23:15] Even if we lose face in the eyes of our friends or family or colleagues, for we will be exalted on the last day. And so are we known as Christians in our social situations, whether it's our social clubs or family or friends or whatever it is?

Are we even willing to lose face for the sake of our faith in those social situations? Two of my uncles, not Christians, one's passed away and one's still alive.

But I remember when I was younger, they were coming, they came to our place for lunch that mum had cooked. And my dad did his usual thing of saying grace before lunch. And at one point, one of my uncles ridiculed dad and said to the other unbelieving uncle, oh, we better let us let him say his prayer.

Otherwise we might choke on lunch. Ha ha ha. Which not only insulted my dad, it also insulted my mum who made lunch. But anyway, you see, my dad's faith meant he had lost some standing in his family setting, if you like.

Now, over the years, they saw his faith lived out and they came to respect his faith, even though the one still alive still hasn't come to share that faith.

[24 : 33] But even if they didn't respect his faith, which would you rather? Are being exalted and rewarded by a human for a little while now? Or being exalted and rewarded by God for an eternity later?

I'll tell you which one my dad prefers. Unlike the Pharisees, we'd humbly put Jesus above any social situation we find ourselves in, even if we lose face.

For God will exalt us. And unlike the guests and hosts, we're secondly to humbly put others first, not just put Jesus first and his truth, but put others first.

We're not to seek our own honour or reward, but we're to put others first, knowing that God will honour and reward us. Have you ever had one of those conversations with people where you ask them lots of questions and you sympathise with how they're going, you offer to help them out.

And when it comes to the time of that conversation, when it's usually time for them to return the favour and ask you questions, they don't. They kind of say, oh, well, it's time I'd better get going, see you later, and they walk off.

[25 : 44] Have you had that experience before? Or perhaps you've invited people to your place, but you never get an invitation from others? Or you call people to see how they're going, but then get forgotten when you're doing it tough?

Now, we need to keep caring for each other and asking after each other, but we're to do it without expecting it back. That's what it means to humbly put others first.

We're not to do it in order that they might reciprocate. No, no, we're to do it without expecting anything back now, for God will repay us later. It's not always easy, I know.

And so we need to keep looking to Christ for encouragement. Let me finish with some verses from Philippians that I think sum up this passage nicely. Paul says in Philippians 2, you do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit like the Pharisees, the guests, the hosts.

They all did that, didn't they? Out of selfish ambition. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.

[26 : 51] In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset of Christ, who although God, what did he do? He humbled himself to death on a cross for us.

And so what did God do in verse 9? God exalted him to the highest place. It happened for Christ, and so it happens for us.

May we have the humility like him that we too will be exalted with him and enjoy God's Ferrari of a feast on that last day. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray.