

Come to the Party

Luke 14:7-24

Introduction

Wedding Party: There are few things I love more than a good wedding. Sure, I love a good marriage even more, but the wedding, the celebration, is something special. Family, friends, food (the food!), and... dancing.

- Now, you might not know this, but I've been known to cut a rug. I'm not a trained dancer (think less ballroom pirouette and more Carlton confidence). My wife? She *only* dances at weddings, and only to songs with clear instructions (i.e., "to the left, to the left, to the left.")
- But that's the beauty of wedding dancing, it's not about skill. It's about **joy**. **It's a taste of the kind of celebration we were made for.**

KoG is a Feast: Much of the discussion in Luke has centered on the nature of the KoG: entrance into the kingdom is narrow,¹ it starts small and unimpressive but grows with unstoppable power.² In this week's descriptions, we see the place where Jesus rules and reigns, his kingdom, compared to a feast—a party!

- In **Luke 14**, Jesus tells us what it means to be invited to feast with the Lord, to sit at His table, not because we earn it, but because He welcomes us in.
- He "prepares" an overflowing "table before" us (Ps 23:5) and invites us to dine. In the closing chapters of the Bible, an angel tells John, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9).
- Why do you think Jesus' first public miracle in John 2 was to refill the wine at the wedding when it ran out (with the good stuff, no less)? Why that miracle instead of healing a leper, calming a storm, or raising someone from the dead? Because miracles are signs³ before they are solutions to problems. They are divine marquees pointing us to the reality and nature of God's kingdom, rather than magic tricks to alleviate our pain. And the flashing light of Jesus' first miracle is that heaven is a joyful and abundant feast.
 - If you think that Christianity has to be a dour, buttoned-up, uber-serious stoic type of monasticism, full of stone faces and emotional restraint, then you've missed the ultimate picture of the Kingdom of God.
- Even as we await the completion of the Kingdom of God, we can experience the joy of the King here and now.
- He is **inviting** us to surrender to his kingship and experience his joy. The nature of Christ our King and his kingdom necessitate an appropriate response to all who would seek to enter. What is the appropriate response to this invitation? **God's kingdom is a joyful feast only available to the humble, needy, and surrendered.**
 - If we are to *enter* and *enjoy* his kingdom, we must come **low**, come **needy**, and come **now**.

¹ Door, Lk 13:22-30

² Mustard Seed, Leaven, Lk 13:18-21

³ σημεῖον

1. Come Low: The Feast is for the Humble (vv. 7-11)

⁷ Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸ “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, ⁹ and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Context: These parables occur during a meal Jesus is attending “at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees” (Lk 14:1). Jesus is under scrutiny about his teaching and behavior (i.e., “they are watching him carefully”).

- Luke 14 appears to be the last recorded meal Jesus has with Pharisees in Luke’s Gospel, and possibly in any Gospel. It’s significant as a final moment of close-table fellowship, confrontation, and invitation before the tone of Jesus’ interactions with the religious leaders grows increasingly confrontational on the road to Jerusalem.
- Jesus immediately calls into question *their* theology and behavior. They think they’re judging him when he, the true judge of all, is rightly judging them.
 - They famously “love the best seat in the synagogues” and to be acknowledged when they walk through the marketplace (Lk 11:43).
 - They viewed themselves as righteous and, therefore, entitled to the blessings of God (and by extension, others as unrighteous and undeserving).⁴
- Jesus uses this parable to directly challenge a prideful heart.

Choose Your Seat Wisely: We understand most seating charts. E.g., Mayor Parker meeting, concentric circles of importance -or- Mali seating by perceived age (gray hair, children on the floor, etc.) -or- a wedding (bride and groom center, bridal party surrounding, family, friends, etc.), you can judge your importance based on your proximity to the bathroom and who else is at your table (e.g., Grandma or the Dj’s cousin). The kind of things that can get us good places in this life are not the things that will get us into the banquet of God. “The currency of this world is not the currency of heaven” (Begg).

- God does not approve of us based on external power, personal righteousness, etc.
- Practically, we see the wisdom of Jesus’ warning: it would be better to start in the back row and be promoted than to claim the head seat and be demoted.
 - It’s a much better day to sit in economy, boarding group 9, and the flight attendant promotes you to first class, than to brazenly sit down behind the magical first class curtain and have to do the walk of shame to steerage.
- Beyond the *practical* warning is the *spiritual reality*. We don’t enter God’s feast because of our status, resumé, or self-importance, but because of his gracious invitation and

⁴ Cf. Lk 18:9-14

redeeming mercy (e.g., Mr. Coulter flight from Paris to Boston post Mali, the captain has ultimate authority and is legally and operationally in charge).

The Gospel Humbles: ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

- **The way of the gospel is the way of humility.** “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes” (Is 5:21). “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6, 1 Pet 5:5). Christ is the perfect and ultimate example of humility (e.g., Phil 2:5-11). If we are going to be Christlike (i.e., *Christ-ian*), then we must be humble.
- **The way of the world is pride.** The original lie of the serpent is that God is keeping us down rather than lifting us up, that we deserve what God won’t give us, rather than recognizing we have been given infinitely more than we ever deserved.
 - Humility was not typically considered a virtue in **Greco-Roman culture**, but as weakness, servility, and low status. Honor and glory were prized. To lower yourself voluntarily was shameful, not praiseworthy.
 - The NT redefines and elevates humility as a virtue, a reflection of Jesus, and a central value in God’s kingdom.
- We have been told that the way to success is to believe in ourselves, promote ourselves, and make a name for ourselves; the gospel tells us to believe in Christ and humble ourselves.
 - We think it’s important to be important, when self-promotion has no place in the kingdom of God. Either we entrust ourselves to God, or we try to do what only he can do.
- Pride sabotages our view of God, ourselves, and others.
 - “Most of us go through life worrying people will think too little of us. The Apostle Paul worried people would think too much of him” (D. A. Carson).
 - “We look down on others because we are not looking up at God” (Sally Lloyd-Jones).
 - “Humility is the beginning of worship” because it takes our eyes off of ourselves and allows us to see Christ (Calvin).
- Humility is a prerequisite for kingdom living **because the gospel humbles us**. The gospel reminds us that, “We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope” (Keller).
 - Once you’ve internalized the truth of the gospel, the sacrifice of Jesus, the failures of your self-righteousness, and the enormity of your sin, you are completely humbled. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph 2:8-9).
- An encounter with the God of the gospel is a **transformative** experience. You’re likely going to come away limping, but you’ll come away God’s transformed child (i.e., Jacob, Gen 32-33).

The Gospel Lifts Us Up: True glory is following Jesus down into service, not seeking personal self-promotion. And when you go **down**, he lifts you up (humbles himself will be exalted).

- So the gospel **humbles** us and **lifts us up**.
- **Humble confidence** (complete *humility* because we didn't earn it, and complete *confidence* because Jesus never fails).
- The gospel does not produce shame and self-loathing.
 - "Pride is not the opposite of shame, but its source. True humility is the only antidote to shame" (Uncle Iroh, *Avatar: The Last Airbender*).⁵
- There is a type of pride in thinking you deserve a seat of honor, and a type of pride when you tell God "no thanks"—as if you know better than He does
 - When all you do is focus on how bad you are, you are still focusing on yourself. The gospel takes our attention off ourselves and puts it rightly on God.
 - "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less" (Warren).
 - The gospel doesn't eliminate pride, it rightly focuses it: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31).⁶

Diagnostic Questions: Have you been humbled by the gospel?

- Laodicea⁷ was the lukewarm church; they thought they were rich and in need of nothing, but Jesus saw them as spiritually poor, blind, and naked. Pride blinded them to their true condition, preventing them from receiving the healing they needed. When you think you're doing just fine without Jesus, you're in the most danger. The gospel humbles us before it heals us.
- Only humility is compatible with the grace of the gospel.

Jesus calls us to come empty-handed, ready to receive what we could never earn.

2. Come Needy: The Feast Is by Grace (vv. 12-14)

¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Strange Instructions: You want me to throw a party and not invite my friends and family (😬). Those are typically the *only* people we invite! Who did we invite to our wedding? The people we wanted there!

- **Rich Neighbors:** The truth comes out. Is your kindness to others strategic or sacrificial? Do you love others from a posture of generous grace? It's like inviting a wealthy person because you know they will give an expensive gift, rather than because you want them there.

⁵ Season 2, Episode 9 ("Bitter Work")

⁶ Quoting Jer 9:23-24

⁷ Rev 3:14-22

- We live in a world of transactional love (e.g., relationships; love myself through you; use you rather than love you; etc.). “You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.”
- A lot of people can’t accept a free gift because they’ve never really experienced love (e.g., water ice, car wash, etc.).
- God does not need you; he lacks nothing. God loves you.

Kingdom Hospitality: The kingdom of God works differently. There is no A-list. Platinum-level givers don’t get a VIP ticket.

- Underneath our personality, education, influence, money, and accolades, we are all spiritually bankrupt and completely needy.
- If that offends you, then grace might be hard for you to receive because you’re still clinging to self-righteousness.
 - Deep down, a lot of us don’t want God’s charity; we want to earn it.⁸ Because if we earn it, then we have some control over our obedience. God can only ask so much of us. But if it’s all from him and all of grace, then he can ask anything, and we have no basis to refuse.
 - I’ve seen folks who really try to impress **others** with strategic generosity.
 - They serve *when others are looking* (e.g., “Blister” who only shows up when the work is done), for social capital.
 - They angle for recognition (e.g., a commemorative plaque on the wall).
 - Bet365, one of the world’s largest online gambling companies, gave almost 1 billion dollars to charity. Sounds great! Except that all of it has gone to the Denise Coates Foundation. Denise Coates? The founder and CEO of Bet365. Only about 10% of its donations have ever been paid out to charitable causes. Coates has used this charitable legal loophole to *avoid* paying millions in taxes and boost her company’s public image. Reputation laundering. Strategic generosity.
 - I’ve even seen some try to impress **God** with strategic generosity.
 - If I put money in the offering plate, then God will bless me financially.
 - If I show up to church, then God will owe me a “good” week.
 - If I serve enough, then God will answer my prayer.
 - **It’s not love if it demands a payback; that’s a loan.**

Kingdom Guest List: Jesus says to invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame (and just to clarify, that’s not “lame” like my dad jokes).

- These were people in the first century who were most obviously unable to contribute to the host’s social standing or return the favor; they didn’t bring perceived value; they needed mercy.
- They had little utilitarian worth in the eyes of the world, but Jesus says, *those are the ones you invite*.
- Because in the Kingdom of God, your “value” isn’t based on your ability, but on His grace.
- Your usefulness to the Kingdom isn’t based on your giftedness, but on your dependence.

⁸ HT Keller

- You didn't purchase a ticket, you're not bringing a contribution (it's not a potluck), you're accepting a free and gracious invitation.

Kingdom Hospitality: If we genuinely pray for “[God’s] kingdom [to] come, [and] will [to] be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).

- The gracious invitation of Jesus not only shapes how we come but also who we invite.
- If your life were depicted as a party, who would be the invited guests? Are you including outsiders at the table?⁹

It's not just *how* you come, but *when*. The invitations have gone out, the table is set, and the King is calling. So here's the final invitation: come now, because the feast is ready.

3. Come Now: The Feast is Ready (vv. 15-24)

¹⁵ When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” ¹⁶ But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ ¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ ²⁰ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ ²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’ ²² And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ ²³ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

Vocal Response: A precocious attendee responds with a pious and presumptuous declaration. The fact that he is reclining at the table makes it safe to assume he is a Pharisee or close associate. He proclaims, and by implication claims, the blessing of eating at the table of the Lord. “Amen, I can't wait to feast.”

- Jesus tells more about the great feast of God to clarify the problem. These people are claiming the blessing while rejecting the invitation.
- They *assume* they belong at the table, yet their actions show they have no real interest in the host. There is no urgency. **They want the reward of the kingdom without the response it requires.**

Save the Date: The Save-The-Dates went out, the RSVPs were received, but when the day of the party arrives, all they have are excuses. Three example excuses are described here:

- **(1) Field:** A material distraction, his investment. My personal gain comes first.
- **(2) Oxen:** A career distraction. Used for farming. My work and productivity.

⁹ HT Butterfield

- **(3) Wife:** A relational distraction. My personal relationships take priority over the KoG.
- They thought the blessings of God's kingdom could come without any disturbance to their everyday lives. They thought they could have God and their own agenda. When the time came, it required giving up something they weren't willing to give up. Many of us face the same issue. We love God in theory but not in reality.
 - Imagine the desire to be in shape, fit, and healthy. You buy new shoes, pay for a gym membership, and start following some online fitness influencers. But the alarm goes off at 6 a.m., and you hit snooze. It's easy to love the *idea* of transformation, just not the part where it disrupts your comfort and routine.
- They all alike began to make excuses, it says. And we too are prone to excuses. Maybe this is you: you want the joy, the security, the purpose of the KoG, but it means you won't make as much money, you won't live in as nice of a house, you won't have the same dating pool, you won't climb the ladder, you won't fit in, or get the applause of the watching world.
 - Even these or things like these keep you from surrendering to Jesus, then you don't want his kingdom, you want yours. You want to be king.
 - If he is the King of the world, then he should be the king of my life.
 - Many people want kingdom power, but they don't want to submit to the king. It doesn't work that way. If Jesus is King, then he must be King of my life.
 - This means that my allegiances, expectations, values, and priorities change. And it means that my purpose and mission changes.
 - You can't have the benefits of the Kingdom of God without the King on the throne.

Warning: There is a great danger here. The ones who enjoy the banquet aren't just the ones who were invited, but the ones who show up.

- It's not that the table is too full, it's that they're too late.
- The tragedy isn't that they weren't welcomed, but that they made excuses.
- In the end, there will be no vacant seats at the banquet of God.
- No one will be there by accident, and no one will be missing who was truly willing to come.
 - The feast of heaven will be full of all kinds of people this world thought shouldn't be there, and missing will be all of those people who assumed they belonged but never showed up.
 - "If those who followed Jesus are not those one would have expected, it is not because Jesus excluded some, but because some excluded themselves" (Bock).
- The only way to miss out is to reject the invitation, whether by distraction, delay, or the belief that something else is better. And when the door closes, it won't be because God said "no," it'll be because we did.

Warning: What excuse are you making? Today would be the day to come and dine with Jesus.

- Humble yourself, you don't deserve a seat at the table.
- Receive grace, you can't earn a seat at the table.

- Drop your excuses, or you'll miss your seat at the table.

Conclusion

Let's Eat: Two of my favorite words in the English language are "let's eat" (you don't get a body like this by skipping meals). A good meal is an experience of joy. While a good meal can banish hunger and sadness for a moment, the feast God offers can banish it forever!¹⁰

- The warning of Jesus is a warning given for your joy. He is not trying to keep you from anything but to make sure you don't miss the truly good thing. The great reward of the gospel is not actually the Kingdom, it's the king!
- By the provision of God, he is inviting you to enter into his eternal feast by his grace.

Communion: Each week we invite all of our members and those who have been baptized as believers to participate in the Lord's Supper—Communion. It is a capstone moment in each worship service that viscerally depicts the provision of the gospel. It reminds us that our pardon is purchased by the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. **But it also depicts a fellowship meal!**

- All the gods of the ancient world required their worshippers to feed them, to offer them sacrifices. Only the true God feeds us.
- Every day, God provides generously for sinners like us.
- At every Communion meal, Jesus welcomes us to the table. "He invites his enemies to become his friends. He is the host and we are his guests. 'We're invited to slide our knees up under the table of God'. Every Communion meal is a chance to hear God's grace in the words that are spoken and to see it, touch it, and taste it in the bread and wine."¹¹
- "Take and eat" are verbs of generosity, inviting us to participate in the provision of God.
- This is why Jesus says to "do this in remembrance of [him]" (1 Cor 11:24, Lk 22:19). We not only remember God's grace, but we participate in it. This is why we don't just "think this" in remembrance of Jesus but "do this." There is something to the physical act of eating and drinking.
- Even though it's only a picture of what's going on, in the Lord's Supper, God is accomplishing "spiritually in our souls all that he demonstrates to us outwardly through these visible signs."¹² "He is the heavenly bread that feeds and nourishes us for eternal life."¹³ This should provoke immense gratitude for the "infinite goodness of our Savior, who spreads out all his riches and goods on this table to [give] them to us."¹⁴

Invitation: So come to the party. Not as someone who deserves a seat, but as someone amazed to be invited. Come humble, come needy, come now, the table is set by grace and the feast is ready, the King is calling, and the only way to miss it, is to make an excuse. Lay down

¹⁰ HT Keller

¹¹ Tim Chester, *Truth We Can Touch*

¹² Calvin

¹³ Calvin

¹⁴ Calvin

your pride, your distractions, your conditions, and receive the joy of the Kingdom. Because the greatest gift of the gospel isn't just a place at the table. It's the presence of the King who welcomes you there.