

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon series: STORY TIME

When Jesus Comes to Dinner

(Luke 14:1-24)

Study #2

Introduction: A dangerous dinner guest...

Neither Miss Manners nor Martha Stewart would have appreciated the behavior of the Guest at this dinner party.

In fact, the whole evening was not exactly a showcase of the social graces. It did, however, provide for an amazing display of grace.

Maybe you have seen the Christian plaque in a friend's home - or maybe you own the plaque yourself - "*Jesus Christ is the Head of this home, the silent Listener to every conversation, the unseen Guest at every meal.*"

It's a beautiful sentiment. But, there should be a warning label attached to that plaque because when Jesus sits down at your dinner table, you can depend on Him to speak His mind, and things just might get a bit dicey.

One evening, a group of Pharisees found out that Jesus can be a very dangerous Guest to have over for supper.

We witness this reality today as we continue our study in the parables of Jesus and explore a social setting in which Jesus was present.

We'll see what happens when Jesus comes to dinner.

Jesus Unleashes Compassion on the Needy (vv. 1-6)

Jesus, "Watched Closely" (v. 1)

[1a] It happened that when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread...

Now this is somewhat surprising. Jesus has been invited to dine with a leading Pharisee - probably in the Galilean region, where He grew up - and our first thoughts are, "*Well, isn't that nice? How friendly.*"

We keep reading and discover that the setting is less friendly than we had hoped.

Luke tells us that *[1b] they* (the other Pharisees who were also present) *were watching Him closely*. We can all just imagine how enjoyable a dinner would be with your host keeping an eye on you for any misstep.

As you may know, the Sabbath (Friday sunset through Saturday sunset) was the holy day of the week for the Jews. No work of any kind was to be done on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest.

Well, at this nice dinner party way, with all pharisaic eyes trained on Jesus, an uninvited guest walked into the house and stood in front of Jesus.

Jesus, Presented with Need AND Cold Hearts (vv. 2-4a)

Jesus, face to face with human need (v. 2)

[2] And there, in front of Him was a certain man suffering from dropsy.

"Dropsy" (today we call it *edema*) is an accumulation of fluid in the tissues of the body, or in one of the body cavities.

It can be caused by problems with the heart, kidneys, or liver. According to the rabbis of Jesus' day, it was the direct result of sin. It represented someone's guilt of immorality.

Somehow or other, this man with dropsy showed up at the Pharisees' home where Jesus was being served dinner.

Of course it is possible that he had just wandered in off the street, unannounced and uninvited (evidently that happened a lot). But it is at least as likely that he was a "plant," that the Pharisees, wanting to test Jesus, steered him into the house to see if Jesus would "work" (by healing) on the Sabbath.

Already, all eyes had been on Jesus. They are especially glued on Him now. The Pharisees think that Jesus is stuck between a rock and a hard place. He can either heal and be guilty of violating Pharisaic rules against working on the Sabbath or He can NOT heal and appear to not care.¹

Jesus doesn't appear to be too worried about His next move.

Jesus, face to face with cold hearts (vv. 3-4a)

[3a] And Jesus answered² and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" [4a] But they kept silent.³

The silence of the Pharisee hosts exposes that they were guilty of callous disregard for people and their welfare. All they were doing was using a diseased man as a pawn in their game of "get Jesus."

As for Jesus, He calmly took the situation in hand and restored the sufferer to full health.

Then, as the man walked out (or ran and jumped?), Jesus posed yet another question to His hosts.

¹ Isn't it interesting that in either case, the Pharisees' trap hinged on their belief that Jesus could perform miracles of healing.

² No, you didn't miss anything. Nobody had asked Him a question. But, being the Son of God, Jesus was answering the *unasked* question. The question that was on everybody's mind was, "Would He heal on the Sabbath?"

³ Usually, it was the Pharisees' talking that got them into trouble with Jesus. Now, these teachers and preachers of Israel are at a loss for words. And what is obviously going on is that they had no concern at all for the suffering man who stood before them. They had simply wanted to exploit his suffering to their own advantage and try to trip up Jesus.

Jesus, Showing His True Colors (vv. 4b-6)

[4b] And He took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away. [5] And He said to them, "Which one of you will have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" [6] And they could make no reply to this.

Again, silence. I would suppose a pretty awkward silence. The Pharisees had been put in their places, but Jesus wasn't at all uncomfortable. And as far as this evening is concerned, He's just getting started.

After the healing, everybody reclined again at the low slung table to eat their meal. That's when Luke tells us (v. 7) that Jesus "**noticed**" something. That's a threatening comment to many of us husbands.

More than once over 35 years of marriage, I have gotten myself into trouble for NOT noticing such picky little details as a new hair style or a new style of glasses, or re-arranged furniture, or a freshly painted room - little stuff like that.

Kathy's question, "Well, did you notice?" usually clues me in that I may have missed something. Observation skills are very important in marriage and in life, generally.

Well, Jesus was a master of the art of observation. He never missed a thing. He noticed something at this party and He remarked on it.

Jesus Unloads Wisdom on Social-Climbing Pharisees (vv. 7-14)

Jesus Advises About Where to Sit (vv. 7-11)

Jesus, with the social climbers (v. 7)

[7] And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table...

The Pharisees and the other invited guests wanted to be honored. And we get that.

It's fairly normal to want to be honored, and we're all familiar with people who try to establish themselves at a party's pecking order by sitting close to the host. Some people seek honor with subtlety and sophistication. Others get bossy and push to the front of the receiving line.

That is what is going on here at the dinner party. Everybody was trying to make it to the best seat, nearest to the host. Jesus offers some sage advice to these social climbers.

Jesus, advocating downward mobility (vv. 8-11)

[8] “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, [9] and he who invited you both shall come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place.”

Wise words, indeed. Don't be in a hurry to take the place of honor at a dinner party, because you might get real embarrassed. Instead, intentionally take the last place.

[10] But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. [11] For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

It seems, at first glance, that we should lump these words into the category of “helpful sayings from Jesus.” Don't try to impress others with your status. Things will go better for you in life if you follow this advice.

BUT the words are more than that. And we know that they are more than counsel from Miss Manners because Luke identifies what Jesus says here as a *parable*. (v. 7) Jesus is using the commonplace event of a dinner party to picture how we should act toward God.

The message of the parable is: Rest in God. Relax. Leave your status, your standing, your reputation in God's hands.

He gave that message to people who had just been knocking over chairs to get seated at the head table.

Then, while He had everyone's attention, and as He kept on observing things, Jesus leaned in close to the host and gave a little more unasked for, friendly advice.⁴

Jesus Advises on Throwing a Successful Party (vv. 12-14)

Jesus, with the rich and famous (v. 12a)

He observed that his host had invited as guests only those who were important, influential, wealthy - just like he, the host, was.

Jesus assumes that this man will give other luncheons and dinners in the future. So, He gives this man advice as to how to throw a party that will be successful next time.

Can you imagine this happening to you? You've just spent hours putting together a nice party when one of your guests comes up to you and whispers, “Hey, thanks for inviting me. Listen, I've got an idea that will help your next party be fun.”

Listen to Jesus' advice.

Jesus, on how to throw a party (12b-14)

[12] And He also went on to say to the one who have invited Him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite⁵ your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment.”

Not that we shouldn't *ever* invite our friends to a party. Instead, the sense is, “Don't ALWAYS invite people who can repay you. Don't get in the habit of entertaining ONLY those who can entertain you back.”

Next time, try inviting those who can't repay you.⁶

⁴ The fact that Jesus can speak so comfortably to the host may imply that He Himself was seated near the head of the table.

⁵ Literally, “do not always keep inviting.”

⁶ Frequently, the New Testament enjoins believers in Christ to be “*hospitable*” (Greek *philoxenian* - love of strangers). Elders of churches are specifically

[13] But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, [14] and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

We all know how the cycle goes. All the guests at the feast in Luke 14 were going to feel obligated to ask the host to their house for supper next time. And, the endless cycle of invitations continues.

Jesus is saying, *“Break the predictable cycle of invitations, expand the circle, and include others in your gatherings. Invite those who wouldn’t normally be included; those who would never be able to invite you back.”*

And so, too, for us, there is a message here. Don’t invite with an eye to being invited. Don’t give with an eye to getting.

So, here is what we have seen so far today.

- First, *the Pharisees lacked compassion*. They didn’t really care about the man with dropsy.
- Second, *they were self-conscious social climbers*. They rushed to get the best seats.
- Third, *they had no heart to reach out to those less fortunate than themselves*. They only invited those who could invite them back.

And so far, Jesus has tried a miracle, a short parable, and a bit of friendly advice to move these guys toward love and compassion, all to no avail. I say, “to no avail” because of what we hear one of the guests shout out to Jesus.

One of those at the party had heard Jesus make reference to ***“the resurrection of the righteous.”***

That phrase, spoken at a Sabbath banquet, put this guest in mind of the great banquet God will throw at the end of time when the Kingdom of God will be fully established.

required to be hospitable (1 Timothy 3), but so are all Christians, generally (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2).

So this man, speaking to Jesus, blurted out,

[15]... “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God!”

Now, of course, what the man said was true. There is great blessing associated with feasting in the Kingdom of God.

But, Jesus was always listening to the *meaning* behind the comment. And here, He heard something more than a joyous remark from a trusting Jew.

Based on what we’ve seen so far, here is what I believe the man meant: *“I am really glad that I’m going to be feasting at that banquet. I’m really glad that I’ll be going to Heaven. And I’m glad that my friends here will all be going to Heaven, too. In fact, I’m glad that all of us and others like us will be going to Heaven.”*

THAT comment - ***[15]... “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God!”*** - launched THIS parable.

Jesus Unveils God’s Great Heart for the Lost (vv. 16-24)

Be Forewarned - Some Will Say “No.” (vv. 16-20)

“Come and get it.”

[16] But He said to him, “A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; [17] and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’”

This is going to be a lavish affair with lots of guests. It will be an honor to be invited to this banquet. I think we are to imagine this being the big party of the year.

And in ancient times, when the party was a BIG one, the custom was to send an advance invitation to the guests weeks or months ahead of the event. Sort of like an Evite “save the date” announcement, this was to get the guests to circle their calendars for the upcoming party and respond with a “yes” or a “no.”

Then, there would be a last second invitation, delivered on the day of the feast, essentially saying, *“Come and get it.”*

In this parable, Jesus envisions the guests already having said *“Yes”* to the original invitation. Now, the day of the feast has arrived, and the host is sending one of his slaves to tell those who were invited that the food is hot and ready to eat.

Now the host expects that his guests are as excited about going to the party as he is to have them over. He would have never dreamed that any of them would decline on the day of the party. But that is exactly what they did.

“Thanks, but no thanks....” (vv. 18-20)

[18a] “But they all alike began to make excuses...

The first one had purchased a piece of land. Nothing wrong with buying a piece of property. But, listen to him. **[18b]... “I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.”**

This man would rather go and gaze at his recently purchased acreage than enjoy fellowship at the feast he had already agreed to attend.

The servant went around to a second guest who also declined.

[19] “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.”

Again, not a thing in the world wrong with having bought a working team to farm with. But he’s going to **“try them out”** (take ‘em for a test drive) on the evening of the banquet to which he had already RSVP’d “Yes.”

The servant came to yet a third invited guest, and got one more excuse to add to the list.

[20] “I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.”

Not a thing in the world wrong with getting married. But rather than asking if it was OK to bring his new bride to the party, he used her as an excuse to not go to the party.

Obviously, none of the invited guests saw going to the party as a big deal. So, they declined to go, which was an outrageous breach of etiquette. It was such a low priority that they considered other things (real estate, business dealings, family) more important than attending the feast.

Now, what is this parable teaching? This feast is a symbol for **“eating bread in the Kingdom of God.”** The invitation to attend the feast is an invitation to be eternally saved, to enter into a relationship with God.

The parable is about a party. These guests must not have realized what they were passing up. They were passing up a great time, a party, free food and drink, great games, and fellowship.

Isn’t it interesting that when Jesus tells a parable about going to Heaven, he doesn’t compare it to a *funeral* or to a *famine* or to a *fast* - but to a **FEAST**?

I believe that many people who reject Jesus today do so because they don’t understand what is being offered when they hear the Gospel. They hear an invitation to come to Jesus and decide, *“Naw. Let’s go to Fiesta Texas. Let’s go to La Cantera and shop, instead.”*

They don’t know that life in Jesus is L-I-F-E! They don’t know that there is peace and joy in Jesus.

If you are listening to Jesus’ invitation today for the first time, or if this morning is for you the first time it has ever made sense, please say, *“Yes.”* I beg you, say, *“Yes!”*

Don’t be like those in the parable who chose to go shopping rather than accept God’s gracious invitation to the most satisfying banquet ever.⁷

⁷ C. S. Lewis’ illustration bears repeating here. From *The Weight of Glory*, “It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a

The Bible says repeatedly, “*Today is the day of salvation.*” Today is the day to run to Jesus, place your faith in Him - and get this party started!

No doubt about it. Jesus wants everyone here this morning to say, “Yes!”

Now, though, we’re going to take a page from His playbook and “*notice*” that His parable continues after the party invitations were thrown in the shredder.

There was nothing the man who was throwing this party wanted more than to fill his banquet hall with guests.

Be Persistent - Some Will Say “Yes.” (vv. 21-24)

Bring in the UNEXPECTED (v. 21)

[21] “And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’

So, off the servant went to coffee shops and theaters and city parks and hospitals to give out last minute invitations. He emptied them all, because those invited could scarcely believe that they had been invited to the party of the year. Of course they said, “Yes!”

It would be like Kathy and me getting a call from the director of the Tobin Center here in San Antonio, inviting us to be among the 1750 special guests who will hear Sir Paul McCartney give a benefit concert on October 1st. Yeah, I think we’d say, “Yes!” to that!

These last minute invitees hadn’t been expecting to be invited to the host’s great party. They were honored by the invitation and they hopped, skipped, and jumped all the way to the host’s home.

But, after these invitations had been handed out and accepted, the slave came back and reported a problem to the host.

[22] “And the slave said, ‘Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’

The problem is empty seats at the banquet table. The host wants all the seats taken, so he sends his slave out again.

Bring in the UNEXPECTED (v. 23)

[23] “And the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled.’

He invites the people least likely to be invited to his banquet. And here Jesus wants you and me to imagine the people least likely to be present at a banquet that symbolizes the feast in the kingdom of God.

Let your imagination run wild as to who those people might be. Where did the slave go to find people you would never expect to be at a great banquet? Where would he go today to find people you would never expect to find at God’s table?

I think I know one place where the slave would have gone if the invitations had been mailed out in 1971. He would have gone to the home at 11519 Rosser Road in Dallas, Texas where a teen-aged boy lived who didn’t even acknowledge God’s existence.

The invitation came by way of a next door neighbor who patiently shared the Good News that Jesus saves with that teen-ager.

She shared the Good News over and over again. It took some months, but the message finally began to sink in. And sometime in May of 1971, I put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life and said “Yes!” to God’s invitation, the least likely attendee at God’s banquet table you can imagine.

Maybe you know where else the slave would have gone. Maybe he would have gone to your house.

slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

That slave went to the places and to the people who would never have been invited to a fancy dinner. And today God is inviting those to His banquet who would never be expected in His Kingdom. People just like us.

In Jesus' parable, all of these who got the invitation knew that the offer was too good to be true and immediately said "Yes!" and flocked to the host's home.

As Jesus wrapped up the parable, though, he told of the tragic end for those who were first invited, and then refused to attend.

Tragic word the rejecters (v. 24)

[24] For I tell you that none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner."

These words that Jesus put in the mouth of the host would have made quite an impact on the Pharisees who were listening to the story. He was describing exactly what God had been doing with the Jewish nation for hundreds of years.

He had been offering salvation to the Jews since the time of Moses, only to hear them say, over and over and over again, that they were too busy to say, "Yes."⁸

Jesus was warning them that while "today" is the day of salvation, "today" will pass. There will come a day when it's too late. If they don't say "Yes!" God will turn to others who will say "Yes!" The seats at God's banquet table will be filled, even if by others than God's chosen people, the Jews.

And the warning is there for all of us this morning, too. God wants us to say "Yes!" to His gracious invitation to believe in Jesus. But if we say "No" or "Not now" long enough, we'll eventually not have the option of "Yes."

⁸ God would offer salvation to the Jews, again, after Jesus was crucified and resurrected. But, they would again reject the offer. And then, the invitation would be given to those who would say "YES" - the tax-gatherers and sinners, and eventually, even the Gentiles (that is, you and me.).

Conclusion:

Our God's heart beats fast at the thought of bringing outsiders in. He wants a full house at His table and He wants every seat taken at His banquet.⁹

That's why Jesus spent so much of His time with people who were far from God. He knew His Father's heart and loved nice, moral people and tax cheats, prostitutes, and priests.

He loved them all and He invited them all.

The words that crop up in many religions for how to be saved are "WORK!" and "PAY!" and "DO!" Jesus is the only one who simply says, "COME" - more specifically, "Come to My party!"

So, have you said "Yes!" to His invitation? You have? Great! If you haven't, you can say "Yes!" today. Come to Jesus and put your trust in Him and find eternal life!

And if you have said "Yes!", are you looking for unexpected and unexpected others to join you at the party?

Are you praying that your friends will come to know the love of Jesus? Are you looking for opportunities to invite them to know your Jesus?

You know people who don't know that L-I-F-E is to be found in Jesus. They don't know that joy and peace is found in Jesus. So how will they find out? Who will tell them?

You will.

⁹ God's passion for the lost is seen in such parables as Luke 15's stories of the lost sheep, coin, and son(s). His heart for those who are least likely to be found sitting at the table is the theme of such passages as 1 Cor. 1:26-29.