

# ***“Come to Dinner”***

**Luke 14:15-24**

Baxter T. Exum (#1016)  
Four Lakes Church of Christ  
Madison, Wisconsin  
May 17, 2009



## **Introduction:**

Most of us would probably agree that movie producers would love to have packed theaters. Last Sunday afternoon, we went to go see the new Star Trek movie at the IMAX in Fitchburg, and that theater was literally packed—it was completely sold out. And as I was sitting there shoulder-to-shoulder among hundreds of people (thinking about swine flu), I could not remember going to another movie where every single seat was sold out. And yet we can be sure that those who run the theater would love for every seat to be full at every movie. Those who own various sports teams I am sure are the same way—they would love for every seat to be filled. Colleges and universities would love for every seat in every class to be taken. The airlines would love to fill every seat on every flight. Restaurant owners would love to have every table taken and would even love to have a waiting list for those with reservations.

And perhaps in a similar way, God would also love for the kingdom of heaven to be completely full. This morning I would like for us to consider this concept as we find that Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a great celebration—a banquet, a party, a great dinner. We know that many people enjoy and look forward to great celebrations. We celebrate getting older with birthday parties. We celebrate new arrivals with baby showers. We celebrate anniversaries by going out for dinner. We celebrate New Year’s Eve by getting together. We celebrate Memorial Day by grilling out. But probably the mother of all parties takes place at a wedding—for thousands, if not tens of thousands of dollars, a bride and a groom will invite all of their friends and loved ones to help celebrate on the wedding day.

Since nearly all of us enjoy good food and getting together, it is significant that the Lord pictures the kingdom of heaven as a great celebration. This morning, I would invite you to turn with me to **Luke 14** as we consider a great dinner where God serves as the Host. **»PPT»** The passage in **Luke 14** starts in **verse 15** and in our pew Bibles is found on **page 1629**.

I think we might agree that sitting down to eat together is one of the most basic building blocks of society and has been almost from the beginning of time. If we want to have a serious conversation with someone, if we are in love, if we want to talk business, if we just want to have a good time, a meal is a great place to do it. And the Bible recognizes this. In fact, in the book of **Luke** alone, I have read that there are at least 32 references to eating and drinking and attending various dinners. That works out to more than one reference in every chapter. Almost every time we

turn around in the book of **Luke**, it seems that Jesus is either talking about eating or He is actually eating! But here in **Luke 14**, not only do we have a reference to Jesus eating, but as He is eating He tells a story about eating! In **verse 1**, we find that the Lord is eating in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees, we find that the meal takes place on the Sabbath Day, and in **verse 1** we also discover that the Pharisees were **"...watching Him closely."** We find right away that Jesus heals a man (which would have made the Pharisees very angry), Jesus then sees the guests scrambling to be seated at the place of honor, and so He goes on to teach a lesson about humility, and then the Lord (starting in **verse 12**) tells the people that when they host a huge banquet that they should not invite their rich friends, but they should invite, **"...the poor, the crippled, the lame [and] the blind,"** those who will not be able to pay them back. So here is Jesus at this fancy banquet, and He is basically slamming people left and right.

Well, the situation is pretty tense at this point, you could have heard a pin drop (or, in keeping with our dinner theme, perhaps we could say that you could have cut the tension with a knife), and at this point one of the guests makes a statement—perhaps to break the tension, perhaps to change the subject. But we find that Jesus jumps right back into it and teaches a very important lesson. If you will, please look with me at the comment that was made and then what happens next—**Luke 14:15-24**...

***<sup>15</sup> When one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" <sup>16</sup> But He said to him, "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; <sup>17</sup> and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' <sup>18</sup> "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' <sup>19</sup> "Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' <sup>20</sup> "Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' <sup>21</sup> "And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' <sup>22</sup> "And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' <sup>23</sup> "And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled. <sup>24</sup> 'For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.' "***

This morning I would like for us to keep our Bibles open here in **Luke 14** as we dig in and try to understand what this parable means for those of us here this morning—So what? What does story really mean?

I. **One of the first things we notice is that the host extends A GENEROUS INVITATION. ▶▶PPT▶▶**

In verse 16, we have the picture of a *“great banquet”* or a *“big dinner,”* and the word *“great”* here is the word *“mega.”* In other words, this is literally a *“mega-meal.”* We are talking here not about any old dinner—not a happy meal, not a mighty kids meal, not an extra value meal, but we are talking here about a feast—a great feast, a banquet, a huge celebration. And we should note that this is not a last-minute invitation, but normally in the ancient world a host would send out a **“hold the date”** invitation several months in advance, people would then reserve the date and would plan on attending, they would RSVP, they would respond and tell the host they were coming, the host would start the preparations, and then on the day of the feast, the host would send out messengers—telling everyone that the great feast was now ready. It is this second invitation that we are considering this morning. And the feast is truly *“great.”* The invitation is truly generous. In verse 16, we find that *“many”* people were invited. It was to be a mega-celebration.

The Guinness Book of World Records says that the greatest and most expensive wedding celebration took place in Dubai several years ago at a cost of \$44 million. And yet as big and as expensive as that celebration was, it is nothing compared to the celebration Jesus is truly referring to here in Luke 14.

Perhaps some people look at the Christian life as being dull, or boring, or even sad—that to become a Christian you have to stop laughing, that you have to stop having fun, that God is only interested in making sure we do not do certain things, that God is only stern and demanding. But there is so much more to it than that! In fact, the invitation to come be involved in something great is repeated all through the Bible. Perhaps one of the first invitations is found all the way back in Genesis 7:1, where the Lord said to Noah, *“Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation”* (NKJV). What an amazing invitation that must have been—not an invitation to a dull, boring existence, but a life-saving invitation to start over. We think of the Lord’s invitation in Isaiah 1:18, *“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’”* We think of the invitation later in Isaiah, where God said in Isaiah 55:1, *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost”* (NIV). We think of King David’s experience as a shepherd in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, where King David praises God and says, *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.”* What an amazing table that must have been! It is significant that under the Law of Moses, the entire religious calendar was structured around seven basic feasts or celebrations.

In the New Testament, we think of Jesus’ invitation in Matthew 11:28, *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”* In the next chapter right here in Luke, we read about a loving father who throws a huge party when his son comes back to his senses and comes back home after living in rebellion.

The father (representing God) was apparently out there on the porch looking off at the horizon, waiting for his son to come home. Our Father in heaven is a God of food, and music and dancing (**Luke 15:25**)—He is a God who invites His people to celebrate! And in the very last chapter of the Bible, we find the invitation in **Revelation 22:17**, ***“The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”*** In the New Testament church, one of the main reasons we come together every Sunday morning is to partake in a memorial meal, the Lord’s Supper—an appetizer, a rehearsal dinner, a small foretaste of the great feast that is still to come. The point of all of this is to emphasize that God is a gracious host and has always offered a generous invitation.

When we think of God, then, we need to think of the most gracious, the most generous person we could ever imagine—someone who wants to bless us in every possible way. We need to think of God as a generous king who is eager to bless His people. And contrary to popular opinion, the Lord has invited us to a party, not a prison! Yes, there are some things we cannot do. Yes, we must count the cost, we must take up our cross and follow the Lord, but the kingdom of heaven is still a mega-feast, even with the sacrifices. It is a life of joy and peace and great happiness, and it is certainly much better than the parties of this world, which often only end with hangovers, regrets, shameful conduct and eventually death.

The Lord’s table is so much better than going back to mom and dad’s house for thanksgiving, it is a table much more amazing than the nicest restaurant we’ve ever been in. It is a table much better than any buffet. It is a table better than any take-out. When we were in Rome last year, my son and I went out late after church on Wednesday evening to find some dinner, we walked in to this nice little Italian restaurant and ordered some kind of pasta off of the menu. We had our money all ready—it was going to be around \$25—and right as I was about to hand over the money, the guy opens up a freezer, pulls out some kind of Lean-Cuisine type meal and starts heading for the microwave! We quickly left that restaurant! We were not about to pay \$25 for a frozen dinner. The Lord’s great feast will not be like this! Everything has been prepared, it is all ready, the food is hot and is ready to be served, the table is set, the chairs are empty, but the question is, **“Are we ready? Are we personally ready to accept the Lord’s invitation?”** It is a free offer, but notice that the host now shifts the responsibility over to our side—it is now up to us to do something. We must accept the invitation.

## **II. And in the face of this responsibility, we find that the guests who had previously accepted the invitation now start to INSULT THE HOST BY GIVING ALL KINDS OF EXCUSES. ►PPT►**

We would think that those who have been invited would love to attend. We would think they would be looking forward to it. But the truth is that some people do not understand how important this decision is. Some people simply do not get it, and so in this story, people start turning down the invitation. And certainly they have made a very foolish decision. In the ancient middle-east, I have read it was not only offensive to turn down an invitation, but in some cases it was actually seen as an act

of war. At the very least, it was rude—it was a slap in the face. In **verse 21**, we find that the host becomes **“angry.”** Perhaps some of us have been in the position of preparing for company—maybe we spend a day cleaning up, maybe we spend a lot of money on food—and then our guests will cancel at the very last minute. We know how frustrating it can be to have a table full of food with no one to eat it. Certainly we can at least empathize with the gracious host who offers a generous invitation, people accept that invitation, he goes out and kills a bunch of animals, he hires servers and cooks, the seats have been assigned and reserved, and then people start pulling out at the last minute with a bunch of ridiculous excuses.

The first man says that he has purchased a field and that he needs to go out and look at it. And yet, is that a valid excuse? Can you imagine someone going out and purchasing some land without ever seeing it? What if it is on the side of a hill? What if it is all swampland? What if it is covered in rocks? I know that we have purchased three different homes so far in my lifetime, and I know that in all three cases we have examined the situation carefully before making the purchase. We have hired inspectors, we have hired appraisers, we have investigated builders, and we have checked out each property in person—multiple times. And so it is not very reasonable to think that this man had never examined the property. Back in those days, people would take pride in dickering and bargaining back and forth, examining and stalling. And yet even if he had not examined the property, certainly putting it off another day (or even just a few hours) would not really have made a very big difference. But for the privilege of allegedly going out and looking at his newly-purchased land, this man who was given a gracious invitation ended up insulting the host with a ridiculous excuse in the process. The message sent to the host is that this man has changed his mind and would rather do just about anything rather than go to this great dinner.

In **verse 19**, we find that a second man says that he had purchased five yoke of oxen and that he needs to go out and take them for a test drive. And as with the property, we can hardly imagine purchasing ten oxen without testing them before the sale. Can we even imagine purchasing a used car without ever looking at it and without ever taking it for a test drive? What about ten cars? Apparently this was some kind of business decision. I am told that the average farmer would have owned maybe one or two oxen back then, so here we have several times that many—this was a big deal, and so it is pretty ridiculous to think that this apparently wealthy businessman would have purchased so many animals without seeing them do some work first! What if they were old, or weak, or diseased? Nevertheless, we have yet another flimsy excuse. Even if he had not tested the animals, waiting for one more day probably would not have really changed very much. If they were good animals, they would have still been good the next day, and if they were lousy animals, they would have still been just as lousy after the party as they were before the party.

And then in **verse 20**, the third man says, **“I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.”** I would say, “Why not?” With most parties I know of, spouses are normally invited. The wife would have surely been welcomed. But the man never asks whether he can bring his wife, but he simply says, **“...I cannot come.”** And remember, this was written into a Jewish culture where a man could

divorce his wife simply for burning the toast. In other words, this man was using his family as a convenient excuse.

We look at these excuses, and we understand that the things they are doing are not bad in and of themselves—there is nothing sinful here—there is nothing wrong with examining a field or some oxen, there is nothing wrong with spending time with your wife. But with just a little effort, with just a little flexibility they could have rearranged things a little bit to where they could have gone to the great feast after all. We can probably say the same thing about many people today: An excuse is normally just a statement concerning our priorities. One man valued his land more than the host, one man valued his oxen more than the host, and one man valued his wife more than the host.

As I was preparing for this morning's lesson, I found that there are many websites out there known as "**excuse generators.**" In other words, you can plug in your situation, you can pick a category, and the website will generate an excuse, and it will continue as fast as you can click—one right after the other. For example, if your supervisor walks in and catches you sleeping at work, you can simply say, "**Oh, they told me at the blood bank that this might happen,**" or perhaps one of the best ways to get out of trouble is to just sit up straight as you say, "**Amen,**" and perhaps the boss will excuse you in that way.

Some of you know that when I first started preaching, my dad encouraged me to start writing down some of the best excuses that people give to me for not attending worship. And so I keep a card in my middle desk drawer. One of my favorites was from a young man who said that he actually woke up too early to go to church—he got up at 4 a.m. and then fell back asleep. Another favorite came from a Christian woman who said, "**I had to stay home and wait for a load of dirt.**" Someone else once told me, "**I took a laxative and I just can't risk it.**" Someone else said, "**I had to make out my will the next morning, and I could not sleep.**" Someone else said, "**Our daughter threw a tantrum.**" Someone else explained that his apartment parking lot was literally gridlocked with cars full of teenagers who had passed out from a party the night before. Someone else said that their dog had eaten an entire loaf of bread for the second time in two weeks, and so they had to stay home to make sure that their dog survived eating that loaf of bread. And the excuses go on and on. But you know, as I look at these excuses, they nearly all seem to fit into the three basic categories represented in this morning's parable: stuff, work, or family. And every single one reflects a misplaced priority. If I will stay home to wait for a load of dirt, then I value that dirt more than I value the Lord. We understand why the host was angry! And yet for the rest of the story, we need to consider what happens next, because...

**III. ...even in his anger, we find in verse 21 that THE HOST IS COMPELLING IN HIS LOVE and will not be satisfied until every seat is full. »PPT»**

We notice that in his anger he does not go back and plead with those who gave the excuses—he does not chase them down—he does not beg them to reconsider—he does not dwell on the fact that he was insulted, but he allows them to go their own

way and the host then moves on to those who were not originally invited. He does not belittle or abuse those who gave the excuses—missing this meal is punishment enough, but he channels his anger into something productive as he tells his servants to go out into the streets and lanes of the city and to bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame. Now, looking back on it, we know that the Jews were represented by those who were originally invited—those who gave the excuses. And when the Jews had rejected the gospel message, the Lord then opened it up to the Gentiles. And so as Gentiles, we are the poor and crippled and blind and lame. I hope no one is offended by this, but as Gentiles we are the “losers” in this parable.

Nevertheless, even when the rejects of society are invited, there is still room, and so the master tells his servants to go back out once more and he tells them to, ***“Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, so that my house may be filled.”*** The good news is that all of us here this morning have been invited! We are all on the royal guest list.

And we notice here that the host wants his house to be ***“filled.”*** He does not want the dinner to be wasted. He does not cancel the event, but he opens it up to everyone. Sometimes we say that God is not really concerned about numbers, and in a sense that is true, and yet it appears here to me that numbers do matter. The Lord does not want any empty seats at the dinner table. The Lord is not happy in fishing without catching, in sowing without reaping, in a fig tree that bears no figs, in a ripe harvest that is not brought in. The love of God is not happy with empty seats at the dinner table.

Have we thought about all of the numbers in the Bible? Even the fish in the miraculous catch were counted in **John 21**—153 fish were caught! Every fish mattered! After the feeding of the 4,000 and after the feeding of the 5,000, the baskets full of leftovers were counted—the 4,000 and the 5,000 were counted. On the Day of Pentecost, those who were baptized were counted—for a total of 3,000 people! In the parable of the lost sheep, the only way the shepherd knew there was a sheep missing was that he had counted the sheep, and so he left the 99 in the open field and went looking for the one that was missing. Numbers matter to God in that God will not be satisfied with empty seats at the table!

At this point, it seems that our role in this parable changes, because at this point (knowing what the parable is really about) we can now plug ourselves in as the servants. In a sense, we are now the ones who have been sent out with the invitation, and as we go we take it to everyone. In **verse 21** we are told to ***“bring”*** people in, and in **verse 23** we are told to ***“compel”*** them to come in. This does not necessarily mean that we force people to do something, but it means that we make such a compelling argument that we leave them no choice. We make them an offer they cannot refuse. It means that as the Lord’s servants we are to be persistent just as the Lord is persistent. We have been sent out to the highways and even the hedges, and the invitation is open to absolutely everyone. It is open to poor blind beggars like Bartimaeus. The invitation is open to rich government workers like Zacchaeus. The invitation is open to religious people like Nicodemus. The invitation is open to people who are crushed by sin like the woman caught in the very act of

adultery. The invitation is open to people from far away, like the Ethiopian officer in **Acts 8**. The invitation is open to working people like James and John who were mending their fishing nets when they first heard the good news. The invitation is open to soldiers like Cornelius. The invitation is open to business leaders like Lydia. We invite them to a mega-party, and we let them know that it is free—we let them know that the host is greater than the most gracious and generous person we could ever imagine. We let them know that there is plenty of room at the table. And even without the ability to repay the invitation, all people are still welcome and are invited to the great feast. We let people know that they are important to God. As Christians, as servants, that is our mission.

### **Conclusion:**

And so the story comes to an end as those on the highways and along the hedges are being compelled to come to the great feast. The blind and the lame are apparently having the time of their lives, but what happens to those who were originally invited? In one of the saddest verses in the New Testament, the Lord said in **verse 24**, ***“For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.”*** Those excuses seemed so important at the time, and yet those men traded a passing pleasure for a lifetime at God’s table. They traded the test drive of some oxen for a seat at God’s banquet.

As we come to the end, we get to plug ourselves in to this parable. Where do we fit in here? Are we like those who accepted the original invitation but then turned it down, insulting the host with a flimsy excuse at the very last minute? Or are we like the blind and the lame and those who were brought in from the highways and hedges?

The God of heaven, the creator of the Universe, our God who knows us in every possible way has invited us to join him for dinner. He has invited us to take a seat at a huge banquet. How do we respond to that invitation? Either we have accepted the invitation or we have not, but there is still room at the table. A seat has been reserved for each of us here this morning. Let us not offer excuses, but let us rearrange our priorities. Tell the dirt man to come back tomorrow! If your soul is burdened and crushed by a depressing load of sin, know without a doubt that forgiveness is on the menu.

According to the Scriptures, we accept God’s invitation when we turn away from sin, when we confess our belief that Jesus is God’s son, and when we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. The Bible describes baptism as our appeal to God for a good conscience. If you are already a Christian and you would like for us to pray about some situation in your life right now, you can let us know about that by writing it down and passing it to the front in just a moment. But if you are ready to accept the Lord’s invitation by obeying the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)