

You Are Invited

Some of the best conversations occur when you share a meal with family or friends. You talk about the events of your day. You share stories of when you were growing up and reminisce over shared experiences. You discuss the challenges you face in life. And, if you are willing to sit long enough and listen patiently, you and those with whom you are gathering at the table will likely go deeper, opening up about your joys and fears and dreams. Sharing a meal, in many cultures, is viewed as a sacred event that welcomes and guards its guests. It is an honor to be invited and a great joy to participate.

It should come as no surprise then that Jesus, the rabbi, would take every opportunity to teach when people came together for a meal. As a matter of fact, it was pretty common for Jesus to be invited to a *symposium*, where He would share His wisdom and knowledge (see Luke 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 11:37; 22:14; 24:30, 41). Luke 14:1-24 details one such dinner invitation. On this occasion, Jesus is invited to the home of a Pharisee, and the activities surrounding the dinner cause Jesus to speak of a banquet invitation that God extends.

It became evident, however, that the intention of the host and his companions was heinous. By now, the religious elite had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Their entire goal was to trip Him up, discredit Him, and reassert their role as the keepers and enforcers of God's Law. As a matter of fact, they had no qualms about breaking all the usual charitable protocol of a dinner invitation to accomplish this objective. As part of their scheme they invited a man painfully swollen due to dropsy. Under normal circumstances, this man would never have received an invitation. By placing him before Jesus on a Sabbath, they hoped the compassionate Savior would break the Law by healing the man. Yet, since they did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God, they did not recognize Him as the Lord of the Sabbath either (Lk 6:5). Jesus understood that "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). And so, He took a hold of the awfully distended man, "healed him and sent him away" (v. 4) as if to say, "This man that you exploited – you are not worthy of him!" Jesus shrewdly exposed their prideful, self-righteous, and egotistical religious activities and left them silent and without reply. The economy of God's kingdom - the invitation to His banquet - is one that has nothing to do with earthly recognition or position, but rather is bestowed upon those who humbly concede that they are in desperate need of grace (James 4:6). They are not disillusioned by a false sense of self-confidence and security, but acknowledge that the banquet's

invitation, their fine attire, and the festive feast are all provided by their divine Host (Lk 14:7-11; Rev 19:7-9).

God exalts the humble and welcomes the outsiders. His kingdom's target audience stands in stark contrast to the one that the world panders to. God's invitation, delivered by Jesus, goes out to the undesirables, the outcasts, and those who have no home (Lk 14:15-24). It goes out to sinners who are poor, blind, and damaged. Unlike the three invitees in Jesus' parable (vv. 18-20), they have no excuses, because they have nowhere else to go but to Jesus, who has "the words of eternal life" and beckons them to come and believe (Jn 6:68-69). Rather than those who consider themselves to be favored and self-assured, it is sinners that draw near and fall, with all their weight, upon the grace and sufficiency of Jesus. He invites them as His honored guests.

What a glorious message for every sick and lonely pauper! It is the Good News. A message that the poor can be rich, the blind can see, and the damaged can be made whole. It is also a message that calls Jesus' disciples - the church - to follow His example and "go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled" (v. 23). The welcome is a welcome from Jesus Himself! As Pastor Ray Ortlund repeatedly shared with his congregation:

To all who are weary and need rest; to all who mourn and long for comfort; to all who fail and desire strength; to all who sin and need a Savior: we open wide our doors with a welcome from Jesus, the mighty Friend of sinners.

Friend, you have been invited, but it takes more than receiving an invitation to taste the banquet. You need to respond. Jesus invites you, "all who labor and are heavy laden", and promises to give you rest (Matt 11:28). Turn from living your life for yourself and, instead, surrender it to Jesus. Believe in what He has done for you through His death, burial, and resurrection. He came so that His Father's house might be filled. You are welcome!

Ephesians 2:11-13 (ESV) - "... remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But **now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**"