

Luke 14:1-24 "Kingdom Feasts"

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[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.

As far back as I can remember, I've longed for significance. As a kid, I always wanted to do something that really mattered, to make a big difference in the world. And that looked different originally, it was being an awesome, incredible baseball player. And that's what was really going to make a difference. At other times, it was just wanting to write books that would be read across the world and for centuries after I was gone. Other times, I really just longed for my friends, the people who already knew me, to think I was really smart and really spiritual. I think we all have some of that longing in our hearts, don't we? To be significant. To be important. And it's actually a good impulse because God created each of us for significance, as Ron has reminded us from Psalm 8 this morning.

[1 : 14] To be important. To be valuable. But what I've seen in my life and in the lives of those around me is that the ways we look for and pursue that significance are often backwards.

You can think of backwards ways that people strive for significance in our culture. The same is true for other cultures, including the culture of Jesus in the Bible. And in our passage this morning, in Luke chapter 14, Jesus is going to call out some of those backward ways of seeking significance through awkward moments at a dinner party. It's going to happen a few times. Let's pray together and then we'll follow the story in Luke 14 as we go. Father, we do ask again for your help.

We need you. We want you to show us your truth and show us our hearts at the same time. That we might be different, that we might be changed, that we might be what you created us to be.

[2 : 21] Do that as we look to your word this morning. Speak to us, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Luke 14 at verse 1, the scene is set.

One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. So there's tension at this Sabbath lunch with Jesus, right? The religious leaders are trying to catch him. They're watching him carefully. And that tension leads to the first awkward moment right off the bat.

One comment on these awkward moments we're about to see. If there's an awkward moment at our Sabbath lunch today, it will probably be because I tried to tell a dad joke.

And got eye rolls and silence and chuckles at best. Jesus is creating these awkward moments because do you remember what we learned last week?

[3 : 25] What's his heart towards these Pharisees? He longs to gather them in. He sees the backwardness and the brokenness. He sees the backwardness and the brokenness and he wants to bring healing.

So he creates these conversations, even these awkward moments, to pursue their hearts for his kingdom. Verse 2.

Silence. Silence. Twice. Well, all right. Not how this event was supposed to go here. Jesus was supposed to be a friendly. Jesus sees something in the culture of the religious elite. Their joyous religious formalism with no joy there at all.

Their sense of moral superiority. Their cold and calculated, dutiful religious performance. It's one way they're finding significance, isn't it?

[4 : 53] And it completely misses the heart of the kingdom. As we've seen, it misses the heart of the Sabbath, doesn't it? Which is to rejoice and rest in God's redemption and deliverance.

Jesus says there's a social shift that must take place in this Jewish town. Stop playing church and start bringing the life of the kingdom to people.

All the time. Especially on the Sabbath. Dream of how the joy of deliverance could bless someone who needs to experience the freedom of the love of God.

Sometimes we start to think that what really matters is whether we sang the right song. Whether the sermon was too long.

Whether the sanctuary was too cold. Whether we are doing church the way we're used to doing it. And feel like we ought to after all these years. And we lose the joy of the kingdom.

[5 : 56] By looking for significance in formal religious tradition. We lose the focus of the kingdom there and making it about ourselves. We're going to do it better than everybody else.

And it's about our preferences instead of letting it be about King Jesus. Just like the Pharisees did. And we find ourselves critiquing others instead of blessing them.

In contrast to that, a couple weeks ago I called a woman in this congregation to ask her if she'd be willing to pray at our congregational meeting last week. We'll call her Deb for the sake of this story since she may or may not be here.

Deb was a little bit unsettled by that. She said, I don't really feel comfortable praying into a microphone in front of everybody. And she felt terrible about the fact that she felt terrible.

Perhaps I should really get over this and do this. It's important for the kingdom. Maybe I really ought to get better. And as we talked, I heard in the background of our conversation the voice of one of our homebound widows.

[7 : 05] I said, are you with her? She had just finished giving her a bath and they were chatting together and so happy to be together.

I said, Deb, you're exactly where you need to be. You don't have to pray into a microphone to do something important for the kingdom. You are taking the joyful deliverance and freedom of the kingdom to those who are outcast and lonely right where God has called you.

That's the kingdom showing up. That's the shift Jesus wants to see in our community. Quit thinking that a good Sunday is one where you make it through worship and Sunday school without your heart really being engaged so that you can go home and feel better than the other guy.

Knowing that you're spiritually superior to the guy who stayed home. Stop seeing the law of God as a way to make you feel good about yourself and consider it as an avenue for blessing others.

No more letter of the law legalism that misses the heart of the law. Love for God and love for neighbor, right? That's what it's about. That's a nice way to start off lunch.

[8 : 22] Just kind of call everybody out. Maybe we should get to the meal here, Jesus. We came here to eat. But in verse 7, Jesus gets awkward again. Now he told a parable to those who were invited.

He wants to give some instructions to the guests right here in the middle of the party. When he noticed how they chose the places of honor, he said to them, When you're invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him.

And he who invited you both will come and say to you, Give your place to this person. And then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, Friend, move up higher.

Then you'll be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Now listen, we do great at this on Sundays.

I've been trying to figure out for years why it is that nobody will sit on the front row in the places of honor. And it's because all of you have read this passage, and you're humbling yourselves and staying back there.

[9 : 42] I'm so grateful. Well done, Southwood. I finally figured it out. But you know, there's something about where we sit at meals that really gets at our hearts, isn't there?

At the spink dinner table, there's a coveted seat between mom and dad. So we have three girls, and at each meal, only one will get to sit by both parents.

And there is never any arguing about that seat except on nights where we're eating dinner. But it goes all the way back to our middle school lunch tables, doesn't it?

Where the table you sit at and the people who are near you tells how important you are, how cool you are. Nowadays, for us, it's who am I seen talking with at the dinner party or whether I can dress the part while I do.

It's how can I position myself to get over and talk to the guest of honor and maybe catch an Instagram picture to kind of show everybody else that I did. And this heightened social tension that we know very well was even more significant in biblical culture.

[10:55] The closer you were to the head table, the more important you were. And not only that, the better food you ate at the dinner. In fact, so much so that if the party was big enough, those who were not as connected, the poor, those who were less valuable, probably wouldn't even be in the same room or, as it were, ordering off the same menu as you were.

Everybody knew where you sat at dinner, showed how important you were. That was the case even when the church gathered to eat.

Can you imagine that? Maybe you can. And Jesus comes into that context and says, my kingdom flips this social convention on its head.

Don't put yourself forward. Don't rush ahead of the line. Instead, run to the back. Race to the bottom. Humble yourself and consider others first.

Don't turn every conversation to yourself. Don't ignore the lonely to be seen with the influential. And at first, it can kind of sound just like a wiser strategy to get ahead, right?

[12:08] A way to get noticed and honored publicly. But as we go on, we'll see that Jesus is really encouraging a completely new system of significance.

And, of course, he said this right there in front of guests who've just rushed ahead to the seats of honor. So, there's a lot of tension in the room. Maybe everybody except the host is feeling the awkwardness, and so Jesus turns to the host next.

Verse 12, Now, I know that you find it hard to understand, how who comes to your party and whose party you're invited to can make you feel important or significant.

But, apparently, that's how people often felt back in Jesus' day before we matured so much and got over that struggle. Jesus says, This social dynamic has to change.

It must be different in his kingdom. Don't seek significance in social networking. Instead, what's the difference going to be? Generously connect and share what you have with the least of these.

[13:42] How many people have been in your home recently who don't have a home to invite you into? Whom do you share your life with that brings you no tangible social benefit?

When you gather people together for something, do you consider the ones most like you, whom you most want to be seen with, and whom you most enjoy spending time with? Or, do you consider who most needs your time and your friendship?

Can we be honest that that kind of society Jesus says his kingdom brings is a big shift for us too is not the way we usually function.

We love to drop names, to feel important because of the circles that we run in, to feel we have value because someone else who has value values us.

Translation of that last sentence, if Tim Keller or Dabo Swinney friends me on Facebook this afternoon, you will definitely hear about it. I will find a way. That's what I mean by that.

[14:51] Because it will communicate that I'm in. My heart will smile and I'll say, I've arrived. It makes me meaningful and important. Jesus says no.

No. You look for the person no one else is inviting and you have them over for lunch. Except not this week because they heard this sermon too, so now no one can invite anyone for lunch in this church all week without feeling bad about why you invited them.

But next week, next week, you invite that person over for lunch. You jump at the chance we get at Thanksgiving to have international college students around our table for Thanksgiving dinner.

You rearrange your priorities to invest in relationships with those different from you and less socially connected than you. Jesus says, you think differently in my kingdom.

It is really different, isn't it? Can you imagine how our society would be transformed if everyone lived this way? Joyfully serving others, being humble all the time, giving to those who have less, welcoming the outsider in.

[16:07] If that's what drove everybody all the time, what a different place. What an amazing city. What a great country. And that's a dangerously good message.

One that you can hear at many churches, not to mention temples, Islamic education centers, and schools in Huntsville.

There's a lot of truth in that message as we've seen. And many churches have decided because of that that that is the gospel.

The good news of Jesus is that. He's a social revolutionary who teaches and demonstrates a new society and what it really ought to look like.

But it's dangerous. It's dangerous because sometimes the story stops there and we miss Jesus as a savior. The ability to address larger, eternal problems and to enjoy true relationship with the Father through Jesus.

[17:16] We find ourselves trying to express grace that we haven't actually experienced ourselves first. And so we call that the social gospel because it says the good news is a transformed society.

Now our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, was founded before I was born in part to avoid that danger, that development, and to maintain the importance of Jesus as the savior of sinners.

And I thank God for that. But sometimes pendulums swing, don't they? Overcorrecting is really easy. And we can function as though Jesus came only to save us from hell and get us to heaven. In a noble effort to avoid the social gospel, we can accept its false dichotomy between eternal and temporal, spiritual and physical, spiritual and social even.

And we can neglect how the good news of Jesus transforms society too. We want to worship Jesus on Sunday and then do business and throw parties and develop friendships and raise our children however we good and well please.

[18:44] We say we experience God's grace, but it never transforms us into people who express that grace in every area of life and expect to see society transformed as we do.

Jesus says there's a third way. It doesn't have to be an either or. Jesus doesn't want only our spiritual life or our eternal destiny and our Sunday mornings.

He wants our Sunday afternoons and our Friday night parties and our Tuesday night dinners and our Wednesdays at work and our Mondays at school.

all of it. He wants all of that. It's hard to miss that in this passage, isn't it? Jesus is our Savior and then a social revolutionary, if you will, because He changes everything.

But the story's not over yet in our passage. There's one more awkward moment where Jesus is going to drive home the foundation for this whole new society.

[19:52] How is it that in Jesus' kingdom this actually takes place? In fact, why is it that His kingdom must function this way? And that if you function differently from the new society He's laid out, you're actually not a part of His kingdom, He's about to say.

The power for this transformation comes from God who started these kinds of relationships where we experience grace to fuel our expression of grace to others.

Listen to this. Verse 15. 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.

What's going on is that you could cut the tension with a knife and there's always somebody there that can't quite handle that. It's getting uncomfortable. And so He leans forward at family dinner and says, Here's something we can all agree on.

How wonderful it will be when we're all together eating in heaven. The turkey's great, Grandma. Boy, it's a little cold around here today, isn't it?

[21:04] And Jesus doesn't stop. He seizes on this to tell a parable to challenge this man's presumption about being there at that kingdom feast.

But Jesus said to him, A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet, he sent his servant to say to those who'd been invited, Come, for everything is now ready. That's what happened. You'd get an invitation, you'd RSVP, and then weeks later when the party came, the day of, the servant would come to say, Now we're ready for you. 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've bought five yoke of oxen and I go to examine them. Please have me excused. And another said, I've married a wife and therefore I cannot come.

So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.

[22:10] And the servant said, Sir, what you commanded has been done and still there is room.

And the master said to the servant, Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled.

For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. Jesus tells a story about that kingdom banquet.

And that last verse is the most pointed one of all, isn't it? What you can't tell in English but is pretty clear in the Greek, in verse 24, it's not the master speaking to the servant anymore.

It's actually Jesus having finished the parable, turning and addressing the dinner party. It's a direct warning. And it's also a direct reminder that the banquet in the kingdom is about Jesus.

He says, It's my banquet. It's his wedding supper, isn't it? And God the Father is the one who at his son's wedding supper has insisted on inviting whom?

[23 : 19] The poor, crippled, blind, and lame. Jews and Gentiles, haves and have-nots. It's so much so that he has to compel these people to come in.

It's not because he's angry at them or because they don't want to come but because socially they're such that they know they couldn't pay him back. They couldn't invite this guy back over so they're hesitant to accept something so much so that he has to come and in a sense take them by the hand and insist, No, I want you here.

I want you in at the party. That kingdom banquet is going to look different from what many of us would expect.

It's those kinds of people whom Jesus has come to rescue to bring into a relationship with his Father so that they are at this feast. And then look how this action of the Father, how what he does in gathering these people into his feast leads to the transformed society we've been talking about. Just briefly read this gospel foundation back into what we've seen already this morning. We're going to go in reverse order back through the passage, okay? Hang with me. Don't try to climb the social ladder to get selfish gain.

[24 : 40] Instead, do what? Reach generously to the least of these. Now why? Well, God, the highest and most significant has already reached down to them.

They've been at his feast so they're valuable. They're not lesser people than you. In fact, they're actually like you because if you're at the king's feast, you too were crippled, poor, blind, and lame, living outside, as it were, until he compelled you to come in.

So it's not some big request to humble yourself and take a seat further down. It's just the truth. And you can be confident as you do that he will exalt you because your significance comes from the invitation of the king.

So finally, what's the basis for the joyful celebration of deliverance? Why is that what our lives should be about, characterized by all the time? That the kingdom of God itself is what?

A party. A feast. A banquet where the king is intent not on getting all those who will rigidly and coldly follow all the rules. Who's he intent on getting there?

[25 : 56] Those who will celebrate his son joyfully and passionately. That's what he wants at his feast. He wants his house filled for the party.

And no one who finds the cares and concerns of life more important than his son, more important than his kingdom, will be there.

More from Jesus on that next Sunday. Watch out. But the king is inviting people into a celebration where his son and the work of deliverance that he achieved for these people is treasured above all else and joyfully shared with all others.

See, the church should be a taste of this new and different kingdom. Right? A picture of this kind of transformed society. This counter-cultural community.

And shame on us when we aren't. As we confessed earlier, when we don't live like this because we've stopped seeing ourselves as poor, blind, and naked, we better repent.

[27 : 07] Something's got to change. It's not the way the kingdom works. We heard on the video, if we don't love our neighbors, there's something we're missing about God and how he throws a party.

The gospel is what drives us to throw the kind of parties that we've been invited to. Right? The gospel is what drives us to make strangers family, to find our neighbors to be both those we naturally run into and those we intentionally go out of our way to run into.

To seek the flourishing of others of different races or socioeconomic levels, even on the back of my property value because of the gospel. God did all this first.

Jesus rescues sinners. He restores them to relationship with the Father and then empowers them by his Holy Spirit to go transform society. That's the gospel.

So we find this transformed society to begin where? Not with us walking out of church to change the world in our own strength, but with our Father who began it all reaching out to rescue us and pull us into the kingdom celebration that transforms all of society.

[28 : 24] that's the true and social gospel and don't let anyone take the social away from you and don't let anyone take the gospel away from you. Amen? That's the good news of Jesus.

Not of us. It's not the good news of me or my gifts that I bring to society. It's the good news of Jesus that comes and rescues us and changes everything. And it's that good news that is why we come here.

Is it any wonder that the picture of the kingdom that God has given his people is a meal? A feast. A feast that celebrates the person and work of Jesus.

Elders and ushers, you can hang tight for just a second. I know I walked down here but I'm not done yet and I want you to hear this. I promise I'll pray in just a minute and you can move then. See that the kingdom of God as a celebratory feast is a theme in the Bible from cover to cover where meals in the Bible are such a powerful picture of inclusion and significance and I won't give you all the examples for sake of time but just a couple.

All the way back to Mount Sinai in Exodus when God has delivered his people from Egypt but they've already started to rebel and to engage in rampant idolatry.

[29 : 47] when God establishes what it's like for them to have this special relationship with him you know what he does? He invites Moses and Aaron and his sons and 70 elders up to have dinner.

These people who deserve to be run off from God's presence he eats and drinks with them. You know when Jesus comes what does he do?

He's known for eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners inviting into relationship those who others are running off and so it's because of that that in 1 Corinthians 11 when Paul is talking about this table the Lord's Supper he says to the Corinthians y'all aren't even eating the Lord's Supper you know why?

Because the rich are getting there and getting drunk and the poor are going hungry in the back room that doesn't get the real food. You're not eating together and considering each other.

That's how important it is that you create that kind of community with each other they must wait and consider each other around God's table and that's what we're going to do and why we gather here this morning.

[30 : 57] But before we do one more glorious passage that tells us this dinner is a rehearsal dinner that we're practicing as it were for the great banquet coming one day Isaiah prophesies about that feast on this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples for the nations for the Gentiles what's he going to make for them?

A feast of rich food a feast of well-aged wine of rich food full of marrow of aged wine well refined and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples the veil spread over all nations he will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth for the Lord has spoken it will be said on that day behold this is our God we have waited for him that he might save us this is the Lord we have waited for him let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation that's what happens at that table at that wedding supper right?

death is swallowed up tears are wiped away we rejoice and say this is the God we have been waiting for to deliver us that's the feast you need to be dreaming about as you come to this one one last thing that's actually the true significance that you long for it's not that you don't matter you actually get that true significance you know how who you sit by by being invited by the king of creation the most high God to sit at his table and look him in the eye and sit next to him and eat and drink a rich feast with him forever that's where your significance comes from so you can throw parties the way God throws parties and not even risk losing your significance nothing can take that away from you you get to invite other people into that as one who whose eternal significance is secure you get to share with others what it means to be invited in and have a taste of the king's feast let's pray and we'll celebrate this together

Jesus thank you thank you that you gave yourself thank you that you gave us simple elements like bread bread and wine to remind us that we're invited to the feast it's the only way we could get in by you giving your life for us swallowing death forever and so we rejoice and we come to celebrate remind us of that and give us joy in it we ask in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org you