

True Fiction: The Great Banquet

Luke 14; Isaiah 25; Revelation 19:6-9

Set the Scene: Jesus is at a dinner at the home of a Pharisee (teacher of the Law) but He wasn't there to make friends. This was on the Sabbath and the Pharisees were watching Him very closely. He came across a crippled man and asked the Pharisees, *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"* (Luke 14:3b). No one answered Jesus so...He healed the man.

Then Jesus asked, *"If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?"* (Luke 14:5) and the Pharisees had nothing to say.

Jesus looked around the room and saw how the guests picked their seats at the table. In this time period, where you sat at the table was a display of your importance. Sitting at the head of the table next to the host was a way of saying that you believed yourself to be the most important guest. Jesus had something to say about that. Read Luke 14:8-11.

That probably wasn't received well, but Jesus wasn't done yet. He also had words of wisdom for the host. Read Luke 14:12-14.

At this point, I bet there was an awkward silence that fell in the room. But there is always that one person who can't handle awkward silence. So a man said *"Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."* (Luke 14:15) That's a good thing to say... right? Let's see what Jesus said.

Parable of the Great Banquet: Luke 14:16-24. On the surface, this is a story about hospitality, but concealed within is a direct confrontation with the religious elite at the table. Jesus is addressing people who *assume* they have a place in the Kingdom. In the story, all the people who were invited to the banquet did not value the invitation. Their place at the table was something they assumed was their right. *"But they all alike began to make excuses..."* (Luke 14:18)

The excuses seem small. Land, oxen, marriage... These are not bad things but they became priorities over God's invitation. Jesus reveals the danger of complacency and spiritual entitlement.

What good things have we let replace God's invitation? Have we gotten comfortable near the table or assumed that we have a place at the table without actually responding to the host?

The Least of These: Jesus also revealed in this parable the heart of God for the least of these. *"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys... bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."* (Luke 14:21b)

Jesus reveals that the Kingdom is not reserved for the deserving but it is also open to the desperate. The guest list expands wildly from privilege to poverty and from assumption to invitation. God's desire is for a full house. He wants everyone at the table!

This is the kind of church we want to be - the one that opens the doors wide and goes into the streets - not just the sanctuaries. This is a fulfillment of the Old Testament Law and Prophets... *"So that my house will be full."* In Isaiah, we read about God preparing a feast for all people (Isaiah 25:6).

Read Isaiah 25. The feast here is a symbol of restoration and grace for all nations. The books of the prophets (like Isaiah) often talk about what is still to come...the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God, the lion laying down with the lamb, and the children playing with vipers...

The prophecies in Isaiah are often restated or renewed in a new light in the book of Revelation. Read Revelation 19:6-9. A banquet table filled with ALL people who have accepted

the invitation and *prepared* themselves for an eternity in union with God. Now that is a celebration!

But that wasn't always the goal. The Old Testament Law required the Israelites to be separate from others. The Pharisees that Jesus was eating with when he shared the parable of the banquet were still living under the requirement of that Law. That's why what Jesus said was so radical and (in their opinion) blasphemous.

Instead of the separation and preparation that the Law required, the books of the prophets foretold a time of inclusion and restoration in God's Kingdom. What these proud teachers of the Law could not understand was that Jesus was the catalyst for the shift they had been praying for their whole lives. In Him, the boundary lines shift from exclusion to inclusion and from one nation to ALL.

Deeper Meaning: But, there is also deeper meaning that we can gain from this parable that makes it super relevant to our lives today. Who are you in this parable?

The master? No... that's God.

The first round of invited guests? Have you accepted the invitation or have you been too distracted by life to understand the value and significance of the feast?

The second round of invited guests? Have you been waiting for someone to invite you to the table? If so, this is your invitation. *Come and dine the master calleth, come and dine. You may feast at Jesus' table all the time. He who fed the multitude, turned the water into wine, to the hungry calleth no, come and dine.*

Or, the servants delivering the invitation? If you have accepted the invitation, you are the servants with the mission of delivering the message of God's invitation. *"Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in..."* (Luke 14:23)

This isn't just about who gets in but also about who goes out. The servants don't stay in the banquet hall. They become the messengers of the Kingdom.

The mission is never about being inside a building. It's about getting out into the world and seeking out ALL people and extending an invitation for them to have a seat at the table. It doesn't matter what building the feast is happening in. What happens outside the walls is what gives relevance to what happens within them.

Reflection Questions:

- What good things have you let replace God's invitation? Have you gotten comfortable near the table or assumed that you have a place at the table without actually responding to the host?
- Who are you in the parable?
 - Is this who you would like to be?
 - Have you accepted God's invitation and understand the significance of the feast?
- In Revelation 19:7, it says, *"For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has **prepared** herself."*
 - How can we prepare ourselves for the feast in eternity with God?