



Potomac Hills
Community Church, PCA
RELEVANT • RELATIONAL • REAL

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What Jesus said about a Great Feast “Revealed Grace” - a series from Luke **Luke 14:15-24**

OPENING THOUGHTS: “Feeling Left Out!”¹

Most of us, most of the time, feel **left out** — like misfits. Everyone feels like that from time to time. We feel like we don’t belong. Others seem to be so confident, so sure of themselves, “insiders” who know the ropes, old hands in a club from which **we** are **somehow** excluded.

One of the ways we have of responding to this is to form our own club, or join one that will have us. Here is at least one place where we are “in” and the others “out.” The clubs range from informal to formal in gatherings that are variously political, social, cultural, and economic.

But the one thing they have in common is the principle of exclusion.

Identity or feelings of worth is achieved by excluding all but the chosen.

But the terrible price we pay for keeping all those other people out so that we can savor the sweetness of being an “insider” is a reduction of reality, a shrinkage of life. Excluding others minimizes new opportunities and experiences we may have. Ultimately, exclusion in this life hurts us.

And nowhere is this price more terrible than when it is paid in the cause of religion. Unfortunately religion has a long history of doing just that, of reducing the huge mysteries of God to the respectability of club rules, of making insiders and outsiders.

But for those called by God there are no outsiders.

Luke is a **vigorous** champion of the outsider.

An outsider himself, the only Gentile in an all-Jewish cast of New Testament writers, Luke shows how Jesus includes those who typically were treated as

¹ The introduction is adapted The Message Commentary: Introduction to Luke. The Message: New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs by Eugene Peterson, Copyright c 1993- 1995, used by permission of NavPress Software. WordSearch 5.0 Database c1999 iExalt Publishing.

outsiders by the religious establishment of the day: women, common laborers (shepherders), the racially different (Samaritans), the poor.

He will not put up with Christianity becoming just another religious club.

As Luke tells the story, all of us who have found ourselves on the outside looking in on life with **no hope** of gaining entrance (and who of us hasn't felt that?) now find the doors wide open, found and welcomed by God through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And in today's passage, Jesus, once again, confronts a religious club with a parable about insiders and outsiders.

Listen carefully ...

Luke 14:15-24, *"Hearing this, a man sitting at the table with Jesus exclaimed, **"What a privilege it would be to have a share in the Kingdom of God!"**"*

[16] Jesus replied with this illustration: "A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. [17] When all was ready, he sent his servant around to notify the guests that it was time for them to come. [18] But they all began making excuses. One said he had just bought a field and wanted to inspect it, so he asked to be excused. [19] Another said he had just bought five pair of oxen and wanted to try them out. [20] Another had just been married, so he said he couldn't come.

*[21] "The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was angry and said, 'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the city and invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.' [22] After the servant had done this, he reported, 'There is still room for more.' [23] So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. [24] **For none of those I invited first will get even the smallest taste of what I had prepared for them.**' "*

Jesus was in the midst of a Sabbath dinner party that had gotten pretty intense. The party was tension-filled from the moment Jesus stepped through the door because, as **Luke 14:1** told us, *"One Sabbath day Jesus was in the home of a leader of the Pharisees. The people were **watching Him closely** ..."*

You see, He had been invited by the religious leaders ... who had invited Him to the dinner for just that purpose ... to watch Him closely and see if they could **trap Him** into breaking the club rules.

In this case, the rule was against healing people on the Sabbath.

And if it was tense **before** the dinner, the tension escalated dramatically when He healed a crippled man, then silenced His critics with a pointed question and by referring to their own practice of rescuing animals but not people on the Sabbath.

As if that were not enough, Jesus went on to criticize both the guests and the host – the guests for seeking the seats of honor, and the host for inviting only those

who could return the favor.

Everyone in the room had been **deliberately insulted** by Jesus.

It is reasonable to imagine that in the silence no one was eating this huge meal that had been carefully prepared by the host.

The party was becoming a disaster.

The host and his friends were silently enduring a theological meltdown.

They were horrified.

They were mortified.

And they didn't know what to do.

But then one of the guests tried to salvage the situation with ...

v. 15: **AN EXCLAMATION**²

A quick-witted guest then attempted to save the day with a pious exclamation. Look at verse 15, “... *a man sitting at the table with Jesus exclaimed, "What a privilege it would be to have a share in the Kingdom of God!"*”

The man's words no doubt had a feigned earnestness to them. The exclamation sounded good — but it was **insincere**. Its pious language evoked everyone's assent and a momentary hope of escaping Jesus' onslaught.

The man's statement mirrored the religious leaders' confidence. In essence it meant, “Blessed are **the likes of us** [“the insiders”] who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

“Amen! Well said! Now pass the potatoes ...”

But their confidence was misleading, and Jesus couldn't let the exclamation pass — for their souls' sake. He knew that in their inmost being, way down deep inside, there wasn't a whole lot of desire for God's kingdom, pious declarations aside. So there at the Sabbath feast, with the religious leaders at the table, Jesus delivered the Parable of the Great Feast to expose the true motivations and desires of the religious establishment.

Jesus' tale issues a warning to every heart that thinks it's sufficiently pious.

The Parable has two main parts. First comes ...

v. 16-20: **AN INVITATION**³

- **Invitations Extended**

It says, verses 16-17, “*Jesus replied with this illustration: "A man prepared a*

2 The exposition of the text is adapted from Preaching the Word: Luke, Volume Two by R. Kent Hughes, pages 115-121.

3 Other works used or quoted are According to Luke by David Gooding, page 267; Tyndale New Testament Commentary, The Gospel According to St. Luke by Leon Morris, pages 223, 255-256; Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36: Luke 9:21-18:34 by John Nolland, page 755; The Bible Background Commentary, New Testament, page 230; James, Fousset, and Brown Commentary on WordSearch; Life Application Bible Notes on WordSearch.

great feast and sent out many invitations. When all was ready, he sent his servant around to notify the guests that it was time for them to come.”

A man of immense wealth extended an invitation to his friends to attend “a great feast,” the greatness of which would have derived from two things — a large list of names and an extensive menu.

This was a feast no one would wish to miss.

The “great feast” pictured the ultimate kingdom banquet, the supper of the Lamb. **Revelation 19:9a** says, *“And the angel said, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.””*

Using the symbol of a feast for Heaven is of immense spiritual significance because it suggests **eternal satisfaction**. Even in this world, a banquet is much more than a means of satisfying physical hunger — it is more than eating.

As David Gooding explained in his commentary on Luke, “The metaphor of feasting, as distinct from merely eating a meal assures us that no true appetite, desire, or longing given to us by God will prove to have been a deception, but all those desires given by God will be granted their richest and most sublime fulfillment.”

The “great feast” is a lavish, sumptuous image of the kingdom of Heaven that will be exceeded by its reality — **complete satisfaction!**

And, of course, the ultimate host will be Christ Himself.

The custom of invitation in Jesus’ time involved two invitations that can be traced back to the Book of Esther and extended well into the fifth century A.D. when the Jewish writings on the book of Lamentations said of the men of Jerusalem, “None of them would attend a banquet unless he was invited twice”.

Therefore, when a prominent banquet was given, invitations were first sent out announcing the time of the upcoming meal, and the guests indicated their acceptance. Then on the day of the banquet a servant was sent out to reinvite the invited guests. To accept the first invitation but decline the second was considered an incredible insult.

- **Regrets Returned**

And yet in Jesus’ parable those who had accepted the first invitation unanimously beg off with all sorts of lame excuses.

First, you have the Property excuse.

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, verse 18, *“One said he had just bought a field and wanted to inspect it, so he asked to be excused.”*

Some excuse! Who would ever purchase land in his town without looking it over first? Besides, the field was not going to run away! But at least he was courteous and explained his excuse as a matter of duty.

But still, it was just an excuse.

One would think that this man would have examined the land beforehand, but like the excuses that follow, this late notice would be heard as a weak excuse that would serve as a serious insult to the host, who had prepared the feast at great expense.

Second, you have the Busyness excuse.

The second excuse was a lot less courteous, verse 19, *“Another said he had just bought five pair of oxen and wanted to try them out.”*

He did not argue duty but simply said, “I’m on my way.” But the excuse was transparently flimsy. No one would buy ten oxen (20,000 pounds of livestock) without knowing their capabilities. Having even a total of five yoke of oxen would mean that this man had a lot of land to plow; he must be a wealthy landowner in his own right. It would be inconceivable that he had no one working for him who could handle this task.

And finally you have the Marriage excuse.

The third excuse was terse and rude, verse 20, *“Another had just been married, so he said he couldn't come.”*

This one may have even cited Scripture in Deuteronomy 24:5, but if so he used it wrong because that text exempts the newly married from military duty, but it is not valid for skipping a feast one had already promised to attend.

The first two excuses had to do with material possessions, and the third with affections. Possessions and affections cover virtually every reason by which men and women give their regrets to the kingdom.

Back in **Luke 8:14**, in the Parable of the Soils, we read, *“The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the **cares and riches and pleasures** of this life. And so they never grow into maturity.”*

Three excuses, given as examples for all the rest of the excuses, answer to *“the cares of this world”* (Luke 14:18), *“the deceitfulness of riches”* (Luke 14:19), and *“the pleasures of this life”* (Luke 14:20), which “choke the word” or as the New Living says, “crowd out the message.” Each differs from the other, and each has its own plausibility, but **all come to the same result**: “We have other things to attend to, things that are more pressing right now.”

Nobody is represented as saying, “I **will not** come”; no, all the answers imply that **but for** certain things they **would** come, and when these are out of the way they **will** come. But not as long as they can think of a reason not to.

Furthermore, the basic thinking behind their regrets reveals mankind’s universal rejection of the kingdom. It is obvious that their refusal to come to the feast was contrary to reason. The decision to forgo a sumptuous feast prepared for you and your friends, to forgo the joy and laughter and satisfactions offered in

order to visit your properties or your farm machinery, or even to be with your new wife, doesn't make sense. They will all be there when you return. Your new wife might even be glad for a break from your **wonderful** presence!

Jesus offers the kingdom, a perpetual feast of peace, a feast of help, guidance, friendship, rest, victory over sin and selfishness, control of passions, supremacy over circumstances — a feast of joy, tranquility, deathlessness, Heaven opened, immeasurable hope — in a word, *salvation*. Yet, people turn their backs on this feast, preferring to visit their possessions and affections.

Jesus' parable does not put down our possessions (our fields and oxen) or our affections (our loved ones). They're all legitimate. We certainly should check out our land, try our oxen, and be with our loved ones.

In fact, the more a man lives upon the feast that is in Christ, the more fit he will be for all these other enjoyments. The field will be better tended, the oxen better utilized, and his wife more loved.

But if our possessions and affections become **so** preferred that they become our **excuses** to turn down Christ's feast, our thinking is absurd and our souls in danger.

The real reason the three invitees offered their lame excuses was that they really didn't want to go to the feast. Their excuses that, in their minds, made attendance at the feast impossible would have evaporated if they really wanted to be there. In today's terms, if they were offered front-row seats at the NBA Championships, or a box seat to hear Paul McCartney at the MCI Center, or a week's fishing, or a week's shopping in Paris, they would have found someone to tend the field, the oxen, and, yes, even the home.

Make no mistake, the real reason people turn away from the eternal feast is that they do not want to be there.

They have no appetite for spiritual things.

It is easy to make general applications, but this text is talking about us and our preferences.

We need to ask ourselves whether we like our car more than we like **God**?

If Christ's banquet and a large worldly estate were spread before us as options, would we take the estate?

Why is it that when Christ offers forgiveness, peace, eternal life, and an eternal feast, so many make excuses?

Why is it that people don't want the kingdom?

It's because their thinking is skewed.

They don't think deeply and they don't think correctly about eternal life.

In the depths of their hearts they do not want God.

The religious leaders in Christ's day acted as if they wanted the kingdom,

but in fact they didn't. And it was really a tragedy!

The hardest people to reach are those who say, "*What a privilege it would be to have a share in the Kingdom of God!*" – who bow toward God's Word, but are simply **unwilling** to come to the feast.

But Jesus doesn't stop with a parable about an invitation ... He turns the table on His listeners by continuing the story with ...

v. 21-23: MORE INVITATIONS

Luke does not tell us how those at the dinner party responded to Jesus' parable. Some of them must have seen where the story was going — that they cared little for God's kingdom despite their affirmation to be kingdom seekers.

- **Outcasts Invited**

Likely few of them, or maybe even none, were ready for the next turn in the tale — namely, the kingdom offered to outcasts. Look at verse 21 ...

"The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was angry and said, 'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the city and invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.'

Historically, from the time of the giving of the Law, those who were physically blemished were barred from full participation in worship.

An example of this, here specifically referring to priests, is found in **Leviticus 21:17-23** where it says, "*Tell Aaron that in all future generations, his descendants who have physical defects will not qualify to offer food to their God. [18] No one who has a defect may come near to me, whether he is blind or lame, stunted or deformed, [19] or has a broken foot or hand, [20] or has a humped back or is a dwarf, or has a defective eye, or has oozing sores or scabs on his skin, or has damaged testicles. [21] Even though he is a descendant of Aaron, his physical defects disqualify him from presenting offerings to the Lord by fire. Since he has a blemish, he may not offer food to his God. [22] However, he may eat from the food offered to God, including the holy offerings and the most holy offerings. [23] Yet because of his physical defect, he must never go behind the inner curtain or come near the altar, for this would desecrate my holy places. I am the Lord who makes them holy.*"

Makes God sound mean, doesn't it?

But it was designed to show; in fact the whole book of Leviticus is designed to show, the utter perfection and total holiness of God. And so, as sort of a permanent object lesson, only the best animals could be sacrificed, none that were considered unclean or imperfect ... and only people who were in the best of health could approach God in the Temple.

But don't read more into the text than is there. It never says that God doesn't love these people, that He doesn't use these people, that He doesn't save

these people. It does say that they become a **lesson** about holiness.

Similar to the marriage of the Prophet Hosea to a prostitute becoming a lesson to the people of God of what their unfaithfulness really looks like.

Did Hosea think that was a good deal? I doubt it.

But God used him to teach the people of Israel.

And God used people with disabilities and ill health to teach Israel again.

But many in Israel took God's lessons about holiness and assumed that made these less worthy people, which is something God never said. In fact there are many Old Testament laws about mercy and justice for these people.

Of course, their disabilities also forced many of these "lesser people" into poverty, making them ragged outcasts and outsiders.

But now, in Jesus' parable, the great feast, the lavishly appointed tables, and the endless entrees of exquisite cuisine were set before many who couldn't even see it all — blind beggars. The lame and crippled hobbled to the tables, their eager eyes reflecting the bountiful feast. Pitiful rags draped from bent limbs as they eased awkwardly into place. Amazing!

This, of course, is **what the gospel does**.

In Jesus' parable, the subclasses of society, those of less noble standing, were called to the table.

But the great feast still had many unfilled spaces.

So the servant approached his master. And we have ...

- **Gentiles Invited**

Look at verses 22-23 ...

"After the servant had done this, he reported, 'There is still room for more.' So his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.'"

This is a prophetic reference to the Gentiles who would soon be invited into the kingdom through faith in Christ ... as seen so evidently in the ministry of the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul's heart would be on fire with his mission of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.

The point of these two verses is that outcasts, Gentiles, and the poor would need some convincing in order to overcome their natural reticence.

The servant was not to take no for an answer.

The feast must be filled.

No seat can be left empty.

And so it will be in the eternal state.

When all the seats are filled by Jews and Gentiles, many of whom are poor, crippled, blind, and lame, the feast will begin.

And there will be incredible rejoicing when that day comes!

Revelation 19:6-9 says, “ *Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a huge crowd, or the roar of mighty ocean waves, or the crash of loud thunder: “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. [7] Let us be glad and rejoice and honor Him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and His bride has prepared herself. [8] She is permitted to wear the finest white linen.” (Fine linen represents the good deeds done by the people of God.)*

[9] And the angel said, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” And he added, “These are true words that come from God.”

Notice that even when these “outsiders” make excuses, they are not the excuses of the first group, the religious leaders, but are an entirely different kind.

Their excuses are made because it would be hard to get them over two difficulties: (1) “We are not fit company for such a feast.” (2) “We have no proper dress, and simply can’t get ready in an appropriate manner.”

How well does this represent the difficulties and fears of the sincere!

I’m not acceptable enough!

How is this met? “Take no excuse—make them come as they are—bring them along with you.”

They are right! They’re not acceptable enough.

But God wants them there anyway ... and that’s Grace ... because they’re getting what they don’t deserve.

And those who think they **deserve** it aren’t going to be there.

v. 24: CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Presuming that silence still prevailed at this dinner party, Jesus’ final words, verse 24, must have settled with over the guests with an ominous quiet, “*For none of those I invited first will get even **the smallest taste** of what I had prepared for them.*”

This was an extremely personal confrontation.

They were the original invitees, but **not one** would be admitted to the messianic meal unless there was a response of repentance.

At that moment every soul in that room except Jesus was lost!

Those keepers of the Law, leaders of Israel, were doomed to judgment!

They had received two invitations to the messianic banquet.

The first had come through the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

They had answered yes. Of course they would not miss the banquet, whenever it would come. Just send the customary second invitation and they would be there for the feast. It was a conventional yes, but it was not from the heart. They actually loved their fields and their oxen and their homes far more than they loved God. They preferred their possessions and affections to Heaven.

They loved the world first! And now that Jesus the Messiah had come with the second invitation to the feast, they would have nothing to do with it.

All their religious posturing was so empty. *"What a privilege it would be to have a share in the Kingdom of God!"* was pious jargon.

Their kingdom longing was bogus. Their true longing was for worldly comfort.

There was such urgency in Christ's method here. He was combative because He ached for their repentance. They must hear and do His Word to avoid judgment.

The man sitting at the table with Jesus saw the glory of God's kingdom, but he didn't understand how to get in. In Jesus' story, many people turned down the invitation to the banquet because the timing was inconvenient.

We too can resist or delay responding to God's invitation, and our excuses may sound reasonable—work duties, family responsibilities, financial needs, or whatever. Nevertheless, God's invitation is **the most important event in our lives**, no matter how inconveniently it may be timed.

Are you making excuses to avoid responding to God's call?

The question for Jesus' hearers, and for us is, do we really want to attend the feast? Or are other things more important?

Our portfolios? Our cars? Our homes?

Jesus is the perfect counselor.

He always gives you what you need.

If you need truth, you get truth.

If you need tears, you get tears.

He will give it to you the day you need it.

He will give it to you in the dosage you need.

He will give it to you in the order you need.

You need His tears, you need His truth, you need His anger.

You need all these things, but most of all you need His grace.

That is what you need most, and that is what He came to give.

Because once again Luke wants us to see that the Jesus story is not only about Him, but also about us.

These texts reveal God at work; and shows us how God reveals His power in order to call people who **know** they're not good enough to "Come, be My disciple."

God takes people who are "outsiders," and who can't get in on their own, and makes them "insiders" ... people who are involved in a relationship with the God of the universe. People who are called to live a life that looks to God because He has poured out His grace on those of us who realize that we are **not** acceptable,

that we are **not** righteous, that we **don't** deserve it.

And so ... just like the outsiders in the Parable of the Great Feast ... we get what we don't deserve ... and that's grace.

Luke is bringing us the same essential message of grace over and over again. We see it in Jesus' teaching. We see it in Jesus' healing. We see it when He casts out demons. We see it with lepers and paralytics and guys who hurt too much to walk. We even see it when He's telling people who **think** they deserve it that they don't. And those who don't think they deserve are the ones who get in.

Why? Because ...

It's all of grace from beginning to end.

And it's all of Grace because it's all of Christ.

Luke tells the story of how Jesus revealed that grace, died to provide it, rose again to bestow it, and will return to establish its presence over all of creation.

The church must show what such grace looks like ... starting by bringing that grace to those among us who are desperately trying to hide our uncleanness, our disabilities, our outsider label ... while Jesus is saying, "That doesn't matter. Come to my feast."

And all who are hungry enough to come said, "Amen."