

The Great Invitation

Luke 14:15-35

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Where we are in Luke 14 today is a continuation of last week. So I want to give you a short recap of last week.

Jesus had been invited to dinner at a Pharisee's house. A Pharisee was a member of a strict, religious sect of the Jews. They gave themselves to keeping every jot and tittle of the law. They were hypocritical legalists. And at this dinner, Jesus gave them some lessons, which were on hypocrisy, in verses 1-6; on humility, in verses 7-11; and He called them to live for eternity, in verses 12-14. That was last Sunday's section we covered.

Then without skipping a beat, Jesus said, in verse 15, "Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him..." that is, "one of the Pharisees who was at the dinner" "...heard these things, he said to Him, 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!'"

In verse 14, Jesus had said, "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." And then one guy blabbed out, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" He said that because he believed he would be one of them. He had a false assumption, a false faith, that he would be in heaven, that he would be in the kingdom of God, that he would be eating in a banquet with God in heaven.

But the truth is that Jesus will make plain in these parables and stories that he would be shut out, while the prostitutes, harlots and tax collectors would be brought in. "The last will be first, and the first last" (Matthew 20:16). These Pharisees will be shut out, and those you think God will reject will be accepted.

Jesus does two things in this long text of 21 verses. He first gives a call to come and dine, in verses 15-24. His first call is an invitation to come and dine at the supper, be saved, go to heaven and eat at the heavenly supper. Then second He gives a call to come and die as a disciple, pick up your cross and follow Jesus, in verses 25-35.

Let's look at the first call to come and dine, verses 15-24. Verse 15, when a Pharisee "heard these things," that Jesus had just spoken out, they indicted Him. So thinking he was hot stuff, the Pharisee said, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But actually he would not be eating bread in God's kingdom. In verse 24, Jesus said, "For I say to you that none of those men who were invited..." including this Pharisee and the other hypocritical Pharisees "...shall taste my supper."

Now in verses 16-23, Jesus is going to give a parable. The text doesn't use the word "parable," which is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, but this is a parable that Jesus gives. It is about a wealthy man, who throws a big, dinner party and invites many people to it. He then sends his servants out to tell the people that the dinner is ready. But one by one they make

excuses why they couldn't come to the dinner. So the master told the servant to go to the city streets and lanes and call the poor, the maim, the lame and the outcast, to compel them to come in, so the dinner seats would be filled.

All this is a picture of God our Father, who provided salvation in Jesus Christ like a feast or dinner. He first sent the message to the Jews, the covenant people of Israel, but they rejected Him; they didn't come to faith in Christ. So the door swung open for the Gospel to go to the Gentiles, which is mostly you and I. So this is a picture of what would take place where God would provide salvation in Christ, it would be rejected by the Jews, but the door would open up for the Gentiles to come in and be forgiven.

Starting in verse 16, "Then He said to him, 'A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, "Come, for all things are now ready.'"" The way it worked in Bible days was you would send out an invitation to come to this dinner. That was an envious thing and an honor to be invited to a banquet like this; no one would refuse to come. Especially if you were invited to a wedding banquet.

The way it worked was you were sent the invitation, but you wouldn't get the day or the hour of the banquet. So these people agreed to come and RSVP'd to the invitation, but they didn't know when it would be. We get a "Save the Date" invitation 10 years before the event, and it gives you the place and time and the whole scoop! Then you RSVP if you're going to come.

But in those days, you wouldn't know the time or place. So what would happen was, in verse 17, a servant was sent out to the invitees to let them know to come to the dinner, because everything was ready.

The one who is throwing the banquet here is God the Father. The first ones invited to this banquet were the religious Jews or the covenant people of God. This is a picture of how God has provided salvation for us in Jesus Christ. It's like a banquet; the table is set and you just had to come.

So these people would get the invite, agree to come and then they would get the call, "It's ready."

Imagine how much work it took to throw a big banquet in those days. You couldn't cater it. You couldn't go to Costco and get trays of food. You couldn't go to In-N-Out and just get bags of hamburgers for dinner. They had to kill the calf, reap the harvest, knead the dough and cook it. It was a big production. So it was ready; food's on the table and everything's hot. "Go out and tell them it's time!" So the servant did that and the table was set.

The picture here, in verse 17, is that Jesus has come, and He's called people to believe in Him. It's interesting that Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). That's the invite to come. He said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). He would give you "living water" (John 4:10). He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall

never thirst" (John 6:35). "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51). So everything was ready; Jesus died, Jesus rose, the table was set. All you have to do is come and believe.

But notice now that the excuses began to come in, verses 18-20. "But they all with one accord began to make excuses." That's an interesting statement. All three who are mentioned here made up excuses. It even says it in the text—"make excuses." Excuses are made up; they're contrived or concocted. A person who is good at making excuses is good for nothing else. What is an excuse? It is a skin of truth stuffed with a lie. If you make excuses, you'll never go anywhere. You have to be honest.

So they were making up all these excuses. No one in their right mind would say "No" to an invitation to a banquet like this. You'd have to be crazy to do that! And as Jesus told the story, the people listening must have thought, That's insane!

But it's also insane when you think of what God has done for you to be saved. To eat of the banquet of eternal life, to have your sins forgiven, to spend eternity with God in heaven, to have a hope beyond the grave! So for you or I to say, "No thank you," to refuse to enter in by faith, is insane!

So there were three people who asked to be excused. And they were all giving lame excuses. Verse 18, "The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.'" Who buys a piece of property without looking at it first?! He was making up this excuse. The ground would still be there after the party was over. Go to the dinner and then go afterwards to see the ground.

You can tell when people make up excuses. Have you ever tried to get out of something and thought, How can I get out of this; not lie, but not tell the truth—kind of tell the truth? So you come up with some concocted idea. You know in your heart you're lying through your teeth. You're making it up. You're making excuses.

Verse 19, "And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.'" That's like buying a car without first test driving it. Would you buy a car with 150,000 miles on it and not first test drive it, not check it out?! Again, this is just a lame excuse.

So these first two gave excuses that dealt with material possessions. The third excuse dealt with marital affections. Verse 20, "Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'" Notice how matter-of-fact this guy is. The first two asked to please be excused. The third one just said, "I just got married! Give me a break! I can't come!" He didn't say, "Please excuse me." He could bring food back to his wife. The women wouldn't be invited to this "great supper" anyway, only the men. But couldn't he get a to-go box and bring home enough food for a couple of months?

So there were three excuses why they could not come. And what excuses do you give for not

coming to Jesus Christ? Any excuse you give for not believing in Jesus Christ is lame. There is no good reason why, when you think of God's great love and the provision that Jesus made at Calvary, you wouldn't accept that invitation to come and dine. Isaiah 55:1 says, "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat." In Revelation 22:17, it says, "Come! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely."

In verses 21-23, the Master had a new, second invitation to send his servant out to the outcasts. The Master didn't say, "Oh, what a bummer! We'll just have to cancel the feast." No; it was already prepared. The food was sitting on the table and would go to waste if someone didn't come and eat it.

Have you ever thrown a large, dinner party and half of the people who RSVP'd didn't show up? You feel like going to the people underneath the bridges and saying, "Come to our house! There's a dinner all ready for you."

Then notice what happened, in verses 21-23. "So that servant came and reported these things to his master." He told him about the excuses. "Then the master of the house..." who represents God the Father "...being angry..." This is God's righteous indignation, because of all He went to to prepare the meal. They had already agreed to come, but now they're saying, "No." And they said, "No," because they didn't want to come, not because they couldn't come.

So He "said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.'"

So first the master said to get "the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind." These were people who would normally never be invited. If you invited them, they would say, "What? You want me to come?!" They would have to be constrained to come. Then second, the master told his servant to go to "the highways and hedges" or out to the foothills and under the bridges and trees. And he used the word "compel," which is a very strong word, which means "with love, logic and force" to come, that God's "house may be filled." God's heart is to fill His house.

We see here that God has made great provision for the salvation of man; we see the invitation has gone out to all, the invitation is refused by many, but God wants heaven to be full, so He sends out further invitations.

This is a picture of how the Jews rejected their Messiah, and the Gospel went to the Gentiles. When the religious community of the Jews rejected Jesus Christ, Jesus went to the publicans and sinners. He went to Zacchaeus and people who were outcasts. Then He went to Galilee, a mostly Gentile territory where He had His most successful ministry. And the Bible tells us, in Isaiah 9:1-2, that "In Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who walked in darkness have seen a

great light.” So those who were first bidden were cast out, and those who were the outcasts were now being invited and compelled to come in. What a picture that is of the Gospel going out to the Gentiles!

Verse 24 is the summary. “For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.” The man who yelled out, in verse 15, “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” will be cut out and won’t taste of the supper. The Pharisees won’t go to heaven. What a surprise. Jesus said it like this: “The last will be first, and the first last.”

When you get to heaven, there will be surprises on who is there. People are going to see you there and say, “What?! How did you get here?”

“I believed in Jesus.”

“Wow! God’s grace is amazing!” So they’ll be freaking out that you’re there.

But we’ll be celebrating the grace of God in our salvation. Those who were self-righteous, those who thought they could get there by their own goodness, by their own works, by their own religiosity will be left out of the banquet. They won’t be able to come in and eat.

So remember not to make excuses. “I’d like to be a Christian, but I’m busy with my job” or “I’m busy with my family” or “I’m busy with my marriage” or “I’m busy with other things.” You have all these reasons to keep from coming to Jesus Christ in salvation, but they’re not reasons—they’re excuses. There’s no good reason for not believing and trusting in Jesus Christ.

it determines your eternal destiny. You can’t do anything yourself to get your soul saved except to trust in Jesus Christ. But there is something you can do to damn your soul for all eternity: reject Jesus Christ and you will be lost.

The second section of our text is in verses 25-35. It’s amazing that we would be invited to the dinner. It’s amazing that anyone would say “No,” but they do. And Jesus now moves from the subject of salvation to the subject of discipleship. You ask, “What’s the difference?”

When you become a Christian, you become a Christian by faith in Jesus Christ. “By grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). So you don’t do anything or perform anything to get saved. But once you are saved, then you begin to follow Jesus Christ. He wants us to be completely sold out and committed to following Him. So you don’t do these things to be saved; you do the disciple thing in order to be a true disciple or follower of Jesus Christ.

Jesus first said, “Come and dine.” Now He says, “Come and die.” Verse 25, “Now great multitudes went with Him.” So after verse 24, Jesus is no longer at the Pharisee’s house. It’s no longer table talk. He’s on His way to Jerusalem, and great crowds are following Him. “And He turned and said to them....” So Jesus is now speaking to this massive crowd. And what He wants from His followers is quality, not quantity.

Jesus gives us the first two of three conditions for true discipleship. The first one is in verse 26. "If anyone comes to Me..." meaning to follow Jesus as a disciple "...and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."

Now let me show you the other two, the first of which is in verse 27. "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me..." and here's the same phrase "...cannot be My disciple." And in verse 33, "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has..." here's the same statement "...cannot be My disciple."

So there are three conditions for following Jesus Christ as a disciple. What does the word "disciple" mean? It means "a learner" or "a learner who follows his teacher." You're following Jesus Christ, and you're being disciplined as you learn and walk with the Lord.

Back in verse 26, it says that if you're going to follow Jesus Christ as a disciple—three different times He uses the word "disciple"—then you have to love Jesus, love God more than your family and even more than your own life. You have to "hate [your] father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and [your] own life also."

How do you explain this? We are to hate our family?! What's going on here? This is a Hebrew idiom, a figure of speech. The word "hate" here is meant as a comparison. It means that your love for Jesus Christ should be so great that your love for your family—and even yourself—by comparison would be likened unto hate. He's not telling us to hate our families. In Romans 9:13, God said, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." God didn't hate Esau; He chose Jacob over Esau. His commitment was to Jacob, whom He loved.

Commandment number five is "Honor your father and your mother." It's the first Commandment with a promise. We're to love our parents and our family. But we often hear that "Family comes first." If you're a disciple, Jesus comes first. Does that mean you neglect your family? No. That's because if Jesus comes first, you'll be the husband, the wife, the parent or the child you should be. And if Jesus comes first, the relationship with your siblings will be right. So He's not saying to hate our family; He's just saying we should love God more, that He should be paramount or the priority. We should love God above all else and all others.

The second condition is in verse 27. "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me..." and Jesus was headed to Jerusalem to die on the Cross "...cannot be My disciple." So commitment is condition number two. You must pick up your cross and follow Jesus. In that time, when you were carrying a cross, that meant that you were going to die.

When you choose to follow Jesus Christ, the Bible says that you're not your own. "You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Paul said in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

The only problem with a “living sacrifice” is that it has a tendency to keep crawling off the altar. You give it to the Lord today, you take it back tomorrow. We should consecrate ourselves every day and say, “I belong to God. My time, my talents, my treasures—everything I am—belongs to God.” And we should take up our cross daily, die to ourselves and be willing to follow Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, “Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). If you try to find your life and do with your life what you want to do and how you want to do it, you’ll lose your life. “I’m captain of my ship and I’ll do what I want!” But if you lose your life for Christ, you’ll find out what it is.

In verses 28-32, Jesus gives two parables that speak of how we should count the cost in discipleship. “For which of you, intending to build a tower...” so it’s a building metaphor “...does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’” He’ll be ashamed.

And notice the second parable, in verse 31. “Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.”

So basically what He is saying is that you need to count the cost. And we should count the cost. But also count the cost of rejecting Jesus Christ, which is eternal loss.

Now verse 33 is the wrap-up, and it’s condition number three for being His disciple. “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”

So the three conditions are that, number one, we love God supremely; number two, we die to ourselves—to our goals, plans and ambitions—and follow Jesus Christ; and number three, we forsake all that we have to be His disciple.

I believe that if you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, you should be willing to say, “Lord, I’ll go where You want me to go.” I used to jokingly add, “...as long as it’s not Barstow!” We should also say, “I’ll be what You want me to be, I’ll do what you want me to do and I’ll say what you want me to say.”

Have you ever prayed that? “No; that scares me! If I pray that prayer, He might send me to Nicaragua! I hate bugs! Too hot and humid.”

Your life is not your own; “You were bought at a price....glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” If you’re a true disciple of Jesus Christ, you’re going to pay a price for following Him.

Now notice as He closes that “Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be

seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

What He is saying is that you will lose your testimony, you will lose your effectiveness, if you don't take up your cross, die to yourself and follow Jesus Christ; if you don't consecrate yourself to being His follower.

I want to read you a quote from Frank Stagg on a commentary on the book of Luke. He said, "True discipleship is as costly today as it was when Luke wrote. The world does not change except superficially. It has new gadgets but the same fears, hatreds, prejudices, lust, greed and cruelty. If the church is at peace with the world, it is the church which has changed, not the world. True Christianity is always a judgment upon the ways and values of the world, and the world resents and resists judgment. Being a true Christian today may cost one his job or his life. It may cost a pastor his pulpit or a layman a position or a promotion. It may cost a statesman an election or a young person social acceptance. Discipleship is costly. Not following the Christ is even costlier."

So not only should you count the cost of following Jesus Christ; you should count the cost of not following Jesus Christ.

There was a group of missionaries years ago that went from America to Ecuador to reach the Auca Indians. The story is recorded in the book *Through Gates of Splendor*. They were planning to go to a tribe that no one had ever made contact with before and live to tell about it. So the American press was calling them "fools." "You can't go there; you're going to die!" But Jim Elliott wrote in his journal before he left on his journey, "No man is a fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose." How marvelous.

We're all looking at what it's going to cost to follow Jesus Christ. Think of what it's going to cost not to follow Jesus Christ.