Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

An Invitation to God’s Great Banquet
Scripture: Luke 14:15-24
Code: 42-194

It's fascinating to study the life of Christ so intimately and so closely and in such detail as we do in going through the gospel of Luke and having gone through the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of John and in the future the gospel of Mark, looking into His life with tremendous scrutiny. And while we see a myriad of details, there are some sort of broad and sweeping realities that come into our view. One is that though Jesus wept, there is no statement in the Scripture that He ever laughed. Though He told all kinds of stories that were somber and sobering, there is no indication that He ever told a joke.

And yet the text before us today surely seemed to the listeners as if He was telling a joke. Open your Bible to Luke 14 and I want to read verses 15-24. We'll look at this text. Luke 14, verses 15-24. "When one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, ‘Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.’ But He said to him, ‘A man was giving a big dinner and invited many. And at the dinner hour he sent his slaves to say to those who had been invited, “Come for everything is ready now,” but they all alike began to make excuses. First one said to him, “I've bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it. Please consider me excused.” Another one said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen and I'm going to try them out. Please consider me excused.” Another one said, “I have married a wife and for that reason I cannot come.” And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.” Then the slave said, “Master, what you have commanded as been done and still there is room.” And the master said to the slave, “Go out into the highways and along the hedges and compel them to come in so that my house may be filled. For I tell you none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner."”

This story would be received by the Jews as laughable, ludicrous, ridiculous, impossible. No such scenario could ever happen. Inconceivable, this is a joke without a punch line. Invited guests to a great feast prepared by a wealthy man as indicated by the fact that it was a big dinner and many were invited would be the pinnacle of social life, the high point. For important people to hold such banquets and to fill them with those invited guests was to receive not only a great meal prepared for you, not only great honor for being there, but to enjoy great music and the fun and the fellowship that went along with the celebration.

This was the pinnacle of Jewish social life in a rather mundane and boring world of existing in an agricultural environment or eking out an existence in the city, in the routine of trying to get enough for food, which was a daily battle because you had to prepare your own or have someone do it for you. To have a great feast prepared for you and to be invited by a very prominent person could be the highlight of your life. This just wouldn't happen; that people who had accepted an invitation would then refuse to come, and the rich man would fill his banquet table with the riffraff and the scum of society. Absolutely absurd.

Now before we look at the story and its meaning, just a reminder, verse 15 says, "When one of those who were reclining at the table with Him." It reminds us that we're at lunch. And this is a lunch provided by a very prominent Pharisee for other Pharisees and scribes mentioned in verse 3 of this chapter. A luncheon is first identified in verse 1. And they had invited Jesus because they wanted to trap Jesus into healing a man who had a case of edema related to some serious organ disease. They wanted to trap Jesus into healing the man, thus violating the Sabbath, and thus proving that He was not from God.

Well, Jesus overturned their intentions and silenced them. He did the healing and then He confronted them with the reality that if they had an ox that fell in a ditch, they'd pull it out on a Sabbath because it meant money. Certainly if they had a son that fell into a ditch, they'd pull him out because of love. They really were hypocrites. They really were duplicitous. Then He went on to talk about humility, the kind of humility that is characteristic of those who enter the kingdom.

And after His lecture on humility, He concludes in verse 14 that those who were truly humble will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. Now they knew He was talking about eternal life. They knew what the resurrection of the righteous was. Jesus was telling them that you are too proud to enter the kingdom. You need to humble yourself and such would be manifest in the fact that instead of clamoring for chief seats at a banquet or instead of holding a banquet and inviting only the prominent people, you would reach out in humility and seek the last place or you would reach out in humility and invite the poor and the blind and the maimed and the lame.

In other words, we remember that He was simply identifying the manifestation or the outward expression of a humble heart. He was telling them that they were too proud. They needed to humble themselves if they ever wanted to end up at the resurrection of the righteous. And so verse 14 concludes with that comment about the resurrection of the righteous. Now, the Jews knew this. They knew about the resurrection of the righteous, of course. And they believed that the righteous included

them, particularly the Pharisees and the scribes. They were the elite of the righteous. And resurrection was their whole hope. They held out hope for the resurrection because that was what they had to look for in the otherwise very difficult, very burdensome, very painful, very self-sacrificing and limiting existence of a legalist. They lived their lives according to very minute prescriptions.

There were relentless burdens and limitations attached to living under Jewish legal tradition. It was painful. It was a kind of a deprivation. They endured self-sacrifice. They endured endless rituals. The weight of their legalism went down to the very minute aspects of eating every day. There was a huge burden; a burden that was so difficult to bear Jesus called it a burden that was unbearable in the 23rd chapter of Matthew. Why would they do that? Why would they live under such strictures?

Answer? Because they believed they were achieving the resurrection of the righteous. They were willing to suffer in this life to gain life eternal and to be free in life eternal from such limitations. In fact, they actually believed that the more rules they kept, the more they assured that they would be a part of the resurrection of the righteous and so they added and added and added and added more and more and more traditions to the laws of Scripture in order that they might in keeping them secure their place in the resurrection of the righteous.

Now this is about the way every religion functions. Why do any people endure the strictures of their own religion? Why do they do that? Why do priests and nuns endure the kinds of deprivation that they do in their situation except for the fact that they believe that through this they achieve the resurrection of the righteous? Why do people go to mass and say their “Hail Marys” and go through all of the religious things that they go through throughout their lives? Why? Why do they endure all of that? Because they believe they're achieving the resurrection of the righteous. Why does anybody in any religion behave according to the religious standards? Why do Mormons try to be as moral as they can possibly be? Because they believe they're achieving the resurrection of the righteous. That's how all religion works, except Christianity where we know we can't achieve that. It's a gift of grace through faith in Christ.

But everywhere else, this is simply a willingness to make whatever sacrifices are required here to achieve the resurrection to come. This is true in Islam. This is true in any religion. The promise of a future good life is what causes people to live with such restriction and restraint and limitation and burdens of morality in their external conduct. And so the Jews were looking forward to the resurrection of the righteous, but they in viewing the resurrection of the righteous saw it as a lavish celebration in the presence of God and indeed that was right.

They actually saw it as a banquet. That was because the prophet Isaiah described it that way. In the 25th chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah looks forward to the future that God has for his people. Listen to what he says. "The Lord of hosts," verse 6, Isaiah 25, "will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain, a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow and refined aged wine and on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time. The Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, remove the reproach of His people from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken. It will be said in that day behold this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited, let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

We're going to be there. We're going to be saved. All the burdens will be eliminated. All the veils will be taken away. We'll all be there and we'll have this lavish banquet. A lavish banquet was the highest experience socially, the most fulfilling and joyful celebration they knew anything about and that is why it became an analogy or a metaphor for the heavenly celebration. And that's carried on even into the New Testament where we see heaven in Revelation as the marriage supper of the lamb. We all, as it were, sit around the banquet table of God in the glory of the new heaven and the new earth.

So when Jesus speaks of the resurrection of the righteous and it happens to be at a lunch, they're sitting a table eating, somebody begins to think about the fact that isn't it going to be wonderful when we all get to the great banquet of God, when we all get to the resurrection of the righteous. And so in verse 15, one of those reclining at the lunch table with Him, when he heard Him refer to the resurrection of the righteous, said to Him, ‘Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.'"

Almost sounds like a toast, doesn't it? It is a beatitude but it's almost as if he picked up his cup of wine and said, ‘Blessed is everyone who will be eating bread in the kingdom of God,’ and they all said yes. This is an affirmation of two things: an affirmation that they were going to be there and an affirmation that they didn't accept what Jesus had just said. Basically Jesus said you're too proud to enter the kingdom of God. There needs to be a dramatic change. You need to humble yourself as manifest in such things as who it is you associate with and how you seek the last place and not the first place.

But they had nothing but scorn for the comments of Jesus, if indeed they bothered to process them at all. They were convinced, due to their fastidious and dutiful observance of the law and the traditions, that they were going to be the righteous in the righteous resurrection and they were going to be sitting

at the great banquet of God eating bread in the kingdom. And so this is a pronouncing of blessing upon their own heads, a kind of toast to themselves, affirming that they had rejected the indictment of Jesus. Confident they were secure in the resurrection of the righteous by their Abrahamic ancestry and by their adherence to the tradition. They would not only be there, but they would be in the prominent seats there. That was so much a part of Jewish thinking that even the disciples were caught up in it. That's why James and John sent their mother to ask Jesus if they could sit on the right and the left hand in the kingdom. They had that same mentality. It was in the fabric of how they thought.

They were all raised up in a work system. You tried to achieve the highest place of prominence. They were sure they would be in the chief seats in the heavenly banquet. And while this is not directly an adversarial comment, this is not an attack on what Jesus says directly, indirectly, it is a scorn and a rebuke of the Lord's insinuation that they were too proud to be in God's kingdom, that only the humble were going to show up at the righteous resurrection. On the contrary, we are the blessed who will eat bread in the kingdom of God and all the rest would have said yes, amen, we'll all be there.

Now dear ones, this is a totally misguided assumption that needs immediate and unmistakable correction. And so our Lord speaks and I'll just tell you something right here, because it's a good place to inject it. Jesus always sought to shatter false religious hope. He never put His arm around a Pharisee and said well we worship the same God, we're both going to be there, You're my brother. He never put His arm around a scribe who was living in a delusion and said to Him well you are a student of the Old Testament and you are worshiping the God of Israel and we're going to be there. You're my brother.

He never put His arms around a synagogue crowd and said what you're doing is really good, God's going to accept this religious effort in His name as enough. He exploded every time the false religious security of the Jews at every level, at the level of the Pharisees, the scribes and at the level of the people in the synagogues. Jesus always sought to shatter false religious hope. This is critical in all evangelism. This is being honest. This is being honest. Anybody who lives under some kind of misguided assumption that they're headed for heaven needs to know that that is not true.

It needs to be immediately and unmistakably and clearly corrected. This is applicable to people in any false religion. You cannot put your arms around people in false religion and say well because you're religious, because you have quote "faith" you're OK; especially in this climate in which today everybody is sort of entitled to their own faith and whatever it is going to be OK. I was thinking about that when I was listening to some of the conversations about Harriet Miers, the President's new

appointment to the Supreme Court and there was some interviews on the Christian radio that I was listening to over in Colorado and they kept saying her faith is important to her. Her faith is the center of her life. She lives according to her faith. And then her pastor came on and said essentially, you know, I've known Harriet and her faith is strong and she lives according to her faith. And at one point I wanted to so OK, hold it here. I'm not really interested in her faith. That's subjective. I want to know: What is her relationship to the faith, once for all delivered to the saints?

And it may be that she's a true believer. I don't know anything about it. I just know that that has seeped down into the vernacular so that even pastors use that kind of language. I don't want to hear about your faith. I want to hear about your relationship to the faith, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Because your faith...everybody's got faith in something. That doesn't mean anything. Unless your faith is placed in the Lord Jesus Christ, your faith is useless. But why do people trust in religion. Because they believe it's going to take them to the resurrection of the righteous. It's going to get them into the kingdom of God. Why do they go through strictures and the requirements and the duties and responsibilities and constraints, and the moral requirements of their religion? Because they make all of those sacrifices so that someday they won't have to make any sacrifices, they'll be in the glory of heaven. That was how the Pharisees lived. That was how the Jews lived. But this was all a delusion, because they were not headed for heaven at all. And Jesus is going to shatter their false hope with a story, a parable. And in fact, there's a brief outline, four points: invitation, excuses, inclusion, exclusion.

Can you follow that? Invitation, excuses, inclusion, exclusion. Let's look at the invitation, verse 16. "He said to him, ‘A man was giving a big dinner and He invited many," the operative words, “big” and “many.” This is a huge event. This is a very wealthy man. He has a dinner in mind that will be a grand, gala banquet. And he invites a huge number of people. Now this is a mirror that the Jews can easily see themselves in because they understand this. This is a...This is the pinnacle of their social experience. For Jesus it's a story to attack the delusional self-confidence of the Jews in their false religion.

The man is obviously prominent because he has the capability to give a big *deipnon*, meaning dinner banquet, on a grand scale, like the wedding feast in the parable of Matthew 22, which is very similar to this one. And the wedding feast would be the banquet of all banquets, could last for days as this one perhaps could. He invited many and that would be an extensive number of people and the invitation would come in a very personal, formal way as an invitation would come to you even today, to a wedding or to some grand scale gala banquet. It would identify the event, only when we get one of those, it tells us where it is, when it is, and exactly the time you're supposed to be there right. But in the ancient world it wasn't like that. The actual day and the actual time were left open. It would be

some time in the future. In a world without clocks and a world without watches, life moves at a different pace and in a world where you had to kill the animals and you had to clean the animals, you had to cook the animals and you to get all of the vegetables and everything else you wanted and do all the preparation, specificity couldn't be stated at the first invitation so always there were two invitations.

First invitation identified you as one who was being invited as an honored guest and you waited to get the second invitation which basically said in verse 17 says, "At the dinner hour, he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come for everything is ready now.’" Every one of these kind of events had two invitations: the one that let you know you would be future invited and then the second invitation came when everything was ready.

Again, this indicates the lavish nature of this. This wasn't lunch at somebody's house after a Sabbath service in the morning such as they were experiencing here. This was a huge event. And the indication here is that everybody accepted. Nobody refuses. Doesn't say anything like that. And that is according to Jewish custom the way it would have been. I mean the Pharisees loved to be at banquets. Matthew 23:6, "They sought the chief seats at banquets," because they were places of honor and prominence and public vision. Everybody would have said yes, absolutely. Oh this would be...this would be an honor, not only the lavish spread and the great entertainment and all the falderal that would go on, but the prominence that you would be given by being invited by such a person.

But at the dinner hour when all the animals had been killed and skinned and prepared and everything had been gathered and everything was ready and the slave goes to those who had been invited and said, “Come now, for everything is ready, the most bizarre thing happens.” They are pre-invited guests, because that's what it says in verse 17, "Say to those who had been invited, ‘Come for everything is ready.’" The long awaited dinner is to begin. They would have been with baited breath anticipating, when do you think it'll start? When do you think it'll start? Will it be this week? Will it be tomorrow? Will it be the next day? Will it be tonight that we're going to hear that it's going to be tomorrow? They would live in anticipation of this great event.

But when the invitation comes at the hour, verse 18, we get excuses. So we go from the invitation to the excuses. Listen to these. "They all alike began to make excuses." Everybody said I can't come, all of them. They all came up with excuses. Now this is where the Pharisees at lunch are saying, this is ridiculous, nobody would do that. What a joke. This is churlish to borrow an English word. This is rude. This is unrefined. This is considered outrageous and unacceptable conduct. This would not happen. This kind of breech of courtesy and the breech of kindness to a man and his staff who had

prepared a massive feast, to say I'm sorry I'm not going to come and have everybody say that, I mean that would...that is a horrible breech of social ethics.

In fact, some ancient near eastern traditions equate with a declaration of war, because when you were invited to a meal with someone that was an extension of friendship and when you refused that that was a statement that you wanted no friendship with that individual. It was essentially a declaration of war. Nobody would do this, but they all alike did it. And the Pharisees and the scribes must have looked at each other and said this is an absurd story. Where is this story going? Nobody would do that, let alone everybody.

And then Jesus says to them, unless they think that there was some really good reason why they wouldn't come, here are three sample excuses. The first sample, verse 18, "They all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, ‘I bought a piece of land. I need to go out and look at it.'" What? Where do you think it's going to go? What are you going to see, dirt? You're going to turn down a banquet to go look at dirt? This is absurd. This is...they would chuckle here and they would say this is getting funnier by the minute. Nobody would do that. The dirt's not going anywhere. “Please consider me excused.” It's a lame, ridiculous, absurd excuse.

And another one says in verse 19, "I bought five yoke of oxen." By the way, if you had five yoke of oxen that was an indication that you were a very wealthy landowner. So here's a guy who's a fairly wealthy guy in the story. He says, “I've got yoke of oxen, I'm going to try them out.” You're going to try out your oxen instead of going to this deal? You think your oxen can't be tried out in another few days. That's ridiculous. Here's the only one that even gets close to reality. Verse 20, you're already there, right? Oh yeah, you identify with this. "I married a wife and for that reason I can't come." Yeah.

You know, she just slammed down her sandal and said we aren't going. That does have a ring of reality to that one, doesn't it? Yeah, I would have come had I been single, but you understand I'm now married and I confess to being henpecked, nothing new under the sun. There were some provisions in the Old Testament law. Deuteronomy 24:5 that said if you married a wife, you get some leave for a year from military service and from having to go away on long business junkets and things like that, but a dinner? A banquet? Nobody would make an excuse like that. And anybody who was that henpecked would make up a different excuse. By the way, Pharisees and scribes considered women as the lowest of the low. Every day a Pharisee prayed, “I thank you God that I'm not a Gentile or a woman.”

So women didn't dictate to men what to do. None of these make any excuse at all. And the story is getting more absurd and more ridiculous. That leads us to the inclusion. We have a problem now. We have a massive banquet prepared and nobody to come. So the slave comes back, verse 21, reports to his master these ridiculous excuses which are samples of all the excuses given by everybody who was invited because none of them are going to come. The head of the household becomes angry and anybody would say that is a just anger. This is tremendous effort, tremendous work, tremendous expense, a tremendous act of generosity and kindness returned with indifference and disdain.

And he said to the slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame." The celebration will go on. The preparations are made. We won't cancel this event. Every seat will be filled, but it's going to be fulfilled by the most unlikely people. Now Jesus had just told them back in verses 12 and 13, "When you have a dinner don't just invite your brothers and your friends and the rich, but find the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame." And here this again appears here. Go at once into the streets and lanes in the city. We're talking about the street people here. We're talking about the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. We're talking about the beggars and the outcasts who live in the slums, who live in the shanties. We're talking about *le miserables*. We're talking about the...the outcasts, the untouchables. Go to the poor sections of town, the slums. Find the scum, the riffraff.

And the now the story turns from one kind of preposterous idea, that the people invited wouldn't come, to an equally preposterous idea, that the man would invited the scum. Neither of these are anywhere near reality in the society of the Jews. Neither would happen. The first group wouldn't turn down the invitation and the second group would never ever be invited. The Jews prided themselves on never touching the outcasts, on scorning Jesus for associating with prostitutes and tax collectors and sinners. They even confronted the disciples of Jesus as we learned earlier in Luke and said, “Your master eats with sinners.” These people were below the waterline of social acceptance.

But the master says go and bring them and it would have to be brought. The verb “bring in,” in verse 21, is important. They would have to be brought in because they would resist it. They know social protocol and as we pointed out last time, it's all about reciprocation. I'll hold a banquet for rich friends so rich friends will hold a banquet for me. That's how it works. The elite stayed together and scratched each other's back. And these people would have said look, I can't repay anything. There's no...I don't want to come to a dinner there because I'm going to be obligated to provide one in reciprocation. I can't do that. I have no capability to do that. Plus I'm not worthy to come into that place.

You know, when Luke was converted as a tax collector he had a big banquet, but the only people who would come to the banquet were other tax collectors and the strong-arm people who broke people's arms to collect his taxes and all the riffraff that went with them. Now these people would have to be brought in. They would have to be literally persuaded to come because it was so against the convention that they were used to. And that's the kind of attitude that Jesus wanted people to have.

The slave, verse 22 said, "Master what you have commanded has been done and there's still room." I got all the people I could from the poor section and there's still room. Still some seats at the table. It's a very big place, a very big dinner. And so in verse 23, the master said to the slave, “Go out into the highways, along the hedges and compel them to come in.” Now you have to compel these. You have to bring the ones in town because they're going to resist you just because they know they can't pay back. They know they don't belong there. Now when you go out it's even going to be a more difficult task so you compel them to come in. Those people don't even have houses inside the city. They're not allowed in the city. They live outside the city. They are the highway people. They live in the brothels, the inns, the roadhouses and along the road and in the trees and in the bushes.

And their harder to reach because they're scattered farther and you're going to have to compel them to come in because if the people inside the city, at least they've been accepted into the city, if they have a hard time accepting the fact that they could come to a banquet like this, these people are going to have an even harder time. So you really do need to compel them. And the idea of the word “compel” here is a very strong word. I'll comment on it a little later. Verse 24 then goes to the exclusion.

We see the invitation, excuses, the inclusion of this other group and now the exclusion. Verse 24, "For I tell you none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner." Now they would all say, “It's right. Boy! I agree with you on that one.” The whole ridiculous story would come to this ending, but in one sense, they would all say well, of course, if anybody did that you'd never ever let them back into the dinner. They forfeited their privilege for good with that kind of conduct. They would all agree with that. But at this point, the application of the parable takes it a completely different direction. The story has all along been in the third person. A man, giving a dinner, he sent his slave, and the people made excuses. It's all in the third person.

But all of a sudden in verse 24, we move into the first and second person. This is no longer the story. This is the application: "For I tell you." And now he's pointing the story at his audience. This is not he

and them, this is you and I am telling you. By the way, “for I tell you” appears six or seven times in the gospel of Luke. Every time it's when Jesus applies a story to His audience. "I tell you none of those men who were invited," notice this, "shall taste of my dinner." We're not talking about the man and his dinner. We're talking Jesus and the Messianic dinner. We're talking about heaven. We're talking about the great banquet provided for the resurrection of the righteous. We're talking about the heavenly celebration, salvation, eternal kingdom, resurrection, life.

Jesus says, "I tell you none of those who were invited shall taste of my dinner." Bottom line, you will be excluded from the heavenly banquet, which means you will not be in the kingdom of God, not among the blessed, nor will you be there at the resurrection of the righteous. Now let's go back to the parable and see the application. All of a sudden what's bursting on their minds at this juncture...By this application, they recycle it and this is what they come up with. The invitation, a man, that's God, was giving a big dinner. Salvation, the eternal kingdom, the resurrection of the righteous, the heavenly celebration, the lavish banquet in glory, and He invited, through the prophets and the men of God and the authors of Old Testament Scripture many, meaning Israel, the pre-invited guests, the chosen people of God to whom were given the Scriptures and the covenants and the promises and Messiah and the adoption.

And they all said yes. The first reaction to the Old Testament revelation is this. You're God's chosen people. God has prepared and provided for you, eternal life. He invites you to that eternal life. He invites you to the heavenly, lavish banquet. He invites you into His eternal kingdom and they believed it. They believed they were God's chosen people. They believed they would be resurrected into heavenly glory and blessing. This was their hope. This still is the hope of all religious Jews. They believe that they will be the recipients of all the Old Testament promises. They believe it.

And included with them are other proselytes from the Gentiles who became proselytes to Judaism. They too will share in that kingdom, even though, as verse 34 of chapter 13 says, "They had killed the prophets and stoned the divine messengers." They had rebelled. They had gone into idolatry. They still believed that because of their Abrahamic ancestry, we are the seed of Abraham and because of their keeping of the tradition they were going to be there. They were waiting for the kingdom. They were waiting for the Messiah. They were in full hope of that promise. That's why all Judea and Jerusalem was going out to John the Baptist, who was saying the kingdom is at hand, the king is here. That was their anticipated hope. And as I said, they lived for that. That's why they would live with all the strictures.

But at the dinner hour, which Jesus called the acceptable year of the Lord, the moment when the meal was ready He sent His slave...God did, to say to those who had been invited, "come for everything is ready now." This could be John the Baptist or Jesus and the apostles, all of them. The messengers come and say it's time now, the kingdom is ready, the door is open, the meal is provided, salvation is here. Jesus said to the synagogue crowd in Nazareth, He said, "Today, these things are fulfilled in your ears." The pre-invited guests were given the second invitation. Everything is ready. The king is here and the kingdom was offered to them.

And then we see the excuses. They all began to make excuses. Two of them have to do with possessions. One of them has to do with relationships. And this is typical. That's all you've got in this world. You either have possessions or relationships. You either have animate things or inanimate things. You either stuff or people to fill your life. Disinterest, indifference, self-satisfaction, the joke is on them by now as they processed this again they're probably not laughing any more, because they're the ones that are holding on to the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this world in the language of the parables of Matthew 13 and also in Luke.

They are not interested in the message of Jesus Christ or in Jesus Christ. When the true gospel of salvation came, they wanted to stone Him. One message in the synagogue in Nazareth and they tried to throw Him off a cliff. They have no interest in the banquet of God if Jesus Christ is the door to the banquet hall. They have no interest in the banquet of God if Jesus Christ is the way. They are the fools with the stupid excuses, who hold onto everything, and that's why Jesus said, "If you're not willing to sell all and follow me, you can't be my disciple; if you're not willing to hate your father, your mother, your sister, your brother and even your own life." Look at it down in the same chapter, verse 26. "If anyone comes to me and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters and even his own life, he can't be my disciple. Whoever doesn't carry his own cross, come after me can't be my disciple."

Jesus repeatedly said this. Often spoke of leaving material possessions and leaving human relationships behind. You see the Jews had all said yes to God's promise and no to God's Son. Yes, to the original invitation, no to the invitation to come. They were dominated like all sinners by natural desire, love of the flesh, love of the world, love of self. How stupid to make dirt your priority or oxen or a relationship, even that with a wife. That is exactly why in chapter 13:34 He said, "I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. You wouldn’t have it. Now your house is left to you." God steps back. I abandon you. You are desolate.

And judgment fell in 70 A.D. physically when the Romans came and massacred hundreds of thousands of Jews. And the slaughter went on for years and years. How stupid to prefer anything to salvation. How ridiculous to make that choice with the most severe and eternal consequences. How much better to do as Paul, to see all of that stuff connected to his Judaism as manure compared to Christ.

Then we come to inclusion. Verses 21-23, they're reprocessing this again and starting to be clear what He's talking about.

So he came back, reports, the household head is angry. God has been dishonored. God has been scorned. God has been affronted. His goodness and His generosity and His kindness have been treated with contempt. This is a righteous, just anger and they know it. They would have said it in their minds. Whoa, that man has every right to be angry, and so does God have every right to be angry with those who reject His Son. The story seemed, at first, to be ridiculous, but the very ones amused by it were the ones who now see themselves under the anger of God. John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life. He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him."

And in 2 Thessalonians tells us in strong, strong language, unforgettable language, that when the Lord comes He will deal out retribution to those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and they will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, judgment. They knew what He was saying. He is angry and you are excluded. You're desolate, left to yourselves. And then, "Go into the streets and lanes of the city and bring the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame." You remember the Sermon on the Mount, the meek inherit the kingdom? The spiritually bankrupt, the humble, the hungry, the thirsty? This is what He's saying.

Go out and find the people who are spiritually destitute. Go out and find the people who are broken and hungry. Go out and find the sinners who know they're unworthy. Go out and find those who know they don't belong at the banquet of God because of their wretchedness, the tax collectors and the riffraff. Go find the beggars, the untouchables, those who are spiritually aware of their utter uselessness, hopelessness and unworthiness. The banquet will not include the Pharisees, not include the scribes, not include the rabbis and the priests. With a few exceptions it will not include the general religious synagogue people. But the banquet will include the outcasts, like the publican, Luke 18, pounding his breast. "God be merciful to me, a sinner." That's why 1 Corinthians 1 says not many noble, not many mighty. God has chosen the humble and the poor and the base and the lowly and the nobodies.

That's the Jewish remnant. That's the Jews who were broken enough and humble enough and spiritually mourning over their wretchedness and they came out of the outcast crowd. But the slave comes back in verse 22 and says, "What you've commanded has been done, there's still room." There's not enough from just the remnant of Jews and throughout all of history there continue to be a remnant of Jews who come to faith in Christ, who humble themselves and know they are the meek and the mourning and the lowly and the destitute and the hungry and the thirsty and the outcasts, like Paul, who saw himself as the chief of sinners. But that's not enough. There's not just going to be the Jewish remnant to fill up heaven. There's still room.

So verse 23, "The master said to the slave, go outside the city. Go over to the highways and along the hedges." This indicates Gentiles. Get outside of the confines of Judaism. Now we're talking about the great commission. "Go into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature. Make disciples of every nation. Go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the world." Now we're talking about preaching the gospel, Romans 1:16, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. The highways, the hedges: That's all over everywhere, outside the confines of the city. People of every tongue and tribe and people and nation and compel them, *anagkaz*, very strong word. It means to persuade strongly, to urge, to constrain, because they're going to say well, I'm not even a part of Israel. I'm not even inside all of this choosing of God, this people of God. I...I'm unworthy.

You're going to have to compel them. That verb is used by Jesus...of Jesus in Matthew 14:22, making the disciples get into the boat; strong, convincing persuasion, get in the boat. It's used by Paul in Acts 26:11, who tried to force people to blaspheme. It's used again, 28 of Acts, he was forced, compelled, urged, had no other course than to appeal to Caesar, he says, in his conflict with the Jews. It was used regarding Titus being compelled to be circumcised in Galatians chapter 2. So it's a strong word. You're going to have to compel these people because of their unworthiness. This is again this publican attitude.

And here I...It's not, “Here I am Jesus. Aren't You glad to get me?” It's, “I'm not worthy. I don't deserve this, but I cry out for mercy. God be merciful to me, a sinner.” So God gave the invitation in the Old Testament and reiterated it in John the Baptist. Then came the second invitation when everything was ready and Christ, Himself, came and His apostles preached the second invitation. Israel rejected and the salvation of God reached down below the socially acceptable line to collect a remnant of outcast Jews who were the riffraff of society for the most part. And then was extended in the great commission to the Gentiles and to the world.

The celebration will occur and the table will be filled by a Jewish remnant and a Gentile church. That takes us to the final statement again, the exclusion statement in verse 24. "I tell you none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner." The nation of Israel won't be there. The Israel of the life of Christ won't be there. Much of Israel in the history before and since the predominant reality is this, they will not be there. The vast amount of Jews, 14-15 million today, will not be there. The horrible tragedy of Israel's unbelief and rejection of God, the Messiah, salvation, is a forfeiture of eternal blessing and eternal life. "They will never taste my dinner."

They may wonder: Lord, Lord, we did this, we did that. "Depart from me, I never knew you." Absence, listen, is due to the rejection of Jesus Christ. Absence at that dinner is due to a rejection of the gospel. The originally invited ones won't be there. And there are many of you who have been invited. You have heard God's invitation to the banquet and you have used some lame and ridiculous excuse to refuse to come to Christ. Take this warning. Unless you accept God's invitation to come through Christ, you won't be there either. No matter how much of an invitation you had you're going to be like those virgins in Matthew 25, on the outside with no oil in your lamp, a lot of spiritual information and no light.

Anyone who rejects Jesus Christ will never experience heaven. Anyone who rejects Jesus Christ will never experience the celebration God has prepared in heaven for those that love His Son. And the gospel is God's invitation. Take a look at what ridiculous excuses you might be throwing up that will ultimately exclude you from the greatest opportunity ever given.

Father, we come to you now at the end of this service, been gripped in our minds and hearts by the potency of this scene. We don't know the outcome. It doesn't tell us how they responded. And it's an open end and it should be because the same parable needs to be told again and again as it has been this morning. There is an invitation, not just to Israel, but to the Gentiles. The invitation will not be received by the people with silly, superficial excuses who want to hold onto their possessions and their relationships. But it will be received by the broken and the humble and the meek and the mourning and the destitute and the lowly who know they aren't worthy to come into Your glorious presence. They aren't worthy to come into Your heaven. They aren't worthy to come to Your feasts and Your banquet, but they will be compelled and urged to come. And one day Your banquet will be full, and it will be full of the most unlikely. And there are going to be many Jews in hell as Jesus said earlier who are going to become aware that there at that banquet will be Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and others and people from the east and the west and the north and the south, from all over the world, but they themselves shut out.

Father, extend that invitation with grace and power through the Spirit to every heart here. May there be no foolish excuses. May there be an embracing of the only way of salvation, the only hope of heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we do commit to you this truth and we thank You for the great and glorious time of worship and the refreshment of being in Your presence with Your people. We pray that the truth that we have learned today may be useful to us, not only in our own lives, but as we reach out to others. May we like Jesus seek to pull the rug out from under people who are living with a false hope. May we unmistakably and clearly tell people that apart from Christ there will never be a heaven. Use us Lord to bear Your truth to those who need to hear. We thank You in Your Son's name, amen.

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