

“God’s Kingdom Banquet” by Shiao Chong
Oct 12, 2025, Community CRC Kitchener
Text: Luke 14:1-24

Happy Thanksgiving. If you were here last Sunday, or if you watched it online, you know that Pastor Melissa preached on the first 14 verses of this passage. Now, we did not plan this at all. I did not know what she was going to preach on when I chose this passage. I chose this passage and then I was told that Pastor Melissa was going to preach on Luke 14:1-14. So, thankfully, you are not simply getting a repeat of last week as my sermon today is focused more on verses 15 to 24. I need to touch on the first 14 verses as background to the parable of the great banquet, but my focus is on the parable. It’s all God’s providence.

As we celebrate thanksgiving today, most of us will have a feast with our families and friends. But the meal won’t just be about food. In fact, almost any meal is never simply about the food but it’s about relationships, about family, about giving and receiving care, love, hospitality, friendship, joy, laughter. Sometimes, it could even turn the other way: meals can be occasions for sadness, bitterness, conflicts, phony or fake emotions, arguments, insults, etc.

Jesus at the Dinner Party

And in our bible passage today, Jesus was invited to a dinner party. And this dinner was not simply about the food either. This dinner was first turned into a trap to catch Jesus. Would Jesus heal on the Sabbath? Would Jesus break the Sabbath law? Jesus got out of the trap by showing them their hypocrisy and the weakness of their legalism: Jesus asked, “If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?”

This dinner party was not only a trap, but it was also a competition. People were competing for honour and status. Jesus noticed that the guests were jockeying for the seats of honour at the table. Now, a Sabbath dinner party at the house of a leading Pharisee will probably have an impressive guest list to begin with. So, everyone is trying to show they are more important than the next guest.

But it wasn’t only a competition, but the dinner party was also a political tool, a tool to gain favour and to get something back in payment. If the guests were jockeying for positions of honour, the host in inviting his guests was jockeying for favourable treatments in return further down the road. That’s what happens in politics: I scratch your back, and you scratch mine. Food is not simply about food. It isn’t today and it wasn’t back in Jesus’ time either.

Jesus chastised both the guests and the host. Instead of turning the dinner into a competition for honour, the guests should be competing for humility. Instead of turning the dinner into a political tool the host should be turning it into a poverty alleviation tool by inviting the poor, the lame, the crippled and the blind. Where it seems that our world privileges the proud, the powerful and the popular, God seems to privilege the humble, the poor and the marginalized. That is all the set up or the backdrop for what happens starting verse 15. *

One of the dinner guests, on hearing Jesus talking about inviting all the poor, the lame, the blind, the marginalized, decided to correct Jesus’ theology. This guest said, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” (v. 15) Behind this

saying is a popular theology about God's kingdom, and about the new world that the Messiah will bring about. This is the theology in Jesus' time.

The Messianic Banquet

In the collection of ancient scrolls known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, we find that there is one scroll that talks about the Messianic banquet – the celebration feast when the Messiah ushers in the new world of God's kingdom. This scroll reflects the common Jewish belief in Jesus' time about this Messianic banquet in God's kingdom. Gentiles are not part of this Messianic banquet. Not only that, any unrighteous Jew is also excluded. In addition, anyone who is crippled in hand or foot, lame or blind, deaf or dumb, senile or having poor eyesight, none of these will be at the messianic banquet. And of those who are invited, there is a seating order: the high priest, according to this scroll, will sit at the head of the table, then the chief priests, and so on down the line, each according to his status in the religious community.

So, when this guest said, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God," he was reminding Jesus – "you know, none of those poor, crippled, blind or lame will be part of that Messianic banquet when God's kingdom come. You seem to forget Jesus that those people are ultimately **not** blessed. And as far as seating arrangement is concerned, there is a pecking order in God's kingdom." He was trying to correct or straighten out Jesus' theology. God does not privilege the poor and the marginalized was what he is saying. "Remember Jesus, who are the ones, ultimately, who will eat at the messianic banquet, who are ultimately blessed."

Theology of Jesus' Day

Let me summarize, very briefly, therefore, some of the main lessons from this popular theology of Jesus' time:

1. You must earn your seat at God's table.
2. God's table is exclusive – only the "right kind" of people can join.
3. Outsiders need not apply.

This is the theology of Jesus' day.

The Parable of the Great Banquet

Well, Jesus responds with a parable. Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. Now, back then as is often today, invitations require an RSVP – a reply if you are coming or not because the host has to know how many people to feed, which usually means, how many animals to butcher. So, when the time the dinner is ready, the host got enough food for all those who said they are coming, and the servant went to only those who replied they are coming. But they all began to make excuses. Remember, these are guests who have already RSVP they were coming! One said, "I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it." Excuse me? Don't you usually go and see a piece of land **before** you buy it, not after? How many of us today will buy a house before seeing what the house looks like? Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm going to try them out." Another lame excuse. Who buys a car today, without first giving it a test drive? Still a third one said, "I just got married, so I

cannot come.” Hello? If you were planning a wedding on the same day, or a honeymoon on the same day, why did you RSVP you were coming? Now you know why the master got angry. These are not legitimate excuses. They just didn’t want to come. They didn’t care about the feelings of the host. They were rude and ungrateful. In fact, they were downright insulting. It almost seemed like they all conspired to sabotage the party.

So, the master got angry. At this point in the story, the master would be justified if he chose to get even. The audience probably expected the master to punish all these guests who have now greatly, publicly, insulted him. In that culture, at that time, it was probably expected for his anger to turn into punishment or retribution. But something else happens in Jesus’ story.

The master, instead, chose grace. Instead of turning his anger into punishment, he turned it into grace, grace to the poor, the lame and the blind. Go and bring them into my banquet instead, he said. And when there’s still room, he asked the servant to go and compel those who are out on the roads and the lanes – people who might be homeless, people who might be robbers and thieves who hide out to attack travellers, people who might be Gentiles or illegal aliens, foreigners who don’t have a roof over their heads. Or at the very least, people who don’t belong in the village. People who are outsiders. Compel them to come to my banquet.

Now, side note: this verb “compel” here does not mean to force people or coerce people to come. No, in the ancient cultural context, it means like, really encourage them or persuade them to come. Because, if you are an outsider, a stranger, you probably won’t say yes to an invitation to a dinner party that you don’t know anything about, from a host that you don’t know, in a village that you don’t belong to. You probably need a lot of persuading to come. That’s what compel means here.

So, Jesus, in response to the theology of his day, is saying, “Sorry, you are the one who got it all wrong. You think that the Messianic banquet is for all those religious leaders, those who have the seating arrangements all figured out? Well, you are wrong! God’s one table is radically inclusive. It’s a table that will be filled with precisely those people you think are excluded: the outcasts, the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind, even the Gentiles.”

Jesus’ Theology

In contrast to the common theology of his day, Jesus’ theology about God’s kingdom banquet teaches this:

1. You don’t earn your seat.
2. God’s table is inclusive – everyone is invited.
3. Even outsiders are invited.

Four Lessons for Everyday Discipleship

What do we learn for our everyday discipleship from this story? There may be a lot of things, but I will suggest four things for us to take home and ponder.

1. Humility – what if our theology of the day might have gotten something wrong? Can we stay humble, especially in thinking we know who gets to sit at God’s table and who don’t?

2. Inviting People to God's Party – what if evangelism is more like inviting people to a great, free party? Do you find life with God to be like a great dinner party, where all your friends and family are? Where you have a great time of fellowship, fun, and food? And you want to invite others to join?
3. Do not uninvite yourself from the party – God wants you to be at his banquet, but sometimes, we uninvite ourselves, don't we? We think we are not good enough. We think we are not worthy. We come up with all kinds of excuses or reasons for why we should not be at God's table. Or worse, we come up with reasons to keep some people away from God's table. We come up with reasons to tell some people to go away, you are not welcome. Do not uninvite yourselves or each other from God's kingdom banquet.
4. Be Thankful – be thankful that we don't earn our seats at God's table. We don't have to be worthy of a seat at God's table. Because if so, nobody will have a seat. Nobody is good enough or worthy enough. Give thanks everyday for God's grace that invites all of us to the table, not that we deserve it, but simply because God is gracious.

Food is not simply about food. Bread and wine or juice is not simply about bread and wine. As we come to God's table, as we break bread and drink the cup, let us practice what Jesus taught us. Let us live our lives in Godly generosity and hospitality. Let us become more like Jesus who sacrificed himself to give life to all.

Let us pray.

* Most of my cultural and historical information on this parable comes from a book called, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (IVP 2008) by Kenneth Bailey.