

Come and Listen: The Parables of Jesus
God's Table—Invited and Inviting
Luke 14:15-24

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Dr. Steve Horn

Introduction: I suspect that many of you are asking today, “Where has the summer gone?” Summers do go fast. This summer we have been studying the Parables of Jesus. We have called our study “Come and Listen” because I sense that this is how Jesus told these parables. In fact, I think it went something like this: Come close and listen. We are concluding this present series today.

When we encounter parables in the Gospels, there are a few basic interpretative principles that we must employ in order to get the real meaning of the text.

1. Understand the purpose of all parables. The literal meaning of the word parable is “to throw beside” or “to set beside.” Jesus used parables to throw beside a teaching or an instructive principle. That leads us to the second consideration.
2. We must seek to understand what that principle is. “What is the main point” is the question we should be asking. Most times, if not all times, there is something in the context that reveals precisely what the main point is and the story simply illustrates that main point.
3. Because we are looking for the main point, it is also important to understand that we need not press the details of the story. In other words, parables are not allegories in every case. I suggest that this particular parable is not an allegory—that is let’s not press the issue with every detail of the story, but rather seek to get the main point.

Text: ¹⁵ When one of those who reclined at the table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

¹⁶ Then he told him: “A man was giving a large banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who were invited, ‘Come, because everything is now ready.’

¹⁸ “But without exception they all began to make excuses. The first one said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. I ask you to excuse me.’

¹⁹ “Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m going to try them out. I ask you to excuse me.’

²⁰ “And another said, ‘I just got married, and therefore I’m unable to come.’

²¹ “So the servant came back and reported these things to his master. Then in anger, the master of the house told his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in here the poor, maimed, blind, and lame.’

²² “‘Master,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, and there’s still room.’

²³ “Then the master told the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in, so that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, not one of those people who were invited will enjoy my banquet.’”

The Context

Jesus is still at the dinner of one of the leading Pharisees. I think you could say that there has been some awkwardness to the dinner. Jesus had confronted the Pharisees for their views about the Sabbath and their own pride. Luke 14:11 is a key statement. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

But instead of getting the message, verse 15 gives indication that the Pharisees had remained rather unmoved by Jesus’ words. The statement is a rather self-righteous response.

The Pharisees looked forward to the coming of the kingdom of God. They believed that they were God’s chosen and their strict obedience to the law would bring the kingdom on earth. Upon arrival of the kingdom, they anticipated that they would be God’s guest of honor. They understood little, however, about the true nature of the kingdom or God’s Messiah who would bring it.” (Roger Sullivan, *The Theological Educator*, Fall 1997, 59-60.)

In other words, the Pharisee’s statement as recorded in verse 15 is a feeble attempt to break the awkwardness of Jesus’ admonition to them. Someone has suggested that the statement is like a toast. Imagine one of the Pharisees breaking the silence with something to the effect of, “Well, now, won’t it be great when all of us usher in the coming kingdom of God. That is the essence of the scene here. The gathered Pharisees had a wrong understanding of the kingdom of God and an elitist idea of participation. So Jesus told another parable.

The Cultural Background

Now remember that Jesus’ parables were famous for characterization and plot development that was so unusual that the unbelievable features of the stories arrested the attention of his hearers. Our interpretation hinges on our discovery of these unusual features.

Dinner Invitations were like weddings. You got invited with a first invitation and then you were summoned by a second invitation. Once a person accepted the invitation, you could not turn down the second invitation.

In addition, the excuses were all lame. There is no need to try to suggest modern day excuses to parallel. The point is that all of these excuses are lame. The excuses are so bizarre that they are barely conceivable.

And then third, in this cultural context the kind of mixing of levels of society—from the best of society to unclean to the unknown is simply culturally incomprehensible. That is, except to Jesus, and that is where we begin to discover our lessons from the parable.

The Lessons

1. **God’s invitation is a universal appeal.**

From the greatest to the least, all are invited. Luke had declared this early on in his gospel when he revealed the words of Jesus spoken in the Synagogue in Nazareth. We read these words in Luke 4:18-19. Jesus was quoting the prophet Isaiah and applying to Himself.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me
to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

2. God's invitation must be unequivocally accepted.

God's invitation must be accepted on His terms. No excuses and no revisions. The only way to come to Him is through Jesus. The only way to come to Jesus is through repentance and faith.

Total surrender to His claims on your life! This idea of surrender is a serious thing. At the end of WWII, Germany was surrounded by the Allied Forces. A few days after Hitler's suicide, the Germans surrendered to the Allies. The actual wording of the surrender document contains these words: The German Command agrees for all German forces to lay down their arms and to surrender unconditionally. Furthermore, the Germans agreed to "carry out at once, and without argument or comment, all further orders that will be issued by the Allied Powers on any subject." Are you willing to say that to God?¹

3. God's invitation must be urgently accepted.

And this parable makes plain that the time for decision is now.

4. God's invitation must be uniformly extended.

We must extend His grace in the manner we have received His grace. We must extend His offer of grace with the same urgency that we sensed to respond to His grace.

So What?

Who do you know in the highways and hedges? What will you do about it?

Next Tuesday night we begin another semester of FAITH. That is one way to apply this passage.

We all watched some weeks ago the very dramatic details of the cave rescue of 12 boys and their soccer coach in Thailand. One report I read indicated that over 10,000 people were involved at some level of the rescue. Some, obviously more than others, but 10,000 to rescue 13 people. There were those who were divers. There were those who built tunnels. There were those who prepared meals. And I sense that there were millions who prayed. Why? People could obviously see the urgent danger and the right thing to do is to do whatever to rescue those boys.

¹ From Sermon by David O. Dykes, "Surrender Your Trust," January 9, 2005. Information verified on web from multiple sources.

And I am thankful for every one of those who participated, and I am thankful for those saved.

Shouldn't we have the same urgency in rescuing people from hell? We all have a part.