

## **The Parables of Jesus Lesson 20**

### **The Banquet Parables**

Here we see two parables within the same context: the Parable of the Places of Honor (unique to Luke) and the Parable of the Great Banquet (Also told in Matthew 22). These parables were spoken to the Pharisees as Jesus was eating at the house of a prominent Pharisee. But these are more than simple stories, they cut to the heart of understanding God's kingdom. In a culture built on honor and shame, where seats at the table reflected status and position, Jesus flips the script: He teaches that humility, not self-exaltation, defines greatness; that generosity without expecting repayment reflects God's heart; and that God's invitation extends far beyond the expected insiders, and extends to the poor, the outcast, and even outsiders. These parables challenge us not only to examine our place at the table but also to consider how we extend God's invitation in our own world today.

### **The Text of the Parable**

Luke 14:1-23 "One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. <sup>2</sup> There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. <sup>3</sup> Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" <sup>4</sup> But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way. <sup>5</sup> Then he asked them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?" <sup>6</sup> And they had nothing to say.

<sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: <sup>8</sup> "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. <sup>9</sup> If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. <sup>11</sup> For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, <sup>14</sup> and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

<sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. <sup>17</sup> At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' <sup>18</sup> "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.' <sup>19</sup> "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' <sup>20</sup> "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' <sup>21</sup> "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.' <sup>22</sup> "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' <sup>23</sup> "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. <sup>24</sup> I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

## Background and Context

Verses 1-6 set the context for the parables to follow. This is the third time that Jesus goes to dine in the home of one of the Pharisees. This is also the third time a controversy arises about healing on the Sabbath. We are told that the Pharisees were carefully watching Jesus, undoubtedly ready to accuse him. Jesus then sees a man suffering from abnormal swelling and precedes the healing with a question to the Pharisees, “is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” They remained silent, but their response would probably have been ‘no’. Jesus then gives examples that if one of their children or one of their oxen falls into a well on the Sabbath, would they not save them. Jesus heals the man and then ‘sent him on his way’, showing that this man was not invited to the meal. The point being that if the Pharisees are willing to save *their own* (child, ox) on the Sabbath, then they should be willing to see this *outsider* healed. Thus these parables are about *who* belongs in the Kingdom of God and the proper attitude toward them. The Pharisees had a very *exclusive* view, that only insiders (those like them) were worthy enough to be a part of the Kingdom. Jesus is going to give more examples of a divine reversal with these parables.

## Exegesis of the Parables

### The Parable of the Places of Honor

The first parable we come to has been called, ‘The Parable of the Places of Honor’. It’s Jesus teaching the Pharisees about humility and rejecting religious superiority.

**v. 7:** We are told here that this parable is in response to how he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor. Such meals were more than casual social gatherings, but were opportunities for religious, social, and political positioning. Table fellowship in Second Temple Judaism was a marker of status and purity. Who was invited, who sat where, and who was excluded all reflected deeper values of honor and shame in the culture. Status at meals was tied to one’s honor in society, and seating arrangements reflected hierarchy. Jesus challenges these norms. The guests choosing the places of honor was reflecting their desire to be seen and known. It was a prideful act where they would claim the higher status. Jesus is getting ready to turn this idea upside down.

**v. 8-9:** Jesus basically tells them, ‘do not think that you are the most important person in the room’. Be intentional *not* to select the places of honor, because someone more distinguished of you may have been invited. If this is the case, then you will be asked to move and you will be humiliated. By then all the other seats will be filled and you will be placed in the least important place. Jesus is setting up an honor/shame scenario, which is the culture of the Pharisees. He tells them to begin with humility, and this goes along with the scripture, ‘not to think more highly of yourself than you ought’.

**V. 10-11:** Here, Jesus gives the proper way to position yourself; choose humility and honor (not humiliation) will follow. Jesus gives the opposite scenario here, where if you take the lower seat, you will be asked to move up to a better place, then you will be honored. He ends with the kingdom principle: those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. This goes along with the theme of ‘reversal’ of the kingdom of God from the ways of the world. When the world says ‘seek the highest positions’, the kingdom says ‘seek the lower position’ of humility and let God exalt you.

### Further Instructions to the Host

Here we see, not necessarily another parable, but another word of instruction (to the host this time) as it concerns the banquet mentality of the Pharisees and the reversal aspect of the Kingdom of God.

**v. 12:** In the ancient world reciprocity was expected: you invite those who can return the favor, building alliances and maintaining status. Here Jesus tells them to not hold a banquet just for those who can invite you in return. Note the ‘guest list’ here are again those who are on the ‘inside’: friends, relatives, and ‘rich’ neighbors.

**v. 13-14:** He now says ‘when you give a banquet’, invite those who cannot repay you, those who have no status, and those who have nothing of value to add to you: the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. He says when you do this you will be blessed. And repayment will come, not from them, but from God at the ‘resurrection of the righteous’. First of all showing the rewards after life for things done in this life, and secondly, they would be regarded as righteous for who they invite and show kindness to.

### **The Parable of the Great Banquet**

The second parable we will see here is setup by the previous word of instruction. This parable has a certain level of depth that goes beyond a general spiritual principle. It deals with the *who* are the ones that will *enter* the Kingdom over those who were *invited*. Matthew’s Gospel goes in greater detail, but this parable can be interpreted as those invited were Israel, but they refused to accept Christ and enter the kingdom. However, it’s the outsiders: the poor, crippled, blind, and lame that would. Many see this as a reference to the outsiders as the Gentiles coming into the kingdom over Israel.

**v. 15:** The first response is from someone who remarks ‘blessed is the one who will eat the feast in the Kingdom of God’. Obviously expecting himself to be a part of it! However, Jesus is going to teach that entrance into the kingdom isn’t a given.

**v. 16-20:** The scene is a man preparing a great banquet and sending his servants to tell those who had been invited. But the invited guests begin to make excuses: ‘must tend to their field, must care for their oxen, just got married, etc.’ This represents those in Israel who are unwilling to be gathered by Jesus, especially leaders like the Pharisees (who for sure thought they would be in). The invitation into the kingdom would first be given to them, but they would refuse and reject this invitation.

The owner here is seen as God. The ‘servant’ here has been interpreted many ways: it could be Jesus himself, it could be John the Baptist who called Israel to repentance, it could be a reference to the Holy Spirit (and their rejection of the Spirit’s invitation), or it could be the long-standing invitation going back to the Prophets calling Israel to faithfulness to Yahweh.

**v. 21-23:** The servant comes back and reports this and the owner of the house is angry. He then instructs the servant to go into the streets and alleys to bring in the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. When there was still room for more guests, he’s then instructed to go into roads and country lands to compel *anyone* and *everyone* to come in so that the house will be filled. He ends by saying ‘not one of those where invited will get a taste of my banquet.’

This is definitely an indictment against Israel and its leaders. Where they were unwilling to enter the kingdom, there are others who will joyfully receive the invitation and be a part of the banquet. On a wider scale, this shows us that our priorities should be kingdom focused, not so focused on the other affairs of life (property, business/economic, for family/social concerns) that we neglect the kingdom that we are a part of. It also serves as a warning to the lost about the importance of the kingdom over earthly things.

Matthew’s account adds more detail, even more condemning to Israel. In this context the banquet is a wedding banquet for his son. Here the invited guests mistreated and killed the servants (definitely a reference to the prophets). Here the king is enraged and “sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” This is definitely a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

### **Concluding Principles**

So we can see that these two parables, including the instruction in the middle, gives us a lot to digest. So here are some concluding principles for these parables:

#### **1. Humility Is the Posture of the Kingdom**

Jesus makes it clear that greatness in God’s kingdom doesn’t come from striving for the highest seat, but

from choosing the lowest place. In a culture that often rewards self-promotion, the call of Christ is to humility. True honor comes from God's exaltation, not from our own efforts.

2. **Hospitality With No Strings Attached Reflects God's Heart**

Inviting those who cannot repay us mirrors the generosity of God, who welcomes us though we bring nothing to the table. This challenges us to extend grace and show love without expectation of return.

3. **God's Invitation Is for All People**

The Great Banquet reminds us that God's invitation extends beyond the "insiders." Those who assume they deserve a seat may miss it, while those who seem least likely are welcomed in. This pushes us to break down walls of exclusivity, prejudice, and pride in our churches and communities.

4. **Excuses Keep Us from the Feast**

The parable shows that worldly distractions: possessions, business, and family obligations, can cause people to miss the kingdom invitation. These things are not bad in themselves, but when they take priority over Christ, they become obstacles. We are called to seek first His kingdom.

5. **God Desires a Full House**

The master's determination to fill the banquet hall reveals God's heart: He wants His kingdom full. The church's mission is to "go out to the streets and country lanes" with urgency, compelling people to come in, not through force, but through the compelling love of Christ.

6. **The Reversal of the Kingdom Calls Us Higher**

These parables remind us that the kingdom of God flips human values upside down: the last become first, the humble are exalted, the outcasts are honored guests. Living in this reversal means embracing a different set of values than the world around us.