

Jun 9, 2018

## Luke 14:1-24

### The Certain Gospel: The Ministry of Food

*Jonathan M. Romig*  
[CornerstoneWestford.com](http://CornerstoneWestford.com)

I want us to start by thinking of the **last people** we had over for **dinner**. Whether that was last week or a month ago, think of the last people you shared a meal with. And if you didn't have them over for dinner, think of those you went out to dinner with. Do you have them in your mind?

What are they like? Are they similar to you or different than you? Do they share a similar **education** background? Do they have a Bachelors or Masters or even a Doctorate? Do they **look like you**? Are they white, Asian, red-headed? Do they make about what you **make**? When they go on **vacation**, do they go to the kind of places you go? Do they send their kids to the same **schools** as your kids? Are they like you?

Now I want to ask another question. Are they the kind of people **Jesus** would eat with? When Jesus began his ministry, he told us who he came for.

#### **Luke 4:18-19**

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (NIV®)

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry he told us that he came for the **unexpected**, the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and oppressed. So it makes sense Jesus would spend time **eating, drinking** and **talking** with them.

#### **Luke 5:29-32**

29 Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. 30 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

(Let's all say our **foundation verse** together...)

31 Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (NIV®)

The Pharisees, a strict religious order, didn't like that Jesus spent time with tax collectors and sinners, the kinds of people they didn't want to associate with. Sinners and tax collectors are **ritually unclean, unholy, un-purified**, but Jesus still spent time with them.

### **Jesus eats with the unexpected. (Lk 12:1-14)**

I want to briefly go over the first part of our passage today. In **verse one** Jesus goes “to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee” on the **Sabbath** and as he ate “he was being carefully watched.” Jesus didn't eat with them because he **preferred** the rich and powerful, but because he had something to **teach** them.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

In **verses 2-6** he heals a sick man to show them it's right to do good on the Sabbath; but then in **verse 7** Jesus notices how the dinner guests are **jockeying** for places of **honor** around the table. I read the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* that said this:

Meals were important social rituals in the ancient world, and one would normally eat only with those of his or her own social class. One's place at the table was determined by social status, and the places beside the host represented the highest status.<sup>1</sup>

And so Jesus tells them that when they go to a **wedding** (a party of great importance), they should seek out the **lowest seat** with the **least honor**. Because if they go to the highest seat, and someone comes along who **deserves** it more than they, they'll be asked to move and **dishonored**. But if they're at the lowest seat and asked to move up, they'll experience more honor. Then Jesus adds, "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (NIV®)

Have you ever been to a **movie theater** and you're told to move because you sat down in the wrong seat? It doesn't feel great. How about at a **wedding**? Hopefully you've never sat down at the **wedding party's table** without an invitation. Jesus is laying a **framework** for us to think differently about **hosting** others. It's a **ministry**. It's not meant to be a time for us to **climb up** the social ladder, but to **climb down**.

In **verse 12** Jesus tells the **host himself** to not invite his family and friends to his next meal, because they in turn can invite him and **repay him**, but to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed" because "they cannot repay you" and "you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (v13-14) *Jesus eats with the unexpected and he tells us to eat with the unexpected too.*

When Monica and I lived in our **Lowell Apartment**, we had lots of opportunities to eat with our neighbors from lots of different backgrounds. Monica jokes that when our **fire alarm** went off, I would get excited and rush outside to meet our neighbors... which is **true**. While we lived there we met an **Indian family** and we invited them over for dinner. I remember the husband told me when they came over that they had never been invited to an American's house for dinner before. There's a growing population of Indian families in Westford, many of whom are 1st or 2nd generation immigrants. But despite this influx I don't think we can assume that they feel **welcomed** and **integrated**. It's tempting to just spend time with people that look like us and eat the food we're used to, but we need to be reaching **across ethnic lines** to eat with the kinds of people Jesus would eat with, the *unexpected*. I want to encourage you that many of us are doing this. Thank you! But if you're not, now is a **good time to begin**.

Why do we do this? Is it because we're good people and want to be seen as such, or is it because of what Jesus has done for us?

## **Jesus invites us to a great banquet. (Lk 14:15-16)**

When Jesus instructs his host to stop inviting the rich to dinner and invite the outcasts instead, it gets **awkward**, and someone tries to **change the subject** by bring up the great banquet God is going to host for his people at the end of the age.

15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

16 Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. (NIV®)

---

<sup>1</sup> Wilkins, Michael J.. Matthew, Mark, Luke: Volume One (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Book 1) (Kindle Locations 14025-14030). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

In our story, Jesus is first and foremost addressing the **Pharisees** and his wider **Jewish audience**. He has invited them to this eternal banquet but they are refusing to come. We spoke about this theme last week. By rejecting Jesus as Lord, the **nation of Israel** is rejecting their place at the feast. (Rom 9-11).

But Jesus not only extends this invitation to those people back then but to us **today**. We're each invited to the great feast in the kingdom of God. But will you **be there**?

### **Many make excuses and have other priorities. (Lk 14:17-20)**

17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

19 "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

20 "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' (NIV®)

Banquets were **costly**. People in that culture usually didn't eat **meat** apart from special occasions. He had already invited each of these three guests and each of them had said they would come (v17). But when the time came for the party they each **cancelled** last minute.

This is like a **wedding**. When you get married first you send out "**Save the Date**" cards so people know when the wedding is going to be. Then you send "**RSVP**" cards so that people can say if they're coming or not, and if they're bringing a guest. And finally, you expect those who RSVP to **show up**, don't you? It's costly. The average price of a wedding in the U.S. right now is \$35,329.<sup>2</sup> Dinner alone usually costs over \$100 a plate. We had a **classmate** who told us the day before in person that he would be there and then he didn't show. Now maybe he had a medical emergency but it still hurt. Now what if he had sent me a Facebook message that said, "Sorry I couldn't make it to your wedding Jonathan. I have to **sit on the couch** and watch **Netflix**." Do we ever do that to the **Lord**? "God, I would spend time with you, I would go to church, I would read my Bible and pray, I would serve the lost, but I have to watch Netflix."

The **first guest** in verse 18 says he just bought a **field** and has to go see it. That man would have already inspected that field many many times before buying it. The **second guest** in verse 19 claims that he's just bought **five yoke of Oxen** (ten total) and has to go try them out. Would you expect him to have tried them out before he bought them? You test drive a **car**, right? You'd test drive your cattle too.

The first two guests ask to be excused, but the **third guest** in verse 20 doesn't bother. He says, "I just got **married**, so I can't come." Remember, this man already said he was coming, and now he's using his **bride** as an **excuse**. *All three guests make excuses and have misplaced priorities.*

Now remember these three guests represent the people of **Israel** who were choosing just about anything over Jesus (Lk 16:14; Mt 6:5). Jesus invites us to the greatest banquet, and you might have **every intention** of showing up, but life get's busy and you find less and less time for Jesus, for **church**, for the **Bible**, for **knowing God**. And by the end of your life you find that you really **don't know him** at all. Maybe you already sent in your RSVP. You said the **sinner's prayer** and you've told others you believe. But I'm not interested in what you say. I'm interested in what your life shows. **What** do you **prioritize** over Jesus? *Many make excuses and have other priorities.* So what does the man in Jesus' parable do (who represents Jesus)?

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://fortune.com/2017/02/03/wedding-cost-spending-usa-average/> Accessed 6/9/18.

## Jesus invites the social outcasts and foreigners. (Lk 14:21-24)

21 “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ (NIV®)

Jesus tells his servant to invite the **social outcasts**, those **within their community** that people looked **down** on. **Who** are the kind of people we shy away from within our community? Is it the guy at the post office who never takes a **shower**? Is it your **noisy neighbor** who you try to avoid? Is it the **single mom** struggling to raise her kids? Is it the has-been **athlete** who has a **painkiller** addiction? Is it the **gay couple** you see at school or your **transgendered** classmate? **Who** do you think of when you think of social outcast? That’s the kind of person we’re supposed to invite into our homes so that we can invite them to an even greater banquet. In Jesus’ story we’re the **servants**. We’re called to invite the social outcasts into our lives.

When Monica and I lived at the **apartment** complex one night Monica prayed that the Lord would bring more gay people into our life. We didn’t know many gay people and felt convicted. The next night there was a knock on our door, a friend of a friend was dropping by, and over time we built our own friendship. And as we walked through that friendship she told us she was a **man** and asked us to start calling her by a male name. We had him and his girlfriend over for dinner several times, and got to share Jesus with them. But when he scheduled an **operation** and I told him not to do it, we **lost** the friendship. I wonder if I’ve permanently turned this friend away from Jesus. Jesus calls us to invite the social outcasts for dinner, and we have to trust the results up to him. It could end in **disaster**, but we can’t lose **hope** that it could also lead to sharing a great banquet for all eternity. This fall I’m leading through two five-weeks studies of what it means to offer both grace and truth to LGBTQ people. I hope you’ll join me so that we can all learn together.

In New England, we’re struggling with the **opioid epidemic**. I was listening to the Holy Post Podcast this week. At the end of the episode the **host** and his **guest** spoke briefly about the opioid epidemic. The guest said “the researchers at **Duke** have found that **relationship** and **connection** and **community** are actual **real ways** that **Christians** can **participate** in helping to **turn the tide**.” I don’t know where he got the data but the host added that he saw a recent statistic that said “**40%** of Americans don’t have a single **friend**.”<sup>3</sup> We live in New England where the opioid epidemic is raging. **346 people died** of drug overdoses in **Middlesex** county in **2017**, **six** in **Westford**. What a difference it could make if we invited these people into our homes to share meals and form friendships. Jesus calls us to love and eat with the social outcasts.

**Food** itself is a **ministry**. At the **preaching breakfast** this week we had something really cool happen. I lead a breakfast every Tuesday morning where we meet at either Paul’s Diner or the Forge Village Restaurant. We read the upcoming sermon text from the Bible, discuss the passage, and pray. After we finished a man came up and introduced himself and asked about us reading our Bibles. He shared his story, we got to share about Jesus with him, and we invited him to church. This is why we do ministry over meals! This is why we have fellowship dinners at church and say to **bring a friend**. This is why we have **cheese** and **crackers** and **sometimes cake** after the service! Jesus invites the social outcasts and foreigners to his great banquet.

Next Saturday **Mark** is going to show a clip from Safe Families. **Safe Families** is a program that helps poor and low income families, usually **single moms** with no-support network, with temporary housing for their **children** in a time of need. They’re giving us a special presentation on **Saturday, August 18th** after the church service. I hope you’ll come. Jesus **doesn’t limit** this call to just our own communities.

22 “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’”

---

<sup>3</sup> *Holy Post Podcast, Episode 302: Overreacting to Christian Purity Culture with Katelyn Beaty, 59:20*

23 “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’” (NIV®)

The roads and country lanes **symbolized** those people **outside** the Jewish community, the **Gentiles**, the non-Jews. To put this into practice we too need to invite people into our homes from different countries, **immigrants** and **aliens**. I don't think it matters what side of the **political aisle** you're on. We live in a moment in **U.S. History** that feels very **hostile** to immigrants. It's our job as **Christians** to go above and beyond to **love the foreigner**, to love the immigrant. One of the ways I've tried to do this is when this issue first really got heated, and the **news** started **reporting** how fearful immigrants felt, I sent my Indian friend from my apartment an **email** to assure him that I wanted him here and to encourage him.

At the end of the day there is hope for Israel and the **Jewish people**. **Romans 11:26** suggests that one day God will turn the heart of the Jewish people to Christ. If like the three men in our story you've made excuses and had other priorities, there's hope for you too. I want to give you my **big idea** and in closing talk a little bit about this message in light of the **gospel**.

### ***The banquet is served. You're invited. Bring an outcast.***

*The banquet is served. You're invited. Bring an outcast.* Revelation 19 gives us a glimpse of the final banquet when all God's children will eat together at the **marriage supper of the Lamb** (v6-9). Jesus **bought us** the **privilege** to come to this banquet through his **blood** shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. He left the riches of heaven to go out into the **alleys** and **byways** to save the lost and foreign, the **Jew** and the **Gentile**. He was **crippled** as his **feet** and **hands** were nailed to the tree. He did all of this so that we can come to the banquet. If you want to come to the banquet, you need to **know the host**, Christ Jesus, and to **accept the payment** he made for you. For those of us who have **RSVPd**, we're called to follow Christ's **example** and to invite others. *The banquet is served. You're invited. Bring an outcast.*

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church.  
Click to listen to more sermons or to read our story.*