

Luke 19:1-10 - The Mission

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Preacher: Guest: Ray Cortese

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Ray Cortese is our guest speaker this weekend for the conference. He's the senior pastor of Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church in Lakanto, Florida. He started that church 33 years ago.

But he's very, very young, which I failed to clarify last night. And we're really glad that Ray and Diane have traveled up here to be with us this weekend.

Thank you all so much. All right. Thank you, sir. There are people who come to Sunday school on time. And then there are people who have a life, right?

So, all right. There we go. If you have a Bible, we're going to look at a passage from Luke chapter 14.

[0 : 59] So, I'll give you a minute to find your way there. It's an experience grace, express grace.

I love it. I love the clarity of the mission. I love the content of your mission. The challenge, of course, is to get any group of people on mission, to get a church on mission, stay on mission, particularly in areas that are significantly churching areas or people that are significantly churching people, to be on mission.

And something we did in our community that's kind of had a pretty radical and dramatic effect is that we changed the mission statement of our Christian school, changed the stated missional purpose, so that we were what was typically called a covenant school.

That is, one parent had to profess faith and be a member of a local church, you know, for their child to be admitted to our school. And we took away that, and we took a more what we called missional approach.

And, of course, there was some disagreement with that decision. And part of my argument was, if you went to, say, India to start a Christian school, and you were a missionary, and you believe that starting a Christian school could be a viable option for impacting that community for the gospel, advancing the kingdom of God, would you require one of the parents of any potential student to be a Christian?

[2 : 45] And what do people say? No. And then, well, why not? Because there aren't any, right?

So, our argument is that if you went to Crystal River, Florida, and you thought that starting a Christian school would be a viable and perhaps effective way to influence the community, advance the kingdom of God, would you require one parent of any potential student to be a Christian?

And the answer should be no, because there aren't any. And so, there are still pockets in our country where there are Christians, and you can pull perhaps enough professing Christians together to do some things.

But until the North American church realizes that the answer is, why wouldn't you do that? No, you know, because there aren't any. Until we realize that there aren't any Christians, then we will not be missional in the way that we need to be missional.

Churches can't be formed by gathering together the Christians in the community. There aren't any. There aren't any. People need to be one to faith in Christ.

And you're reading this, right? You can see how culture's changing. I remember just a couple years ago thinking, the Supreme Court is going to declare same-gender marriage as the law of the land, and that's actually going to be the law in the state of Alabama.

[4 : 19] I remember thinking, how is that going to go down? In Mississippi and in Alabama, same-sex marriage is going to be legalized. So if we want to live in America we wish it was, or it once was, or something else, we can play those games, or we can live in the culture in which God's put us in, which, by the way, is just an awesome time to be a Christian.

You know why it's an awesome time to be a Christian? Because the darker the culture gets, even dim bulbs like me, and perhaps like you, actually appear to be light, right?

So it doesn't take really that much to be a light in a very dark place. So those of us who never consider ourselves that our life could ever make any difference for Jesus, guess what?

The very simplest things now will make you a radical follower of Jesus in our culture. And I'm going to suggest one of those in this brief Sunday school, I was going to say Sunday school hour, you know, the abbreviated hour.

So, you know, sometimes what the Bible tells us to do is pretty simple. And that's what we're going to read in this passage. The passage says that God is having a party, a big party, and he wants, he has his eye on people who are unwanted.

[5 : 46] He wants unwanted people. He wants the unwanted to come to his party. And he wants you to bring them. That's not that hard to understand, is it?

Pretty simple concept, right? God's having a big party. There's people he wants there, and he wants you to bring them. And if you do that, you're on mission, and you're actually a really radical Christian.

So let's look at the passage, and I'll give you a chance to, I could have you stand, but you have coffee some of you. By the way, if you want to go out and get more coffee, anytime, or stand up, or walk around the back to stay, I'm not going to be the least bit disturbed.

So just make yourself at home for the next hour, and we'll enjoy this time together. So if you can, go ahead and stand, just as we give our attention to the Word of God.

And we're looking at Luke 14. Now in Luke 14, Jesus is at a dinner party, and it's not a very warm affair. In fact, the first verse says that Jesus went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees.

[6 : 53] So you can, you know, he's kind of in the lion's den there, isn't he? And it says they were watching him carefully. So you get the spirit of what is taking place there.

He's under scrutiny. We're going to pick up the account at verse 12. And notice sort of the chutzpah of what Jesus does, because what he's about to say, he says to the host.

You know, usually you're kind of conciliatory towards the host. But this is what Jesus said. He said also to the man who had invited him, when you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and you will be blessed because they can't repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. But Jesus said, a man once gave a great banquet and invited many.

[8 : 02] And at that time for the banquet, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, come for everything is now ready. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, I have bought a field and I must go out and see it.

Please have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to examine them. Please excuse me. Another said, I have married a wife. I can't come. So the servant came and repeated these things to his master.

And the master was angry and said to his servant, go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. Servant said, what you have commanded has been done.

There's still room. And the master said to the servant, go out into the highways and hedges. In other words, go further out. Now this is Pharisees. This is a Jewish deal here.

This is a Jewish crowd. What is Jesus actually saying at this point? Go out and invite who?

Gentiles. Ugh. Ick. So he says, go all the way out and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.

[9 : 07] For I tell you, none of those men who are invited shall taste my banquet. But this is the reading of God's holy word. Let's pray.

Father, we don't want to be hearers of the word only. We want to hear it. We want you to teach it to us. We want to be stunned by it. And we want our hearts and minds engaged.

But then we want it actually to show up in our lives. We want your, the fact that you included us in the great feast to just blow us away afresh.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. Do be seated. Listen, hospitality. We're going to talk about hospitality. Hospitality is an ancient path.

Jeremiah says, thus says the Lord, stand by the roads, look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

[10:12] Jeremiah 6.16, write that down. Isn't that a great passage? Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient path. The well-worn path.

The ancient path is the way of life. And so hospitality is one of those. Hospitality is an ancient path. And let me tell you something.

Hospitality matters. Hospitality changes people's lives. Hospitality is what it means to be a Christian. Hospitality has tremendous impact.

Hospitality is personal. It's deeply personal to me. It's why I am a pastor. Hospitality is a pastor. When I was in, when I finished high school, a pastor and his wife invited me, I grew up in Miami, and they invited me to live in their home in Upper Glade, West Virginia, in the heart of Appalachia. Less than half the people in the community had running water. And so for two summers in a row, I went up, and matter of fact, when I got there the first summer, after three weeks, the pastor left for a month, and I was the pastor of the church.

[11:23] I was 17 years old. And so I lived with this family for two. I mean, I saw things I've never seen since. But I learned something about what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, even certainly amidst the poor.

Poor people would come. They'd have a fire in their little shack or their trailer or something and lose everything, and they'd knock on the door of the pastor's house. And I saw his wife go, you know, she didn't go down to the church to get some old furniture people had donated.

She'd walk into her children's bedroom, unload their dresser, and walk it out the front door and give it to people. I saw her take their couch and just give it away. I mean, it was just an astounding tutorial in what it might look like to be a follower of Jesus in that place and time.

You know, my wife and I spent a portion of our honeymoon in Gadsden, Alabama. Now, don't ask why. You might be surprised to find that Gadsden's a great honeymoon hotspot.

But on our honeymoon, my wife had a dear friend from college who was supposed to sing in our wedding, and she fell off the radar, and finally my wife got in touch with her just days before the wedding, and she said, I'm not coming because she had entered into a lesbian relationship and was filled with guilt and shame.

[12:52] And so on our honeymoon, happened to be, she was from Meridian, Mississippi, so we were kind of in the neighborhood by being in Alabama, and my wife called her, and she came and spent a couple days in our hotel room on our honeymoon with us.

That was an introduction to hospitality, and it made a big difference in her life and the way her story would play out. A couple, maybe a month, six weeks ago, we were in northern New Jersey, Diane and I, and we went to a church that we were there trying to initiate it 36 years ago.

Again, right when we got married, we went to New Jersey three weeks after we were married and started working on this church start. And so 35 years later, we went back to this little, and it's just a little church with less than 100 people, and so we knew that nobody would be there that had been there that long ago.

And when we walked in, and somebody said, is this your first time? And we said, no, we've been here before. And they said, when did you, when's the last time you were here? It was 35 years ago. We're kind of, casual visitors. And every 35 years. So, we went, they said, oh, well, then you must know Valerie, Valerie Marquette.

[14:21] Of course, we were just stunned. And, and they pointed out who Valerie was, and we went over, and she just began to, to weep. Because, 35, 36 years ago, Valerie came and sat in church next to us.

She was a Catholic girl in northern New Jersey, and she lived with her boyfriend, and he was abusive. And as we got to know her, we invited her to come live with us, at least trying to get her to leave this horrible situation she was in.

And, and then even when we left there, and we moved to, went away to a graduate school, Valerie came and stayed with us. And she told us there, you challenged me when I came to your place in Mississippi, and, and I gave my life to Christ.

Hospitality. See, it makes a difference in people's lives. We hadn't seen her in 35 years. I won't forget what she said as we were crying and hugging each other at this reunion. She said, this is what heaven must feel like.

when, when people you've long lost touch with, suddenly you're, you're, you're back together. The power of hospitality. When we were, in some of the earlier days of our church, I remember there was a girl who was a waitress at a local restaurant.

[15 : 44] She was a friendly kid and got invited to play softball because our, our church did this softball thing then. She was a good player, so she showed up, so then she came to church, so then she met Jesus.

Okay? Um, and she lived with a guy and because she met Jesus, she moved out and really within a month she had relocated to somewhere else in Florida kind of to start her life over because she was a Christian now.

Um, and, and so guess who started coming to church when she left? Well, the guy that she used to live with, um, was kind of, thought it was fairly remarkable that not only had her life changed, but she had met somebody more wonderful than him.

And, um, he could hardly understand that. And, uh, so he walked into church and, and he got converted and he came and, and he was going, wanted to go to law school and his, um, uh, living situation had been disrupted.

Um, so he, uh, he had nowhere to go. So, so he came to live with us for about four months and, uh, we remained good friends for, uh, many years.

[16 : 46] Uh, went off to law school and, you know, so it was, it was kind of fun. My little son, you know, in the bottom bunk and this, this guy in his early 20s in the top bunk, they were roommates for a while.

Well, in, in November, he will be the speaker of the Florida House of Representatives. Um, so, uh, hospitality is very personal, uh, deeply personal to me.

It's, uh, had a shaping influence, uh, in my life. I want you to know that hospitality is our heritage.

From the 2nd century to the 16th century, any traveler in the Western world would spend, uh, every day of their journey scanning the horizon in search of one thing.

What would they be looking for? As you traveled along, you would spend, um, every day looking for one thing. You would be looking for a church or more, most, more likely a monastery, uh, because that's where you would stay.

That's the only place you could stay. It's the only place that most lodging places were houses of ill repute. Or, um, and, uh, this was the only place where you could find safety and, uh, and food and rest.

[18 : 05] Everyone knew the church was a place where strangers were welcomed as guests. Did you know that? This is our heritage. This is what the church, um, did for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years.

The vocation of hospitality is deeply embedded in the historical DNA of the church. Perhaps you've heard of the rules of Saint Benedict. Um, and, and here, here's one of them, the holy rule.

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ. For he himself will say, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Once a guest has been announced, the superior and the brothers are to meet him with all courtesy of love.

All humility should be shown in addressing a guest on arrival or departure. By a bow of the head or by a complete prostration of the body, Christ is to be adored.

Did you hear that? They believed that when anyone showed up at their door, um, that was Jesus. Jesus was showing up at their door and the way they treated the guests was the way they treated Jesus.

[19 : 12] In a sense, you couldn't say you love Jesus if you didn't love the guests that he brought to your door. Um, the abbot shall pour water on the hands of the guests and the abbot with the entire community shall wash their feet.

Isn't that wild? Well, this was the, um, um, the church, um, at its heart is a community of welcome. Philip Haley wrote a book called Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed.

Uh, I really recommend it. It's about the, uh, a French Huguenot community called Les Chambons. Now, the Huguenots you might not, um, be entirely aware of are, if you, um, adhere to, uh, the reform faith, reform theology, um, then the Huguenots are our forebears.

Um, we don't have Huguenot churches because they were all slaughtered. The ones that weren't slaughtered, um, were up in the hills. They were in more rural, out-of-the-way places like this town. Um, but Huguenots were experts at, um, hiding, right? They, they had to hide for their lives. And so during, uh, Philip Haley wrote, wrote that, that he was so distressed studying World War II and the, and the inhumanity and the, the, the, um, industrialization of death.

[20 : 31] And, um, it, you know, he said he was emotionalist. He was, um, callous to it all. And, um, and, and then suddenly he began reading about this small town he'd never heard of and he said the strangest sensation happened.

There was, there was moisture drops hitting, um, the book, the, the materials in front of him and he realized he was weeping. Uh, because he discovered the town of Le Chambon and the, the story of Andre and, and Magda Trachma, the, um, uh, Protestant pastor and his wife who organized their entire community to hide Jewish children.

They saved thousands of Jewish children, uh, during World War II. And the Nazis would come and look for them, um, and, uh, I, I think they, they ultimately found one.

Um, they were, they were experts at this. And, uh, they imperiled their whole community. Matter of fact, when the Nazis came ultimately to arrest her husband, the pastor, um, and he was arrested, um, Magda said, um, they knocked on the door and, they, they were coming to take him away and, uh, and she said, well, you are not going to take him away until you sit down at my table and you eat.

It is dinner time and guests at my table, uh, are going to be fed. So she had the Nazis sit down and she fed them before they took her husband away because she was in charge of her house.

[21 : 54] Um, just great. You know, if you go to Yad Vashem, uh, in, uh, in Israel, there is a place of honor for, um, these are, these are our, this is our heritage.

This ought to be the, uh, a height of, uh, of incredible joy that this is our historical, um, legacy. So here's our challenge in our day is that our neighbors are still wandering just like they have for all of history.

Um, but they're not looking anymore for the church, are they? Uh, like people once did, um, as a place of refuge, a place of safety, a place of welcome. They're not looking any longer, um, for the church.

And what's even sadder is that all too often we're not looking for them. Um, and we're not open, uh, to, to welcome them. Um, so we must recover this ancient path.

It's the lost vocation of, uh, hospitality. Now, almost everybody here has, has, uh, seen the musical Les Mis. And you remember at the very beginning when Jean Valjean is, uh, has been set, uh, free, but he has, no one will take him in, right?

[23 : 01] Where does he go? He goes to a monastery, right? See, that's the very picture of what we're talking about. That's where people went, that there was nowhere else for them to go. And you remember what the priest sings in the Broadway version.

Um, come in, sir, for you are weary and the night is cold out there. Though our lives are very humble, what we have, we have to share. There's wine here to revive you. There is bread to make you strong.

There's a bed to rest till morning. Rest from pain and rest from wrong. Wouldn't that be awesome to have right across the doorway of, of, uh, of our churches?

Um, come in, child, for you are weary and the night is cold out there. Our lives are humble, but what we have, we have to share.

There's wine to revive you, bread to make you strong. So this is the mission of Southwood Church. Um, it's, uh, it's to having experienced the welcome of Jesus, right?

[24 : 02] Experience grace. Then you extend the welcome of, uh, of Jesus. So let's talk about that together. Hospitality, the, the, the, the main characters we're going to talk about in Jesus' parable and the first is we have the host, the yearning host.

Um, so the recovery of the vocation of hospitality begins with the conviction that God is a host who wants his house filled. He has, uh, set up a great feast and, uh, um, and the church then is to be that community of welcome.

So Luke 14 is, is this, uh, fascinating tableau because Jesus is at this tension filled, a Sabbath dinner party with the most conservative religious leaders who are watching him.

And Jesus first criticizes the guests. We didn't read this, um, part of the passage, but Jesus criticizes the guests because they seek the places of honor and then he criticizes the host. So Jesus is really not, um, Jesus apparently is not a southerner because no good southerner would act, um, this way. Um, he, he, he not only criticizes the host but, you know, then he criticizes the other guests because, you know, the guests for seeking the place of honor and the host because he's invited the socially prominent.

[25 : 16] Nobody is eating. The tension is, uh, palpable and one, um, good fellow decides that he's going to ease the mood and he stands up and says, well, well, blessed is everybody who's going to eat bread in the kingdom of God.

In other words, what he's really saying is, now, blessed are the likes of us who are essentially shoe-ins at the feast in heaven. We're all going. We're all, uh, going to the feast so it's, it's good with all of us.

Now, Jesus can't, just can't let it go, right? And, and so he tells a parable and in his parable he says there's a man of immense wealth and he, um, puts on a sumptuous feast and the invitation list is lengthy but when the day is come and the meal is ready he sends his servants out to inform everyone, uh, that it's time to come to the feast.

But what do they say? They have a whole bevy of excuses, um, right? Uh, and, and they decline but he's adamant his house is going to be filled so he sends them out to bring the poor and the lame and the nobodies and compel them to come in and even that doesn't fill the house so he does the unthinkable.

Um, Jesus says he actually sends them out to gather Gentiles and even bring them um, into his house. So what's the picture we have of the host in our parable?

[26 : 35] The host is, uh, Jesus portrays God as passionate. Um, he is going to share his fullness with the hungry and that is the story of the Bible.

The story of the Bible as it unfolds is God, uh, God as the desirous host. Look, consider the whole story. What is creation? Creation is God, um, showing his, um, creative genius and laying out this, this, um, this spread of beauty and art and creation and food and the bounty and inviting and then creating us um, to come to his, to fill his, um, to fill his house and enjoy the feast that he's created. That's creation itself. We know in the wilderness, um, God feeds his people. God's always feeding people. The Bible revolves around eating. That's something we can get excited about, isn't it? Um, and, and so in, in the wilderness, he's, he's giving them bread, right, from heaven.

He's giving them meat, quail from heaven. He gives them shelter from the hot sun in, uh, in the day. He keeps them warm in the, the cold nights in the wilderness.

The prophets, uh, love to describe the coming glory in, in terms like these from Isaiah. On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food, full of marrow, of aged wine, well-refined.

[28 : 01] Um, for many of the people in our church, that's their life verse. They love reading about all that wine. Um, so, here we have it. Um, in the New Testament, what do we, um, what do we get?

Jesus usurps the role of the wedding host and makes the best wine. He feeds thousands of people. Um, he eats, uh, with the notorious and gets in trouble for it.

He initiates the Lord's Supper. He tells us that God is a welcoming, um, father who, when his wayward children comes home, he throws a big barbecue, right, for all the, all the community to attend.

Um, and he says that all of creation is headed for a great wedding celebration, a great, um, feast.

Um, and regularly in churches, what do we do? We invite people to come forward and, uh, and taste and see that the Lord is good and taste the bread and, uh, and drink the wine.

God is the host. He is, uh, he is this, um, lavish, um, generous, welcoming host. Now, we will never be the practitioners of hospitality until we experience personally this welcoming heart of, uh, of God.

[29 : 12] Um, so have you, um, have you experienced God welcome you? Do you know what it's like to go to God's house? And, and, and, you know, in our church when we go forward for communion we, we encourage people to come, um, with their hands out like this because it's a way for us to say, uh, we don't bring anything.

We don't bring righteousness to this. We don't have any merits to come to this. We haven't provided, um, the food at this meal. You know, in our church, um, I take people out to lunch, um, all the time and, uh, when I take out particularly the successful, the wealthy, the, uh, those people, I

always pay for it and I have to be really quick.

Um, and they are always bothered by that. Um, because they, they have an idea that, um, that, um, they're the provider, the church is the recipient. They give, the church receives.

Um, they're the have, the pastor is the have not. Um, and, uh, and, and they're always bothered.

And one of the things they'll often say is, we'll have to do this again. And I say, no, no, no, we're not. And, uh, and you're not going to get the satisfaction of you, um, um, uh, paying, uh, because this is the way it works in the family of God. It's called grace. You contribute nothing.

[30 : 34] Um, something is given to you that you don't pay for. And, uh, and if you can't even stand it at a lunch, how can you, um, uh, how can you, how can you understand it as a way of life?

Um, we don't pay God back. Um, that's not the motivation for Christian living. Um, we have to experience, listen, there's all sorts of people go to church in North America who profess faith in Jesus who could recite the, um, Westminster Confession of Faith and Ugaritic.

Um, but that doesn't mean you've ever had the experience, uh, uh, you've ever experienced grace. Doesn't mean that, um, you really know the love of God. Um, that you've ever been, you know, my, my, uh, my favorite verse in the Bible is when the prodigal son came home in all his shame and all his filth and all his rebellion.

Not only did his father run out to him, but the Bible says his father what? He kissed him. He kissed him. Him. Your life changes the day you experience the kiss of the father.

You can be a follower of God, a believer in the Bible, and never have experienced the kiss. Um, the kiss of, uh, of, of God. And to consider the price of the feast, you know, this is my body broken for you.

[31 : 54] That's the price. He provides it. He provides the meal for his children. This welcoming, I bet you sing in, in your church from time to time, oh, I'm running to his arms.

That song, right? And the riches of your love will never, you know, the, the riches of your love will always be enough. Oh, I'm running to your arms.

It's such a beautiful visual picture of children, um, um, running into, uh, the welcome of the father.

My wife and I went on a road trip a couple years ago up I-95 through, uh, Georgia.

And before you get to Savannah, there was an exit we took, and we went to find a restaurant because Southern Living had talked about it. Uh, the Old School Diner, it was called.

It was Ben Affleck's favorite restaurant during the filming of some movie and of course what Ben does, I do. And, um, so, um, we drove and drove and drove and drove and finally got to a dirt road and you turn down the dirt road and, um, and there's just a, uh, uh, and, and really a shack with about five shacks, you know, added on to it and, uh, and the most bizarre, uh, tableau because there's, it's not, there's no paved parking.

[33 : 12] Um, the whole area around the restaurant is covered with carpet torn out of mobile homes. Um, the carpet's the whole ground and, uh, and so as we pulled into this place thinking, you know, what is this gonna be like, out the door barrels Chef Jerome and he runs up to the car and as he's running out towards us he goes, my family, my family, my family is here and he wraps us in his arms and he says, get on in here, get on in here.

He said, I threw the hush puppies on when I saw you coming down the lane. Now there was a welcome um, and, uh, it was a beautiful picture uh, of, um, uh, a beautiful gospel picture.

Um, listen, we wanna have churches that reflect the yearning host uh, who wants his, um, party filled. Diane and I went to a church in Los Angeles where, um, we, uh, they met in a school and, uh, we had to park a number of blocks away in a parking garage and, uh, it was, it was an incredible experience because when you got out of the car somebody was standing there and said, walk over that stairway to that guy in the green shirt, you know, and when you got to the stairway a guy in the green shirt said, go down the stairwell and at the bottom you'll see a guy in a green shirt and at the bottom he said, go down this alley to the end, see that guy in the green shirt down there, go to him and that went to about seven different guys in green shirts all the way till we got into the, and, uh, and their warmth and their welcome continued all the way through the, uh, experience there so much so that when we went forward for communion, uh, the, the man who served us was so, um, warm that my wife took a picture of him and I was like, no, don't do this to me, I'm a PCA pastor and, um, um, but it was that, uh, you know, we were blown away, uh, and, and wrote the pastor later, so there we go, we got it, hospitality, this is our heritage, our father is a welcomer and, uh, we have been welcomed and so we welcome, so second,

I want you to see the guests that, uh, that, they come to the party, with me, the guests, to re-engage this vocation, we've got to believe that those outside the church are the father's desired guests, Jesus says to those gathered in the dinner party, when you give a dinner, don't invite your friends or your family or your rich neighbors, Jesus' day was like our own, society was stratified by class, it was all about who you knew, and everybody wanted to socialize with the beautiful and the wealthy and the important and the successful because social engagements establish your status, and to get anywhere you need a network, and you only practiced hospitality, the purpose of hospitality ultimately was to get something out of it, got it?

So Jesus is saying, invite those who offer you nothing, right? It reminds me of selfies actually today, you know, when people take selfies and post them online, it in many ways is about establishing their status, they show themselves in beautiful restaurants, they show themselves in New Zealand on incredible vacations, if they happen across a celebrity, they take a picture with the celebrity because it's sort of like saying, look at me, I'm with so-and-so, I'm important.

[36 : 38] So it was, so it was, so it is with socializing. So Jesus says, actually hang out with people who offer you nothing, invite the people at the bottom of the pile, invite the poor and crippled and lame and blind, and one of the reasons Jesus says to invite them is because they'll actually come, when the rich host invites the well-off to his party in the parable, what happens?

Nobody shows up, right? I've got a new marriage, one of them says, I've got new property, I've got new oxen, I've got to go work out. And then you remember the man interrupts and says, oh, blessed is everyone because we'll all be at the feast.

And Jesus says, no, no, you won't be at the feast. Do you realize what Jesus is saying to these people? He's telling them, you're not God, you're not going to be at the feast.

You do not belong to him. I mean, he counters what that guy says right in the dinner party. Do not invite Jesus to your dinner parties. It will not be a casual, delightful, social engagement.

He tells the people in the dinner party, no, no, you're not responding. I'm right here. I'm right here inviting you.

[37 : 57] And you will not come. You are too self-sufficient to respond. The accomplished, the busy, the successful, the achievers are too full to realize how hungry they are to run to the feast.

Jesus is blessed are the poor in spirit. They will come to the feast. But the middle class in spirit are too self-sufficient to need mercy and to need charity and to need Jesus.

Philip Yancey was traveling in Eastern Europe and he was talking to a prostitute and he asked her, he said, do you know that Jesus actually talked about prostitutes?

And she didn't really know that and he said, do you know that Jesus said there are more prostitutes in the kingdom of God than there are rich people?

And he said, why do you think, why do you think Jesus said that? He asked this to a prostitute and this is what she said. Did, she said, you know, there are more prostitutes than there are religious conservatives is actually what he said.

[39 : 14] And she said, well, everybody has someone to look down on but not us. We are at the low. Our families, they feel shame for us.

No mother nowhere looks at her little girl and says, honey, when you grow up, I want you to be a good prostitute. Most places, we are breaking the law. Believe me, we know how people feel about us.

People call us names, whore, slut, hooker, harlot. We feel it, too. We are the bottom. And sometimes when you are at the low, you cry for help.

And when we cry for help, Jesus comes. And when he comes, we respond. She said, maybe that's what Jesus meant. When you're at the low.

So, we have to admit that we look at non-Christians with contempt and we look at the poor with disdain. It's just in us.

[40 : 14] If you're successful, it's in your DNA. People, no, we don't say this out loud, but inside we think that most people are poor because they choose to be poor because they aren't as disciplined and didn't work as hard as we have.

I like to say in our church, if you have anything you have, it isn't because you worked hard for it.

God gave it to you. You know, most people have a wealthy, comfortable lifestyle because they were born in the United States of America.

If you were born in the 13th century on a hillside of Peru, you probably wouldn't have lived to the age of one. You didn't choose where you were born. If you have anything, it's the gift of God. Jesus wants people at the party that we do not want at the party. His guest list for the party is completely different than our guest list. Jonah, remember, would rather run the opposite way than to go preach to Assyrians because he knew God, because he knew the grace of God, because he knew the kind of God that God would actually like these people that he despised. He knew what God would do. He knew that God would convert these people and it would ruin the good people of God to have those people. He was right.

[41 : 39] When I was in seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, I used to preach on weekends in Utica, Mississippi. There were 11 people when I started there.

We had the Spirit of God moved and we grew to 17. And so we decided to have a revival. That's what you call it. You don't call it an experiencing expressing grace weekend. If you're in Utica, Mississippi, it's a revival. And they have kind of a comedy agreement. because the Methodists will go to the Presbyterians and Baptist revival. They all go to each other's revivals. So we said we're going to have a revival. And have a preacher come in and have special services. So I went all around the town to put up posters to announce our revival.

They hadn't had one at a Presbyterian church in 20 years. and I remember asking a old lady in the church, you know, I said, you know, there's that place right when you get off the highway and you pull into town and it seems like there's a lot of cars out there.

[42 : 43] Would that be a good place to put a poster up? And she said, Pastor, you can't go in there. What if somebody sees you in there? That's not the kind of place for a pastor to go, not in that place.

And she said, ain't no kind of people in that place would want to come to our church anyway. And I'm not sure we'd want those folks in our church anyway. So all I know is Jesus has a different guest list than we do to his party. So let me finish then. What's the last part of understanding this text?

It's not to know the host, this yearning host. He's going to have his house filled. He's going to fill his house with people that we wouldn't have on our guest list. And then what's our role?

To be the welcoming servants. The welcoming servants. The ones who are sent out to scour the countryside until the house is full. Our calling is to summon our neighbors to the feast.

[43 : 51] You think evangelism. I can't do evangelism. I don't know how to do apologetics. I can't talk to agnostics or atheists or give proofs for Christianity. I don't have a good tongue.

I can't answer their arguments. I'm telling you, what does the Bible say to do? Feed them. Welcome people. Welcome them into your home. Welcome them into your life. This is what God says to do. He's having a party and he wants you to bring people. Is that so hard? God's having a party and he wants you to invite your friends to go to the party.

This is the forever party. This is the big party. This is a great party. Most of us find it pretty easy to invite people to our parties. And so the problem is our hospitality of course is warped. Our hospitality is more Martha Stewart than Jesus. It's entertainment and menus and table settings and southern living. And it's often about our looking good and our feeling good about what kind of performance.

[44 : 53] But hospitality, the word actually is philoxenia in the Greek, which means the love of strangers. That's what hospitality means. The love of strangers. Hospitality is welcoming strangers into your life, your home, and your church.

It's offering food, rest, warmth, conversation, safety, and peace to people. So how do we offer hospitality to strangers?

Real quick, here's the application. Offer hospitality to Christians, first of all. And my notes is offer hospitality to strange Christians because some Christians are incredibly strange. And, you know, in your church there are people you don't know and there are people you don't really want to know. Okay? There are people in this church that you will not like, that you will not be drawn to, you're not really the people you want to hang out with. So when the Bible says to offer hospitality to strangers, well, a lot of them are right here. They attend this church already. They may as well be believers.

[46 : 05] They're, you know, I'd ask, is your small group welcoming? Are you on the welcoming team? I don't know if you have a greeting time in your church, but, you know, after church, in our church we have like a ten minute rule, we emphasize, you cannot talk to your friends for the first ten minutes after church.

That's a worthy thing to do, to get together and talk to your friends, but there's too many people you don't know to talk to. And God sends somebody to this place, to his house, he wants them welcomed here.

And you never have any idea who is walking through the doors on any given week here, do you? You have no idea. Do you know I've been to church here one time? one time, about four years ago, and on Sunday morning, standing outside by those bank of windows there, I encountered a woman who was a member of our church, and she was living in Mississippi.

She left her husband, fled her marriage. I didn't even know about that until after she was gone. and she came to Huntsville to visit a relative and came to church that Sunday, the one Sunday that I've ever been here, and we crossed paths at Southwood Church, and we had a very significant conversation right outside.

You have no idea who's going to be here this morning. God is sending people here every week, and he wants you to welcome them. And it's a beautiful thing.

[47 : 36] Listen, it's not Will's job to build this church. Jesus said, I'll build the church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. And it's just the most fun to watch him do it, and to realize it's not our responsibility.

We can't do it. People are going to walk in this church today. So, you know, got it, hospitality to Christians.

Second is hospitality to your neighbors. believers. Jesus was always eating with people. You don't have to preach to them. Most people are not argued into the kingdom. They are loved into the kingdom of God.

Rosaria Butterfield was a lesbian. She was a PhD. She was a professor at Syracuse. She had tenure there. She was considered the national expert in gay and lesbian studies. She lectured at all the different Ivy League schools.

[48 : 40] She was writing a book on why do Christians hate gays. In the course of researching it, she got vile communication from Christians, which was, of course, her whole point.

But she also got a letter from a Presbyterian pastor in her town that intrigued her with its tone and everything else. She decided to sit down and talk with him.

It sparked a long friendship. She found herself at his dinner table repeatedly. It says, he initiated two years of bringing the church to me, a heathen.

I had seen my share of Bible verses on placards at gay pride marches. The Christians who mocked me on gay pride day were happy that I and everyone I love were going to hell. That was as clear as the blue sky.

But that's not what Ken did. He did not mock. He engaged. So when his letter invited me to get together for dinner, I accepted. My only motive was I thought this would be good for my research.

[49 : 47] But something else happened. Ken and his wife and I became friends. They entered my world. They met my friends. We did book exchanges. We talked openly about sexuality and politics. They did not act as if such conversations were polluting them.

When we ate together, Ken prayed in a way I had never heard before. His prayers were intimate and vulnerable. He repented of his sin in front of me.

So as powerful an advocate for the biblical teaching on sexuality in our country today is Rosaria Butterfield. And it's all because of what?

Hospitality. Hospitality. Hospitality to our neighbors. Hospitality to those we go to church with. And last, hospitality to the poor. We are to give preference to the broken and needy.

Corrie Ten Boom, you're familiar with. She and her family hid Jews in Holland until somebody ratted them out and they were discovered.

[50 : 54] And when the Nazis came, they said to our father, he was a watch repairman, Casper Ten Boom, and he had been doing it for years in this community.

He was one of the most respected people in the community. I think he was 80 years old or something like that. And they knew he wouldn't last long. In fact, when he was ultimately taken away, he died within two weeks.

He was just a frail old man. And so the Nazis didn't want the Dutch turning against them by taking this venerated elder man away.

So they said to Casper Ten Boom, just tell us you'll stop hiding Jews. That's all you have to do. We will not take you away. We will leave you here. Just tell us you'll stop.

That's all you have to do. And he said, if you leave me here and tomorrow there's a knock on my door and there are people who are seeking refuge, then I will open my door and I will welcome them in and I will feed them and if need be, I will hide them from you.

[52 : 03] He said, why would I do that? He said, because I am a Christian. That's what Christians have always done.

That's what Christians still do. We've received the welcome of the Father. He feeds us with his own body and blood.

He kisses us the most unworthy and when you experience it, you express it.

Let's pray. Father, may it be so. May it be so in the Cortese house and in the Cortese life. May it be the experience of us that we find ourselves at your table the least worthy and we just can't get over it and we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. information, visit us online a couple of jó at five e