

Jesus is invited to dinner at the home of a leader of the Pharisees on the Sabbath

Purpose is for the Pharisees to investigate his political and theological views

It is the Sabbath and the meal begins with the appearance of a man with dropsy (fluid retention)

Jesus asks if it is lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, but the Pharisees are silent

Jesus heals him, saying it's like a child or ox that falls into a well and needs help

But the Pharisees had no response

Jesus notices that the guests choose places of honor and gives them some advice

Guests should choose the lowest place at the table, rather than exalt themselves

Hosts should invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind, in addition to friends and family

It is at this point that there is an outburst from one of the dinner guests...

"Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

This is a challenge to Jesus to declare his view on the kingdom of God and the Messiah

At the end of history, the final fulfillment of the kingdom will be a Messianic Banquet

The Pharisees were concerned with who is a worthy and acceptable participant

The statement is set as a challenge to Jesus to share his views on this

Expectation: Jesus will say something like,

"That we might keep the law so we will be worthy

And may sit with the Messiah and all true believers at his banquet."

Everyone would approve—he passed the test—next topic...

Rather Jesus responds with a very different view of the Messianic Banquet

Jesus tells them the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:16-24

It is a traditional Middle Eastern banquet—host invites his friends and relatives

Sends word ahead of time that there will be a great banquet and extends an invitation

At the time the banquet is ready—the servant is sent to tell people to come and eat

For us—it might be as if the invitation was sent ahead of time

At the appointed hour we gather in a reception area, waiting until called

When dinner is ready, we are invited to enter the dining hall and sit at our places

But when the servant says to come, we find three people giving last minute excuses...

1. I bought a field and must go see it; please excuse me
2. I bought 5 yoke of oxen and must go test them; please excuse me
3. I married a bride and cannot come *[no request to be excused]*

Three rejections imply total rejection of the banquet itself

In the first excuse the man bought a field and must go examine it—which sounds reasonable at first

But this area in Palestine has very little agricultural land

Before anyone buys a field to grow crops, that land will have been examined thoroughly first

To buy it before examining it is unthinkable as it could very well not be useful at all

Like one of us buying a house, closing the deal—then calling to say I'm late for dinner

Because I bought a house over the phone and I want to go see what I bought

In the Middle East—when invited to the home of a community or religious leader

—acceptance and attendance are expected

If one cannot attend—a believable and reasonable excuse must be given

Therefore, this rejection is an insult to the host

Second man bought 5 yoke of oxen and wants to go test them out
But oxen that are yoked together must be evenly matched or they will not be able to pull
No way that anyone would buy 5 yoke of oxen without testing them first
This is a second insult to the host

Third man says he just got married and can't come—but doesn't even offer to be excused
Kenneth Bailey says the way this is said indicates he is really saying...
I have a woman in the back of the house and I'm busy with her! I'm not coming!
This rejection is extremely rude and insulting to the host

With 3 rejections—all insulting to the host—the servant refuses to continue calling folks to come
The host knows that he has been rudely insulted—they want to stop the banquet all together
The host becomes understandably angry at this rejection
However, he responds with grace rather than acting out his anger
This parable is all about grace as the host responds with compassion
Grace is the giving of unmerited favor, which the host extends generously

The host sends the servant out into the streets and lanes of the town
There he is to get the poor, crippled, blind, and lame and bring them to the banquet
These are the people the religious community had decided to bar from the Messianic banquet
They are the outcasts—the unwanted
They're welcomed to the banquet even though they aren't "worthy" to eat with the host
Nor can they reciprocate in return and invite the host to their banquet

But there is still room—so the servant is told to go out into the roads and lanes, looking for people
Go outside the town and find people excluded from the village or town
Find those who sit outside the walls of the city—shepherds, the unclean, the Gentile
Grace is extended beyond the ordinary outcasts to include everyone!
The servant is told to "*compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled*"
When an outsider is invited to come in—particularly one who has been rejected in the past
The outsider usually has a hard time believing they are really wanted
The servant is to persuade them that they truly have place at the table—are welcome!
At first exposure, grace seems unbelievable—we often must be persuaded that it is true
And that it is applicable to me! —Again, this parable is all about grace!
Persuasive grace that refuses to follow convention and is radical in its inclusion!

Finally, Jesus uses the plural you, when he says "*For I tell you...*"
He no longer talks to the servant in the parable—but he is speaking to the guests at the table
Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees who are at the dinner with him
For Jesus, the Messianic Banquet has already begun
The Great Messianic Banquet is Jesus' banquet, which is being served now!
The Pharisees listening to this parable are welcome at the banquet
But if they refuse to attend, the banquet will proceed to the people of the land
The outcasts of Israel and beyond them to the Gentiles
Jesus says, "*For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner*"
The judgment is self-imposed—those who refuse the invitation cut themselves off from the gift
They choose not to taste the banquet that was offered to them
The implication is that the Pharisees with whom Jesus is eating dinner will not eat the banquet

This is one of my favorite parables, because I love that God invites those who are unwanted to come in
God's anger at the Pharisees turns to grace, which is extended to the most unlikely people around
I want to be a person of grace!
I want to welcome everyone to come to God's great Messianic banquet—now!
It is also a challenge to those of us who think we have it made and are busy with our own thing
To lay down our excuses and come to the banquet
That eating the banquet served to us is the most important thing we can do

What is the banquet? To what are we being invited?

The banquet is the Kingdom of God, which is now—it has begun on earth and continues in eternity
It is wrong to say that it only occurs at the end of the age and only for those worthy of it
The Kingdom of God is this upside-down kingdom where we live as citizens with Christ
It is God and the Living Christ and Spirit, come all the way to us, living with us
It is the Divine Presence which accompanies us every minute of every hour
It is Love and Acceptance—that we belong as children of God
And joint heirs with Christ, receiving the fullness of God now
The banquet is like the Kingdom of God in that it is a generous bounty served to us
It is full of everything we need to sustain life with Jesus
It is lovingly made with those things which are delicious and enjoyable
The banquet is rich and good—and made just for us
Yet too often, people are hesitant to partake of what is provided
Our most important work is to live in this Kingdom of God with Jesus
To fully partake of the banquet God has prepared for us
To notice where God is at work in our world and to bless and grace what we notice
When we notice that of God in another—we are welcoming them to the banquet
We join with God in the invitation to enter the Kingdom of God
When we pray, we eat at the banquet table with Jesus
When we accept the spiritual gifts that God bestows upon us, we eat at the banquet
When we let these gifts be used in our lives, the power of God flows through us
When we follow Jesus' callings and respond to his grace, we eat at the banquet

The invitations have been sent—the table is set—the food is ready... Will you come in and eat?