

Responding to the Invitation, Part 3

Luke 14:15

Look at verse 15 of Luke chapter 14. "One of those who reclined at the table with him heard these things and said to Jesus, 'Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.' But he said to him, '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'd been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all, alike, began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I've bought a field and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' Another said, 'I've bought five yoke of oxen and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I've married a wife and therefore I cannot come.'"

The Jewish nation, there's a representative sample of the Jewish nation seated at the table with Jesus. But the Jewish nation had been invited for centuries to attend the great banquet of the kingdom of God. The fathers and the prophets had delivered the

word of God to Israel, and there was always the same response. "All of the Lord has spoken we will do, count on us. We're participants in the covenant. All that he has said we will do. We will be obedient. We accept the invitation. You're our God, we're your people."

And yet when John the Baptist came to the nation of Israel, saying this in Matthew 3:2, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The Jewish nation, again represented in part by the men who were around the table with Jesus, at this moment, those men balked.

When Jesus the Messiah came to the nation of Israel following John the Baptist, he said much the same thing. Matthew 4:17, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." It is here, it is near, it is in your midst.

And the nation, again, represented by the men sitting around the table with Jesus, they rejected him. So in Luke 14:16 to 20, the second half of the parable, Jesus puts all of their excuses into the form of a parable, and he exposes this grand conspiracy. He

does that in the first part of the parable, he exposes this conspiracy. The entire Jewish nation is ready to reject the Messiah, and in doing so to reject the God who invited them.

These men, much of Israel following their leadership, they thought far too highly of themselves, their properties, their work, their families, far too highly of themselves, and they thought far too low about God and his grace. They refused to show up when God sent his beloved son to deliver that joyful news, "Come for everything is now ready." We get into the second half of the parable. The rest of the parable is about a new set of guests.

This is the provision that God has made in the face of Israel's rejection. This is the provision that God has made to fill his banquet hall. To put his great goodness, and the glory of his goodness on full display. To pull out all the stops and let them see his amazing grace and goodness and the riches of his kingdom.

So look what he says in the second half of the parable starting verse 21, "So the servant came and reported all these things." What things are those, they're are all these excuses that have been made. The summary rejection of Israel as a nation. "He came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets, in the lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'"

"When the servant said, Sir," or Lord is the word there, "'Lord, what you've commanded has been done, and still there is room.' The master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and the hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

As we work through those details in the text, seeing the master's intent to bring a new set of guests into his great banquet hall, we need to be careful that we don't forget what we saw in the first half of the parable. That we don't look at that section as done and dusted and in the cabinet, and that's lessons from the past and we can close the door on it.

Now, we need to actually pay attention. Pay close attention to what happened to Israel. And use that as a warning for ourselves. Romans 11:19, he cautions the Gentiles, us Gentiles, cautions us to walk in humility and faith rather than following the pattern of Israel's pride and unbelief.

Some Gentiles, who were not paying attention to that lesson, said something like this in verse 19 of Romans 11, "You will say branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." As if to look down upon the branches, as if they're not made of the same stuff, and elevate themselves.

Paul acknowledges, that's true, branches were broken off so you might be grafted in. Learn the lesson. They were broken off because of their unbelief. You stand because of faith. Does that make you better? Is faith something that was somehow generated from you in your goodness and greatness and excellence?

Absolutely not. Faith is a gift of God. They were broken off because of their unbelief. You stand, through faith, not become

proud but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. You think you're better? "Note then the kindness and the severity of God. Severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you too will be cut off."

Go back to Luke 14. Folks, we need to recognize, if we are in Christ we stand by faith. We need to recognize God's kindness toward us. We're not smarter. We're not better. We certainly don't come from better stock. We're not superior in any way. God has been kind to us. That's the only explanation for this. We need to let ourselves be sobered by the rejection of Israel as we continue to pay attention to those lessons.

The thought of what God has done with us in the face of Israel's rejection. That ought to humble us to the floor. So that we don't even dare look up, but we just hold our hand up and say, God, we are unworthy to be called your servants. Unworthy even more to be called your sons and daughters.

God has taken us, a wild rabble, and grafted us in. That oughta humble us so that we fear the Lord, walk in the fear of the Lord. We walk in humility. So we stand fast in a reverent faith, being obedient to the things that are written. As we kind of wade into the details of the text, write down four words. Four words which are really the main outline points, four words: affinity, quality, hesitancy, and diversity. I'll run through them as we walk through each point.

Number one, the affinity of a new group of guests. The affinity of a new group of guests. As we already saw, the first group of guests who were invited, they had all the external indicators of affinity. That they would be like minded along with the person who invited them. That they and the master would be basically of one mind and one thought.

That same religion, same ethnicity, same nationality. Same social class, same financial status and condition. That is, they're all wealthy. All the normal factors, external factors seem to line up perfectly, so they seem to share a close affinity to the master. But when the external appearance of affinity, of like-minded loyalty and friendship, when those

things are tested just by a simple invitation, they proved to be only paper thin and only skin deep.

Servant sent out by the master, in verse 17, he sent out with this festive message, "Come for everything is now ready." His enthusiasm in announcing and bringing the good news to them, this is a gospel message. His enthusiasm is rebuffed by this chorus of excuses. A unanimous rejection, seemed like a conspiracy, like they all got together and agreed, this is how we're going to answer.

Imagine being that servant returning in verse 21 to report these things to his master. How disappointing that report would be. So much for the things that we count to be so important, right? All those external factors, ethnicity, nationality, same religious experience, status of wealth and social standing and all the rest. Those things we count to be so important they really do divide us in our culture and separate between people. All the things that are external factors are truly superficial and skin deep. They burn away under the first test.



So as he comes to report these things to his master, it's heartbreaking, I mean, just on a human level. Imagine if this were you and this were your wedding banquet. This is your invitation that people are reneging on. No wonder, as the servant returns to the master's house, no wonder the master becomes angry in verse 21. He is furious at these ungrateful, arrogant people, and he's angrier still at the politeness of their reply. This nonchalant tone that expects the master to just understand that all this property, or all these yoke of oxen, or oh I just got married. All that is a valid excuse?

This is presumption in the worst way. As if any of those excuses, property, work, family relations, all that stuff, as if any excuse is sufficient for backing out of a promise that they had made to attend the master's banquet. But notice, in the face of this incredible insult and his anger, notice what the master actually does. Master of the house became angry, but he said to his servant, "Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame."

God turns away from those who rejected his earliest invitations. And instead, he offers his affection to others. He

starts with the social outcasts of popular Judaism. Who are they in verse 21? Throughout Jesus' ministry they are the tax collectors, the prostitutes. They're the publicans, the sinners. All the people that hung out with that group of people. Those on the edges of society on the fringes. Turns out that they had a much deeper affinity to this master than any of the people in his same social class.

Notice what the master does in his anger, you could say even in spite of his anger. Instead of making immediate war on the ungrateful and the proud, which was justified, the master's immediate energy is much more positively directed here. Need of the moment is to see that his preparations don't go to waste. To see that his banquet hall is filled to overflowing, but with grateful people, with the right kind of people. So, he waits, he postpones, he waits to execute justice. He spares this city that ought to be slaughtered. He spares the city, and he sends his servant to others. Go out quickly into the streets and the lanes of this city, the same city.

This time, though, he sends the servant to the social outcasts. Those whom the master originally invited; those are people that

all had mailboxes. Those are people that all had addresses. They lived in homes, they had servants. They lived on real property. But the master turns to invite those without addresses living in the streets and lanes of the city. The word street refers to a broader open street, a busy thoroughfare. Gotta imagine, these are the places where the shops are set up and little things are sold on the streets.

The word lane refers to a narrow passageway between buildings. We call it in the city, alleys. The two words together street and lane, one commentator says, "they stand for the public places of the town, in which those who have no comfortable homes are likely to be found." It's what he's picturing there. This is a picture of the marginalized. This is a picture of the invisible people, the forgettables. The outcasts that are spurned by the Jewish social elites. The ones who would never make it on the guest list of this ruler of the Pharisees.

So who are the most fitting recipients of the kindness of the master? They are the ones who have an affinity for the master. They are the ones who can see his kindness clearly, they're the ones who can appreciate his grace most profoundly. Who are

they? Poor, crippled, blind, and lame. You know what they share in the common with the master, just right off the bat? They, along with the master, have the experience, the common experience, of being rejected by the same people.

Those whom the master invited, initially they've been living at the social and relational distance from those in the greatest need, the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. The rich, the healthy, the strong, God gave them all those advantages to help the poor and the crippled and the weak. What do they do with it instead? Indulge themselves, but they keep those people at arm's length. By keeping them at arm's length, by spurning those with the greatest need, they show that in their heart they have no affinity whatsoever with the master because he designed that they should have what they have in order to help those who do not have.

They don't share his heart at all. They don't have an affinity for the master. It's those with the greatest need, they are the ones who evoke the greatest pity from the master. Their situation elicits all of his compassion. Reveal his heart of kindness in actions of kindness. And they have nothing to offer

in return. They have nothing to buy his affections with. They have nothing to turn his eye, turn his gaze. All they are is the willing recipients of the master's kindness and they respond in gratitude.

And when they do that. They show affinity with the master. They show an affinity and a like-mindedness with his heart. So that's why as the master sends a servant out again and sends him into the same city, but this time he sends him into the streets in the alleys. And surely he's gonna find guests for his banquet there. He'll find those with a close affinity for him for his heart. Not like the rich, not like the self-satisfied. One commentator put it this way, "He said the poor would get no other invitation. The maimed would not be likely to marry. The blind could not go out to see farms, and the lame would not go out to prove and test their oxen."

The master perceived, correctly, that these people were less likely to be tied to the physical and transient matters of this temporal life. And, therefore, they're all the more likely to accept this invitation. In fact, they're grateful to receive an invitation at all, to even being known, to even be thought of,

to be paid attention to. They're likely to accept his invitation and then eager to come whenever the master summoned them. And they're eager to come, eager to experience a goodness beyond any experience that they've ever had.

To enter into a home unlike anything that they've ever seen. To sit on couches that are plush beyond understanding, to eat food that is so rich they can only take a few bites. We met quite a few of them already in Luke's gospel. The leper and paralytic in Luke chapter 5. The man with the withered hand in chapter 6. The woman who had an issue of blood in chapter 8. There's the bent over, crippled woman in the synagogue that Jesus healed in Chapter 13. And there's the man at the beginning of this chapter that Jesus healed of dropsy or edema.

All those people, and more besides, but all those people suffered conditions that excluded them from Jewish society. All those maladies, those physical maladies, kept them out of the temple, kept them shunned by priests and the religious leadership, and therefore they're out of public life. They're invisible. They are the ones to whom the master turns now, showing his favor, "Go out quickly into the streets in the lanes

of the city. Bring in those people, the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame.”

All these evidences of the master’s kindness. He postpones his judgment; he spares the city; he invites the city’s rejects and social outcasts. By these things Jesus is representing a heart of goodness and kindness in God himself. Shows God delaying his judgment and extending his patience. Extending his kindness he’s willing to give more time to embrace sinners out of an attitude of tender-heartedness.

But the evidence of the master’s kindness is really summed up best by looking at this list of human beings that are rejected by the somebodies of Jewish religion and society, the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. Poverty is obviously a financial condition. Being crippled, blind, and lame, those are all physical conditions. But you just know how those two conditions interweave into one another. The one results in the other oftentimes. People who suffered all those physical conditions, they often live below the poverty line. In Jewish society, they’re treated as cursed people even by God.

The social elites treated them as having a curse from God. They're suffering maladies from God because they're harboring hidden sin. And because of what they have hidden, God has exposed it through the judgments of being crippled, being blind, being lame. So they're treated as cursed people by the social elite. And by doing that, by saying, Well, it's because of their sin, they can easily sweep them aside. I don't have to pay attention to them. So they're excluded from temple life, often from synagogue life, from religious life, and that has an impact on their financial, social status. It's even harder to make a living.

To be excluded in religious life in Israel, that meant being excluded from social, cultural life. It had an impact on all their financial opportunities, business dealings and all the rest. It made it extremely difficult to make little living, take care of the most basic needs, let alone build any kind of a business, let alone accrue any kind of wealth. So the crippled, blind, lame, this meant poverty as well. God has a heart for those people. And when God shows them grace, and mercy, and



kindness, when he treats them tenderly, it turns out that they respond to him. And they have an affinity for his offer.

So there's an affinity between these new guests and the master who's extended his invitation to them. It reveals a mysterious and wonderful purpose in God's sovereign election, to bring glory to himself by favoring people like this. We'll see that in the second point, which is called the quality of the new guests, number two. So first we saw the affinity of the new guests. The new guests with the heart of the master. The second point is about the quality of the new guests. When the master considers a new set of guests for his great banquet, he extends the invitation on a completely different basis. He's looking for certain qualities or characteristics among those who are going to sit around his table and share his banquet meal.

So let's think a little more carefully about what those physical descriptions are and what they represent on a spiritual level. The poor we've talked about this before in the Sermon on the Mount, but the poor, the *ptóchos*, that's the Greek word *ptóchos*, they are the spiritually destitute. The word *ptóchos* refers to an absolute beggar. Someone who has no money whatsoever, not

even two pennies to rub together. And they are those, spiritually speaking, those who know that they're spiritual beggars, that they have nothing to offer God whatsoever.

They have no claim on God and as beggars, as the spiritually destitute, all they can do is bow down before God and appeal to his mercy. Look to his heart of compassion and plead for his grace and plead for his unmerited favor. That's the poor, the crippled, the maimed. They recognize, spiritually speaking, this represents those who recognize, that sin has crippled them.

It's sin, because of its working in and through their life, sin has deprived them of any ability whatsoever, or any capacity to please God, to do his will. In fact they understand being crippled. They don't understand God's will well enough, and even if they could, they don't have the ability to put it into practice. They find themselves stumbling over and over.

The blind, who were they? Spiritually speaking, the blind picture those who lack spiritual sight. Again, they may have legs to walk around and feel like they can do, and act, but they

don't have the eyes to see. If they were to walk they don't know if they're going to fall off a cliff. They don't understand God's will. They don't understand his ways.

This is those who lack spiritual understanding, and they realize it. But they are content to have God lead them by the hand. They're content to be completely dependent on him and his spirit to, to lead them into his will, to give them eyes to see, and ears to hear, and a heart to respond.

They're content to wait on God. Give them the gift of sight and show them light, teach them truth, illuminate the truth to them. Those who are blind, they understand that there is no sight in and of themselves, that it must come from God. What about the lame? The lame are those who cannot walk, and so in a spiritual sense, they're unable to walk in God's ways. They're unable to walk in his wisdom. They're unable to enter through that narrow gate, unable to walk that narrow road.

They're spiritually lame, so they can't make any progress forward. They gotta be carried. They know it has to be all of

God. It's God who carries them. He picks them up and he carries them forward and their spiritual progress, if it's to be made, is going to be made by the power of God.

So that's the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. My friend is that you? Do you see yourself in those terms? Because if so, this invitation is for you. This is who Christ was sent to seek and to save. But the lawyers and the Pharisees, along with any proud, self-assured, religious person, even in our own day, to admit that they are among the poor, and the crippled, and the blind, and the lame, that is absolutely repugnant to their pride. They are not ready to admit, I can't see things, I can't understand things, I can't do if I know. I don't have anything to offer before God. They can't say that. They esteem themselves so highly.

And because they're so far up in the clouds, in their own mind, they refuse to identify with any of those social outcasts, with the rejects. They refuse to identify with the poor because they long to be numbered among the rich, climb that social ladder.

This is why Jesus pronounced woes upon those who are rich and satisfied, and laughing now, remember in the Sermon on the Mount. Those who enjoy a good reputation with the world, he pronounced woes on them because they don't see their desperate need for God salvation because they're going to be among those who turn away from the invitation.

On the other hand, he said to those who are poor, and the crippled, and the lame, the blind. He said this, "Blessed are you who are poor," *makarios*, "blessed are you, for yours is the kingdom of God." You thought you were poor, instead, you're very rich. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." Wait till you get around that banquet table.

"Blessed there are you who weep now." Because you're gonna laugh, you're gonna sit around that table. We're gonna share stories. We're gonna talk about what God did in your life, and your life, and your life. All mourning will be turned into laughter in that day, and "Blessed are you when people hate you now, when they exclude you, when they revile and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man."

Why? rejoice in that day, leap for joy, because your reward in heaven is great! So their fathers did to the prophets. You are going to be sitting around that table in the company of the Son of Man and the prophets and all of those who have been like that, spurned and reviled and excluded. And guess what, you're going to be in that company of close affinity with the heart of the Father with one another.