



# GOOD SHEPHERD

## PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

### Dinner Lessons: Full House, Full Table

Luke 14:15-24; Isaiah 25:6-9

*Sermon by: Robert Austell*

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We are in the middle of a dinner party with Jesus and some religious people. For several weeks, we have been reading about this event where Jesus healed a man and then began teaching about what God and the Kingdom of God is like, using the dinner party as a way to explain these things. Last week, in the passage immediately preceding this one, Jesus reminded us that we can't buy, earn, or deserve God's invitation. Rather, God's invitation is entirely on His terms, a gracious act extended to the world. At the end of that teaching, in Luke 14:15, one dinner guest exclaimed, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God!" I suggested last week that he got it... that he understood what Jesus was saying. It's hard to know for sure, because we weren't there. But, Jesus responds to him in today's text as if to say, "Yes, that's right; but I'm not sure everyone here understands (maybe you either)!"

So, in today's text, Jesus clarifies God's invitation. Another way to say this is that the man's exclamation is correct – blessed IS everyone who will eat at God's Table. But perhaps some of the assumptions around that earthly table were wrong... many not around that table might be included; and maybe everyone present at that table would not be at God's Table. That's what Jesus is addressing here.

## The Invitation (v. 16)

In verse 16 Jesus begins his parable: “A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many...” In some ways, Jesus is just clarifying what he has just taught. He has been describing God as the gracious and inviting Host, who calls people to him without regard for what they can offer in return. That is not to say that behavior or faith is not important to God. Rather it is to say what the Apostle Paul later said so clearly, “God demonstrated His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

In other words, God invites us to Himself entirely on His own terms. The particular struggle the Pharisees had – and remember, that’s who was at the table with Jesus – was that they were trying to come to God on their own terms. Now, please know that they weren’t evil people. Just the opposite; the Pharisees were trying their hardest to follow God’s Law and live religious lives. Jesus was correcting a wrong assumption that often comes with that kind of diligent religious living. That wrong assumption is that we somehow can make ourselves worthy of God’s love and salvation. That assumption also can lead to the second wrong assumption that those who are not practicing diligent religious living are unworthy of God’s love.

This is one of many examples of Jesus teaching something that is later echoed by the Apostle Paul. Paul would pick up this theme in Romans, where he wrote that in fact none are worthy of God’s love; yet God loves us anyway. That is the heart of Jesus’ table-teaching here... that the invitation to salvation is extended to all, because we all are “sinners.” That is the heart of the Good News – that whoever you are and whatever you have done, God invites you to Himself through Jesus.

The rest of Jesus’ teaching here is addressed to his table-companions. The unfortunate result of assuming we can secure our own place with God is that we come to God and relate to God on our own terms.

## Excuses → Priorities

So the word goes out – it is time to come; everything is ready. And they began to make excuses (v. 18).

*I have bought a piece of land and need to go look at it... (v. 18)*

*I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am going to try them out... (v. 19)*

*I have married a wife... (v. 20)*

What is Jesus saying here? That work and family keep us from God? No, one of the main differences between parable teaching and allegory is that in allegory every single thing has a corresponding spiritual point. You go through and ask, “Who is the wife? What do the oxen represent? Etc...” In a parable, and this is almost always what Jesus used, there is really one main spiritual point. The rest of the details are just stuff we understand from everyday life to help us understand the one spiritual point.

Here, Jesus is saying that if we treat God’s invitation as one more part of everyday life, we run the risk of missing it altogether. These are important things – work and family. They are perhaps the most important things *of life in this world*. But Jesus is saying that there is something infinitely more important, because it affects life forever, both in the present and in the Kingdom to come. Elsewhere he compares it to a pearl of great price, a thing of such value that it reprioritizes and shapes all of the rest of life. He’s going to go on in the next chapter of Luke, when he’s back out among the crowds, to teach this point with even more glaring contrast and strength.

The question raised for the Pharisees was not literally about work and family, but about their practice of religion displacing actual relationship with the Lord of the Banquet, God Himself. The question raised for us might be asked any number of ways: “What excuses do you make that distract you from a

living relationship with God?” Maybe it is work or other obligations. Is working a few more hours’ worth missing what God is saying and doing? Maybe it is family? Maybe your husband or wife or parents aren’t interested in church or God. Are you willing to persevere in coming and continue to invite them?

But there is a deeper question for us, underneath the specific examples of things that distract us from God. That is the question of place or priority. What place does God have in your life? Is God important? Is He in the top 10? Is He in the top 3? Many Christians will list God, work, and family as the top 3. Maybe that’s why Jesus used these particular examples. But what is Jesus asking through this parable?

And why does he go on to describe the host going out to get the poor, crippled, blind, and lame? It is partly to once again describe God’s compassion for these grappling most with human need. But it is also partly to illustrate the clarity that can accompany true human need. If you are truly alone, outcast, sick, or in great need, would not an invitation to relationship sound quite appealing? This is not always true, of course; sometimes need blinds us to God; but Jesus is here trying to “punch through” to the Pharisees, and all that deafens them to relationship with God. I can imagine Jesus’ audience thinking, “Of course those folks would come to such a banquet!” But that’s the point – why is that not the response of the first guests... “of course we’ll come; we wouldn’t miss it!”

For most of us, relatively wealthy in the things of this world, it is so easy to make God one more hobby or appointment or disregard as “not pressing right now.” Jesus is making the case that if we really understand who God is and what God is inviting us to, then not only will God be in our “top 3”, but God will be our #1. And he will actually press beyond this in the next section of Luke to say that God should not only be our #1, but our only one. Jesus is describing the first and second commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make or worship idols.”

That's what I mean by coming to God on our own terms. When we do that, we are actually fashioning our own god – an idol. We are saying, "I want to worship a god who I can worship on my schedule. I want to worship a god who asks nothing of me." In the language of Jesus' illustration, "I want to worship a god whom I can take advantage of... always inviting me, but at my beck and call."

Jesus is calling the Pharisees at the table with him away from that, and he is calling us away from that. God is who He is. That's what God's name, Yahweh, means! And God invites us to Himself on His own terms.

### **The Result and Invitation**

The shocking result, in Jesus' words, is that if we insist on reshaping God into a god who is at our disposal, then we will have no seat at God's table. In other words, if we don't see and acknowledge God as the gracious, inviting host, who is inviting us now into relationship and worship, then we may miss it all. Jesus' last words here are horrible and tragic:

*I tell you, none of those men who were invited [and made excuses] shall taste of my dinner. (v. 24)*

That is, however, not God's desire for you, me, or those Pharisees. So hear both the challenging warning and the winsome invitation of the Gospel.

Re-examine your life and your faith. Is your hope in God alone or is it in self or some other earthly 'god'. I know what answer comes quickly to my lips. But Jesus' challenge is that our choices of time and priority will give away what is true in our hearts. Do you give God first priority? Will you come to God on His terms?

And here is the invitation. It is the same Jesus has been giving around the table in all of Luke 13 and 14.

*Come; I choose you and invite you because I love you. You cannot earn that love and you cannot lose that love. You can only ignore that love. Come eat and live with me.*

Listen again to those words spoken by the Lord through the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before Jesus. This is what God said He would do and this is the invitation God has issued through Jesus Christ and his death on the hill of Calvary:

*<sup>6</sup> The Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine. <sup>7</sup> And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. <sup>8</sup> He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken. <sup>9</sup> And 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!" (Isaiah 25:6-9)*