

Part 53: Hospitality in Light of Eternity

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We've been working through the book of Luke and today we find ourselves in the same spot we were last week. Jesus had been invited to dinner at a Pharisee's house and where he began a series of three parables.

Today, we get parables two and three. His first one addresses not the guests, but the host himself. His second parable is a response to the whole party. Both parables we encounter today can only be understood in light of eternity. In fact most of Jesus' teaching lately has been in light of eternity. What Luke took away from Jesus' teaching is that we cannot be followers of Jesus if we ourselves do not think about heaven and hell often.

Our secular world goes to great lengths to not think about anything beyond this life, and the church is often sneakily secular in this area too. I remember when my wife was about to go on a year-long missions trip to Africa, one man who claimed to be a believer warned her saying, "Don't be one who spends so much time looking up at the sky that you don't know where you're going." His fear was that if this bright young woman spent all her time thinking about the reality of eternal souls, then she will be of no earthly good.

But Jesus makes the opposite point today at the dinner table. In no uncertain terms both of his parables will go to show that those who understand most clearly the hope and the reward of what is to come are the ones who best know how to live in this world. Heroes for heaven are always of most earthly good.

From the Pharisee's dinner table, Jesus is going to teach us about our two other dinner tables. First we are going to see **How Eternity Shapes Our Tables** and second we are going to see **How Eternity Shapes God's Table**. Both of these parables revolve around who is invited and why they are invited.

Our world loves the idea of being hospitable. Drive around Missoula and you might see bumper stickers that say, "Don't build bigger walls, build bigger tables." Once again if you were to go to the Farmer's Market and read **Luke 14:12-13**, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind" it would be met with head nods and affirmations.

But Jesus' teaching here should make proponents of secular social ethics just as uncomfortable as it should make stingy self-centered Christians. That's because culture's ideas and motivations for justice and equality depend on a biblical view of eternity. This is precisely what Jesus is doing in our first parable today where he shows us **How Eternity Shapes Our Tables**.

We learned back in Luke 14:3 that the guests at this feast were Jesus (probably his disciples too) and then a group of Pharisees and experts in the Old Testament law. In other words, the table was filled with the movers and shakers, the powerful and privileged of society. It was to this culture that Jesus gave this parable.

Jesus himself knows that our hearts are full of unrealized prejudices. His parable last week warned us to not think of ourselves as better than others, but now he's going to highlight the way in which we may treat certain groups of people as better than others.

This is not a religious problem, this is not a secular problem, this is a human problem. In the garden there was a beautiful sense of diversity, but sin weaponized our differences against us. What Satan sold Adam and Eve was that the difference between them and God was dangerous. If they wanted to flourish, if they wanted to be equal, they had to be like God. This desire for sameness has crippled us ever since.

Jesus is calling us to assess our tables, so let's just use that as a sample. I want you to think about the last time you invited someone over who was of a different skin color or ethnicity. I know we live in Missoula, which is predominantly white, but for the sake of the exercise I just want you to consider it. Now I want you to think about the last time you invited someone over who was from a different income bracket. There's far more diversity inside our church even in that area. But now I want you to think about the last time you invited someone over to your house who was in a different stage in life.

I heard from someone inside our own church once that it wasn't until they were married that she started being invited over to people's houses for dinner. Why? Because the bell curve of our church is married people, and we drift towards sameness. Why do we do this? Jesus tells us doesn't he: **(Luke 14:12)** "lest they also invite you and in return you be repaid."

Behind the idea of sameness is the reality of reciprocity. I can care for you because you can care for me. It's giving with the intention of receiving. That's not hospitality for others, that's hoarding for one's self.

But Jesus doesn't simply guilt us into change here. Instead he holds out a motivation that fundamentally changes how we view others and how we treat others. How should we live? **(Luke 14:13-14)** "Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Jesus says, invite the people who are naturally needy and perhaps even off-putting to you because they cannot repay you. But that's not where he ends. He says do it because you will be repaid in the resurrection of the just (the word translated "just" is the generic New Testament term for "righteous").

One day, those who are righteous will be resurrected, and in that day your repayment will not be from a rich neighbor but from God himself. Our world is aware of our drift towards prejudice, but the only way we can really deal with these is to do what Jesus does. We need the idea of eternity and righteousness beat it out of us like dust from a rug.

Here are two wonderful points of application in this text.

First, we see that the just, or the righteous person, has a different ethic than others. Now I want to be clear here—Jesus doesn't say that loving and hosting those who are different than us makes us righteous. Instead he assumes that those who are righteous live this way.

The gospel inverts our bent towards sameness. We are not made righteous because we worked to be like Jesus. Jesus didn't save us because we were like him. He saved us because we weren't like him. We are given what theologians call, "alien righteousness" by faith in Jesus. That word is helpful here

because “alien” seems totally opposite the idea of sameness. But that’s what faith does, that’s how the gospel changes us.

We are saved because Jesus didn’t go to those who were like him, but to those who were different from him. We are saved because he makes us righteous like he is righteous, and that experience of salvation pushes us to be self-giving and missional in the same way Jesus was.

John Ruskin was a renowned art critic in 19th Century Europe. He once discovered a young painter of which he said that if she would give herself wholly to her work, “She would be the greatest living painter and do things that would be immortal.”

However this young 24 year woman, named Lilius Trotter, turned down Ruskin’s advice saying, “I see clear as daylight now that I cannot give myself to painting in the way Ruskin means and continue to ‘seek first the Kingdom of God.’”

Instead, while painting on the side, Lilius wandered the streets of London at night serving the marginalized women, but went on to spend 40 years in North Africa sharing Christ with the poor, sick and neglected in the Arab world. She said of her ministry and her gospel message: **God wants to show us that nothing is great or small to him.**

God is not in awe by the fanciness of your friends, nor is his apathetic to the least and hurting in the world. Neither then should God's righteous saints. The gospel changes our ethics. It gives us eyes to see what the world ignores.

But second, there is hope and reward in the resurrection of the righteous. If you take an intro to Philosophy class you'll see that there's an age old debate: What makes a work good? Do we do good simply because we must? Or do we do good because it’s the best for us?

This presents two challenges to a secular mind. First, if we only pursue good because we ought to, then we remove joy as a motivator. But second, if we only do good because there’s a reward in it, is all of our benevolence actually self-service?

The gospel solves both of these because it gives us an objective sense of good that is rooted in something outside of us (the character and nature of God) but it also says that when we live out those objective “oughts” of the faith it is also the most experientially rewarding and satisfying way of living.

It’s costly to live in a way that reaches to people who are not like you. But sometimes, even in this world, we encounter meaningful and wonderful joy here. One of my favorite stories of this was a relationship that formed between an Asian-American man who had a PhD from an Ivy League school and was involved in international politics and a white, steam-punk goggled, top hat sporting, leather wearing auto-mechanic.

They sat at the same table in community group, and the gospel grew a friendship.

But sometimes moving towards others, caring for the neglected in our church or in your neighborhood seems simply costly. But remember then, that our reward is not from the applause of man and their ability to acknowledge and repay, but our reward will be in heaven when God, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

The gospel wants right now, to challenge your hidden prejudice, and to call you to a greater reward. I need help with this. You need help with this. Jesus isn't asking us to have cure for poverty, or sickness, or inequality, he's just asking us to have an open table.

What would the experience of someone in our church be if we could apply even such a counter cultural ethic to who we talk to after church? What might your neighborhood or your workplace see about Jesus as they experience the outer working of Jesus' own righteousness in your gospel-shaped hospitality?

This idea of reward was so weighty that it lead someone in the crowd to offer up a poorly timed, and contextually deaf comment in **Luke 14:15**, "When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, 'Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God!'"

I love how Luke includes these little moments. By my count this is the fifth time he's recorded a tone deaf comment like this. I think Luke includes these little things to show that even your dumb thoughts are part of God's grace to change you.

Here Jesus challenges the futility of selfish sameness and says that if you want a greater reward, go to those who seem furthest from you. And one of the guys, who sits in his group of same station in life friends, probably drinking some fancy wine, who has never touched a poor person in his life says, "Can't wait."

What's the irony here? This man assumes an invitation because even after all this, he thinks he's worthy. So Jesus turns the tables a bit here and his second parable shifts from our table to God's table. He moves from your Tuesday night dinner to the great banquet held out in heaven for the church.

Here we see **How Eternity Shapes God's Table**.

The parable itself is really simple. A man gave a banquet and invited many. But when the banquet was ready, none of the people on the guest list bothered to come. So the host sent out to those who weren't initially invited, and filled his banquet hall with the very people the Pharisees just neglected: the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.

Jesus has been long exposes the Jew's unwillingness to see him as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament and this parable is highlighting this point. It's as if he says to the man, "You think you'll be there? Well you'd better be careful. Because you've been invited. The feast is here but you're not coming. You're not responding to the invitation."

Jesus warns us of our hearts desire to invite only the worthy just to show from his own experience, "The 'worthy' won't come anyway." The ruler of the Pharisee invited these rich neighbors to his table, but these same rich neighbors are refusing to come to Jesus' table.

There are four points I want to examine here about this invitation and feast in God's Kingdom. We are going to see: the feast is ready, the world is waiting, the Lord is willing, and the servants are working.

First, we see ***the feast is ready***.

In verse **16**, Jesus says, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'"

Look at how Paul spoke of the Jews in **Romans 9:1-5**. What is Paul saying? He's saying that in the Old Testament, God invited the Jews. They received a promise that if they would simply have faith in him, and stay near to him, they would get the kingdom feast they always wanted. The Old Testament message was: the feast is coming, be ready.

Do you remember how we were introduced to John the Baptist in **Luke 1:16-17**? "He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

God promised a banquet. John came to prepare the people for the banquet. And when Jesus started preaching his message was simple: "The Kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus came and said, "Come to the banquet." You see in Jesus, and only in Jesus does God say to anyone: "Come, for everything is now ready."

It is Jesus who says, "let the little children come to me," it is Jesus who says, "come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," it is Jesus who says, "if anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink," it is Jesus and Jesus alone who says, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."

Despite all of this, the Jews didn't come.

God cannot prove his love for you more than he did when he sent Jesus. God cannot prove the danger of sin more than he did when Jesus went to the cross. God cannot prove the power of salvation more than he did when he rose Jesus from the dead. God cannot prove the hope of a future banquet more than he did when Jesus ascended to heaven saying, "I'm coming back."

If you're looking at Christianity as a skeptic, Jesus is the greatest apologetic of the Christian faith. It's only because of him that the Father can say, "everything is now ready." So come to him.

And you Christian in here, notice how this challenge is for us too. For Jesus's parable also shows us how easy it is for us to functionally deny the sufficiency of Jesus. Here we see ***The world is waiting***.

When the dawning of the great banquet was declared as ready, there were many who were too captivated by the same world that was always there. C.S. Lewis once said that's only biblical Christianity that's truly progressive because it's only biblical Christianity that goes forward. Everything else goes back, that's what we see here with these three guests.

It wasn't even exciting things that kept them back. The first two had absolutely miserable excuses. One of my greatest joys in going out to eat is that I don't have to clean up. I don't have to do the work. But what's the excuse of these people when heaven's hospitality is declared to them? "I'd rather work."

A man bought a field, and he says he's going to go check out his dirt. Another man bought an ox and he's going to "try them out." He's excited to go put that pedal to the metal and watch those oxen plod.

But how often are we distracted from the invitation of Jesus because just like the hosts in the first parable, we only think of this world and its rewards. At my community group one of the guys was sharing how in his workplace he's seeing men who are throwing their family on the altar of their career. And didn't do it to say, "Look at those fools," he did it as a prayer request to say, "Help me not be the fool."

Jesus just told us to strive for the narrow door and we need to strive because this world strives for us.

The third man says, "I can't come. I've got a wife." Now this might sound like a joke. But this man is actually holding up a high view of marriage. In the book of Deuteronomy the law held marriage in such high and joyous regard that a soldier who gets married gets discharged for a year to simply go be with his wife.

We have some high schoolers in here, and I too was one of you once. And I remember very vividly thinking, "I want the Lord to come back, but I want to get married first." There's some other work I'd like to get done before that day.

How easy is it even for us to take good things like marriage and vocation and make them the crowning joy of our lives! We become so consumed in living for a field on which to build our house, an ox to fund our vacations, a spouse to satisfy our need for intimacy or family that we do not realize in the meantime the slew of excuses we offer towards that end.

C.S. Lewis brilliantly describes this problem when he says, **"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 slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."**

There's a feast where everything you hoped for, all the promises you were dreaming of, are finally and fully true. Don't miss the one invitation that gets you there. Buy your field, prepare your oxen, love your spouse, dream for your family, but those who leave for this feast leave nothing behind.

But these men rejected it. And notice what happens next: **Luke 14:21-24.**

So here we see initially, ***The Lord is willing.*** What is the will and desire of the host? To fill his house with guests.

This is not the first time Jesus has used a parable of a feast and it's important to remember what lay on the outside of this feast is not the fields of missing out, but the flames of hell. The host's desire to invite is the host's desire to save! The gospel exists to display not merely God's justice to condemn, but his overwhelming passion to redeem. One theologian says: "[God] never used his justice to crush men till he had used his kindness to allure them" (Charnock).

And so what does the master do? He send out his servants to the streets and lanes to get who? The poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame—those who don't by nature deserve it.

You see the Jews actually forgot that though they were invited, they too were invited by undeserved grace. They didn't deserve God's promise. In fact in Deuteronomy 7, God says, "I didn't choose you

because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord chose to love you for you were the fewest of all people.”

We, just like Israel, misremember our own past and forgets the grace of God in election. And Paul tells us in Romans that it’s because of Israel’s arrogance and refusal to come that God’s plan to bring the gospel to the nations was carried out.

This servant went out to do what God desired all along—to bring in the lost and broken. He grabbed all he could and what did he say? Here are some of the most beautiful words we could ever hear (vs. 22): "Sir, what you have commanded has been done, and there is still room."

Friends, multitudes of multitudes can and will come to faith at the message of Jesus. Disgraced sinners, deformed sufferers, blind beggars, sexual idolaters, self-righteous hypocrites and more will come and take a seat through faith and there will still be room for you. One can exhaust the praise of the world and the feast of her pantry, but here is a house whose provision is as endless as its host: infinite and eternal.

The Lord's table is just as large as his desire. None who come to him will lack a seat. That's good news for you and me isn't it.

But it's also good news for others. Because what we see is the difficult news that some will never come, but we also see that more people than we can expect will come. The gospel will save people, even people you never thought possible.

This is our final point today: ***The Servants are working.***

The host prepared a table, the host bought the price of entrance, the host slaughtered the lamb. But who has the host sent out? His servants.

Brothers and sisters we are to take up the call of going to the lost and the nations, of hitting the streets and lanes, and the highways and hedges to call others in.

There are three verbs Jesus gives to the servant here and they are words that apply to each of us who have responded to Jesus. He calls us to go, he calls us to bring, and he calls us to compel.

We are to go. Go to the highways and hedges. Go to the hills and the Himalayas. Go to the soup kitchens and the board rooms. Go. Get up today.

Go and bring them. We are to go out into the world, but we are not called to stay there. We are to bring them back with us. I see many people who are willing to go, but forget the call is to come back. These people become just like the three men who made excuses. They became preoccupied and missed out.

Bring them back with the message of Jesus. Bring them back to the church. Bring them to your community group—to your Bible study. We bring them back by sharing with them the good news of what they are invited to: the rich feast of Jesus’ love and grace.

That's why Jesus uses the last word: "compel them." We may be snatching souls, but we aren't called to snatch bodies. We compel them, we appeal to them. We share the gospel with them. We warn them of the dangers of hell and we overwhelm them with the beauty of heaven.

Dear church, we do have much to grow in in this area. Evangelism is happening and I'm so encouraged to hear it, but it needs to happen more. Why? Because everything is ready.

We get so discouraged when people don't respond. But it precisely the rejection of others that compels the Lord's servants to go out again! The gospel will be rejected by some, but it will be accepted by others. Eternity is coming, the feast is ready, let's go.