

Invited to a Feast (Luke 14:7-24)

Sunday school July 16, 2017

I want to call you attention to **READ Luke 14:7-14**. This text starts with the word “and,” meaning that what we just read is a continuation of what came before. In verses 1-6, which we studied two weeks ago, Jesus was dining with a group of Pharisees and lawyers. So in this text, and really all the way down through verse 24, He is still addressing Pharisees and lawyers. There are applications for us too, but His immediate audience was Pharisees and lawyers, Jewish leaders and people trained in the Jewish law. The key word in this block of text is the word “bidden,” which is an old English word for invited. The word “bidden” and its derivatives occur 9 times in verses 7-24. In verses 7-11 He talks about being bidden to a wedding; in verses 12-14 He talks about being bidden to a dinner or a supper, and in verses 15-24 He talks about being bidden to a great supper. So today we will study instructions Jesus gives on inviting people and being invited to feasts and applications relating thereto.

Transition: So let me HAND OUT OUTLINES. The connecting theme in the first 5 verses is...

I. Invited to a Higher Room READ v. 7-11 Especially in Jesus’ time and also somewhat today, it was to your social and economic advantage to be in highest (or most honorable) company possible. Partly that is due to how others perceive you: if they see you around influential people, they think you are influential too. Mainly it is because of who you would be able to interact with in the “highest room.” In Jesus’ time they had different physical rooms where you would physically sit with a group of people at a table. Today we might just have different tables in the same (very large) room or different circles of acquaintances. To import this situation to a present-day setting, if you found yourself sitting at a table with Donald Trump (President of the United States), that would be good for you from a social and economic perspective. He’s very wealthy and powerful and can do a lot of things for you, especially if they are also in his best interest. If you find yourself sitting at a table with Alex Acosta (the current Labor Secretary), that’s not so good because he’s not as powerful and can’t do as much for you.

Rightly or wrongly, your social and economic advancement very much depends on who you know, more than I think it should. I'm an idealist in the sense that I think your material success should depend solely on your merit, your work-ethic and ability. In reality, who you know and who your parents know (especially when you are young) matters alot. A few years ago I had one student: straight-A student, good work-ethic, very bright, but from a very disadvantaged background. He is doing OK now, but he had a hard time finding his first job when he graduated. I had another student, straight-C student (so barely passed every course she took from me), but she was from a very connected family. She had no trouble at all finding a job when she graduated. I didn't think that was fair, and I got rather frustrated over that, but that's the way this fallen world works. Today's not Independence Day, but I'm glad that your background does not matter as much in this country as it does in some others. My dad was a meat-packer, my mom was a file clerk and janitor, and I ended up being a college professor. That wouldn't be possible in some countries. I told you I am reading "The Art of the Deal" this summer; I actually finished it a couple of weeks ago. Donald Trump started with \$200,000 and mostly by outworking and out-thinking the people around him ended up with \$200 billion. I like the freedom and opportunity this country offers that allow people that kind of economic and social mobility.

Getting back to the text, the point Jesus is making in these verses is: don't promote or give honor to yourself. Honor is to be given, not sought after or taken. If you walk through buildings with professors' offices down at University, you will notice that a lot of professors take research articles or things that have been written about them, highlight their name with a highlighter, and post them outside their office door. The University publishes a quarterly magazine, and a few quarters ago they featured one of my colleagues in the math department. He took the entire magazine, opened it up to where he was featured, took a push pin and posted it outside his office. That's exactly what Jesus is saying not to do: don't be self-promotional. This principal of not promoting yourself is found over and over in the Bible, and I've listed a couple of references in your outlines. Proverbs 25:6-7 say, "Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: 7 For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen." Don't promote yourself; let others do it, if it is going to happen. In Daniel chapter 4, after King Nebuchadnezzar had spent some time feeding with the animals, his sanity was restored, and he wrote in Daniel 4:37, "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase." God ultimately determines who succeeds and fails. He does it on His time-table, not on ours, but He ultimately determines who succeeds and fails. It is better to have others honor you than to promote yourself and have your promotion not be accepted. Honor is to be given, not pursued after or taken. Don't promote or give honor to yourself.

Transition: Next item, still talking to the Pharisees and lawyers, we have...

II. Invited without Recompense READ v. 12-14 I'm not going to say a lot about this topic because we already covered it back in Jesus' Sermon on Plain in chapter 6. The reference I gave you is Luke 6:32-34, where Jesus tells us to give expecting nothing in return. He goes on to say that when you do that you will in fact get something in return because God makes sure of it. In Luke 6:35, Jesus says if you give expecting nothing in return, "your reward shall be great." These verses contain the same idea, but instead of giving its inviting. It's easy to invite someone if you have a motive. In Jesus' days, there was an unwritten rule: if someone invited you and you accepted, then you had to invite them back. So people would invite others with the motive of getting an invitation for themselves, probably to a feast with better connected guests than the one they are throwing. Jesus says, "don't do that." Invite people expecting nothing in return. If you do that, Jesus says in verse 14 "thou shalt be blessed...for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Your guests may not give you anything in return, but God on His time-table will make sure you get something in return. That's inviting without recompense.

Transition: That last phrase "the resurrection of the just" points these instructions in an end-times direction, and that is...

III. Going to the Greatest Supper of All I've broken verses 15-24 down into three parts. The first part is...

IIIA. Two Invitations Extended READ v. 15-17 Verse 15 is a blessing spoken by an unidentified table guest. Since Jesus was dining with lawyers and Pharisees, probably it was a lawyer or Pharisee. This guest is probably referring to himself and his present company, thinking they would be the ones eating bread in kingdom of God. As we will see, Jesus rather harshly says they won't if they don't respond to the invitation.

When we think of eating bread in the kingdom of God, the first thing we think of is the marriage supper of lamb in Revelation 19:9. What you might be surprised to learn is that Revelation is not the only place where a great end-times feast is mentioned. The next reference I gave you is Isaiah 25:6-8, which says, "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. 7 And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken." A lot of this language reminds us of things we read in Revelation, but it is in Isaiah too. Of course Isaiah is in the Old Testament, so even Jesus' immediate audience would have been familiar with the idea of an end-times feast prepared by God. In the Roman culture, giving grand meals was used to promote one's status in society. So this invitation to a great supper reminds us that nobody has more status than God. No feast compares to the marriage supper of the lamb that is coming at the end-times.

Transition: The original invited guests do not get that, as next we have...

IIIB. Excuses Made READ v. 18-20 To understand how rudely these would-be guests are treating the host with these excuses, you need a little cultural background. In Jesus' time, they used a double invitation system, so the would-be guest would get two invitations to one feast. The first invitation was like an RSVP to see who would come so that the host could get a count and prepare food accordingly. The second invitation came right before the feast to those who responded affirmatively to the first one; it told them that the feast was ready. The first invitation was in verse 16 when Jesus says the host "bade many," and the second is in verse 17 when he just says "come." So it is only after they had accepted the first invitation that the would-be guests started to make excuses. It's important to realize that none of these excuses are genuine; any of these things could have been done the next day. The effect was to make the host look very bad because he couldn't get anybody of note to come to his feast. It's like playing a big game in a stadium with no fans. Can you imagine Clemson scheduling a football game at Memorial Stadium and only 5000 fans showed up? That would make the program look very bad.

Transition: Since people who had originally agreed to come excused their way out, the host has a problem: he has a great feast prepared but no guests. His solution is...

IIIC. Invitation Broadened READ v. 21-24 The actions the host takes here are motivated by his reaction to the excuses as given in verse 21: anger. He's angry at the way his would-be guests have treated him. He responds by broadening the invitation to those who could not reciprocate (what Jesus had said to do earlier) in verse 21 and then to anyone in verse 23. Notice the people in verse 23 have to be compelled to come in, that is they have to be led in because they were not normally invited to this kind of feast and therefore had no idea what to do there. My dad took me to an art museum when I was young. We didn't know we weren't supposed to touch the art. We had to be led around because we had no idea what we were doing there. In my Sunday school class at my church in Ohio, the Berean class it was called, we had promotion Sundays when we tried to have a big crowd. On one of the promotion Sundays, we used verse 23 as a slogan: "that my house may be full." That doesn't quite fit the context here, but it worked: we had over 100 people that day in a class that normally ran about 40.

To finish this up, in verse 24 the host banishes the original invitees. It's not that the host didn't want them; in fact he had invited them first, but their chance to come to the feast had passed. Because of the Pharisee/lawyer audience and the original question, some commentators interpret the original invited in verses 15-17 to be Jewish leadership or even the Jewish people and the ones who are invited more broadly in verses 21 and 23 to be Gentiles. Acts 13:46 in particular suggests that interpretation. There are also some problems with that interpretation, but the point is that the invitation to the marriage supper of the lamb is now open to everyone. The simple invitation "come" given here is the same one we give today. The last reference I gave you is Revelation 22:17, which says, "And the Spirit and the bride *the church* say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The invitation today is open to whosoever will, and it is accepted by believing in Jesus.

Conclusion

As a final thought, a lost person can make a gazillion excuses not to trust Him. We as Christians can make a gazillion excuses not to serve Him. Ultimately, these excuses do not matter. When we try to give God these excuses, we get the same response from God the would-be guests got from the host: anger. As a result, you will be left out. In the case of salvation, you will be left out of eternal life. In the case of service, you will be left out of eternal rewards. Don't give God excuses; as Christians give Him faithful service.