

Table Talk

Luke 14:1-24

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for March 19, 2023

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SUMMARY:

One Sabbath day, Jesus attended a dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee. During the dinner, Jesus healed a man, which sparked a debate with the Pharisees over whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. In response, Jesus told a parable about a great banquet. The parable serves as a warning to those who prioritize worldly concerns over spiritual matters. Jesus taught that none of those who were invited but declined to come would taste his banquet. The meaning is clear: those who reject his message will not be able to partake in the blessings of his kingdom. How will you respond to God's invitation?

Martin Luther, the reformer who essentially launched the Reformation in the 16th century, was bold, rather brilliant, but at the same time, very down to earth. Much of his appeal to the masses was his ability to make scripture understandable.

His home was a revolving door of religious leaders, pastors, and university students and often, they would be invited to his dining room table in the evening. His conversations with them were colorful, interesting, convicting, encouraging, and oftentimes somewhat dangerous for the times he lived in.

Many of his conversations were written down later and eventually published 75 years after Luther died. The book is simply called, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*. It's been republished many times during the past 400 years, and I have a copy of it in my own library today.

I pulled it off the shelf and read some of his dinner conversations – like this one:

We have neglected the pure and clear Word; we have gone from the clear fountain to the foul puddle and drunk its filthy water [taught by] friars and monks.

In another conversation, he said:

I heard a nightingale singing very sweetly near a pond full of frogs, who by their croaking ... tried to silence the bird; likewise Jesus is like the nightingale and false teachers are like the frogs trying to silence Him.

William Hazlitt, translator and editor; The Tabletalk of Martin Luther (originally published in 1646; reprint, 2003), pp. 98, 114, 474

You can imagine the problem this book would create in the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, back in the early 1600s, Pope Gregory XIII ordered Table Talks to be burned, and anyone found with a copy of it was to be burned along with the book.

Ibid, p. 10

The table talk of Martin Luther – his conversations with skeptics and followers of Christ over dinner – has certainly been used by God over the past 4 centuries.

It's interesting to consider that the truth of redemption often involves a meal of sorts.

For instance, the fall of mankind came on the heels of Adam and Eve disobeying God by effectively eating a forbidden meal (Genesis 3);

Later, the covenant with Abraham was confirmed by eating a meal (Genesis 18).

The Israelites' escape from Egypt after centuries of bondage would be celebrated by a Passover meal (Exodus 12)

The Lord will Himself institute for the church a memorial meal to reflect the gospel – we call it communion (Luke 22).

The Lord promised His original disciples in the upper room that He wouldn't drink the fruit of the vine again until He drank it with all the redeemed – implying that a celebration meal was in the future (Luke 22:18)

And John the Apostle gives us some of the details of that future meal as Jesus returns to earth to establish the Millennial Kingdom following the Tribulation period.

That meal is called the Marriage Supper of The Lamb.

I believe this is the meal where Jesus will again drink from the fruit of the vine when we, as believers, celebrate our joy with Him as His kingdom on earth begins.

There will be singing and feasting at that celebration dinner. In fact, in **Revelation 19**, the apostle John is able to see into the future as he's given a personal tour of heaven – he records **in verse 6**:

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out:
"Hallelujah!*

*For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory,
For the marriage of the Lamb has come
and His Bride has made herself ready.*

The Lamb is Jesus, and the Bride is more like a bridal party composed of those who have believed in Jesus. **Now verse 9 – where John writes;**

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." Revelation 19:6-9

There is a future feast; there is a coming celebration, and it begins with a meal to mark the beginning of the kingdom of Christ.

And we who believe will have a literal seat at a literal table in a literal kingdom of Christ on earth.

You've been given an RSVP to that banquet. The question is – have you responded to your invitation – have you sent it back in, so to speak, because you want to be there?

Or is there somewhere else you'd rather be?

That's the underlying message that Jesus is about to deliver over dinner, in what I'd like to call a Divine Table Talk with Jesus.

So let's listen in on that table talk here in **Luke chapter 14**. I plan to cover 24 verses this morning – I believe we can do it because I believe miracles still happen. Actually, I want to cover it all because it all happens around the same dinner table, at the same meal.

And speaking of miracles, here's a real miracle, about to happen before dinner.

Verse 1;

One Sabbath, when He went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching Him carefully. And behold, there was a man before Him who had dropsy. Luke 14:1

This condition today is called edema – the accumulation of fluid in tissues and joints – causing feet, ankles and legs to swell larger than normal. It's painful and can become deadly.

More than likely, this is part of the set up. This man's been invited and placed there at the front door when Jesus shows up.

In other words, this was a set up – it was a trap. Jesus knew it, of course. He gets an invitation to eat with this ruling Pharisee – many Bible scholars believe he's a member of the Supreme Court of Israel – the Sanhedrin.

Any kind of medical assistance, unless it was life-threatening – certainly any kind of healing, would have been considered work – and this is the Sabbath day.

Ibid, p. 315

So the word Luke uses here for watching Jesus – they were watching Him – is a word that can be used in the sense of spying – or watching in espionage.

Ivor Powell, Luke's Thrilling Gospel (Kregel Publications, 1965), p. 314

They're wondering if Jesus would violate the law with somebody like a Supreme Court Justice in the room. They're hoping He will!

But Jesus stops and just looks at all of them and asks the question – verse 3;

"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" Luke 14:3

Now Jesus springs a trap of His own.

The word for lawful here is a word that means "proper or permitted." Jesus did not ask them if it was lawful according to the law of Moses, but was it proper – does it conform to good manners? Everyone knew that healing on the Sabbath wasn't a violation of the Mosaic law – it was a manmade tradition that forbade it.

One author writes, "This was a brilliant move. He turned the tables – He's publicly asking them to choose between their traditions and common kindness. He's effectively asking them if they're traditions are more important than people.

Swindoll p. 366

Now they're stuck in their own trap.

My grandmother taught me to play chess when I was in Middle school. I never beat her. I used to hate hearing her say the word – checkmate. All the way through college, I never won. So I stopped playing her.

These Pharisees are still trying to play chess with the Master.

They clearly heard Him say, “Checkmate.”

Ibid

Verse 4;

They remained silent. Then He took him and healed him and sent him away. And He said to them, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” And they could not reply to these things. Luke 14:4-5

Of course they can't. They know the law didn't forbid helping someone in need on the Sabbath.

They knew that they would spend hours, if needed, getting one of their farm animals out of an open well or cistern if it fell in on the Sabbath.

And here's a man in misery that Jesus can heal with the wave of His hand.

They got the point – in their religious traditions, their animals were more precious than people.

They're stumped. Checkmate!

They're probably standing there holding their plastic plate of hors d'oeuvres – little cheese squares and crackers – thinking, “Who's idea was it to put that sick man in the doorway.”

He made us admit that our animals are more important than people.

Can you believe those Pharisees? Not so fast.

America is the leading country in money spent on domestic pets. I'm not talking about livestock or milk cows – I'm talking about pets. The American Pet Products Association recorded that our country spent 109 billion dollars on their pets last year. That was 6 billion dollars more than the previous year.

And get this: only 50% of Americans actually gave any money to any charity last year, and those who did, gave, on average, \$47 dollars a month.

Those Pharisees cared more about animals than people – I'm glad we're not anything like them.

Well, this is a little too convicting – so let's move on – we've got 17 more verses to cover – I'm sure they won't be as convicting.

Now the chapter opened with these men watching Jesus – what they didn't know was that He was actually watching them – **verse 7;**

Now He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them,

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place.

But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’

Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table, with you.”

Luke 14:7-10

By the way, Jesus isn't giving them some gimmick to guarantee being honored. He's not suggesting false humility that takes the back row – in fact, that might be just as prideful as taking the best seat in the house.

Jesus is simply pointing out what he's observed in this dining room. There was an unspoken seating etiquette, and everybody sat according to rank and importance. The closer you sat to the host, the more important you were.

Swindoll, p. 367

But rank can be a subjective thing – and so this dining room becomes a flurry of elbows as they try to outmaneuver each other into sitting in the most prestigious seats.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume II (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 110

It would have been comical had it not been so dreadful.

I read the testimony of Chuck Colson several years ago as he talked about being a personal aid to the president of the United States. He described the way Washington D.C. was literally hobbled by status and rank and nearness to people with power. He and several other aides would travel on Air Force One with the president, and Colson remembers how one of his associates would take out a ruler and measure the distance between the president's chair and the chairs of the aides to make sure no one was even an inch closer to the president than he was.

It's all about being perceived as significant.

I read this humorous incident some time ago. An Army Colonel had just been promoted and given a new office on base. He had a big desk, a nice chair, and as he sat there waiting for his first day to begin, a knock came at the door. It was a lowly Private. The

Colonel said, “Just a minute, I’m on the phone.” And he picked up the phone and talked loudly enough to be heard down the hallway, ‘Yes sir, General; I’ll be happy to, sir; I’ll call the President of the United States today. No sir, I won’t forget.” Then he said, “Come in, Private – I’m a busy man, what can I do for you.” And the Private said, “Well, sir, I’ve just come to hook up your telephone, sir.”

Look, the world says, “If you’re going to be somebody – get out front – let them know you’re somebody – go for the best seat in the house – be seen with people who seem to matter.”

Jesus effectively says, “God has a different seating arrangement – there’s a coming banquet, and in that dining hall, the seating arrangement is the opposite of this world. The proud are humbled, and the humble are exalted.”

Jesus goes on to say that these religious leaders don’t understand grace or the gospel at all. They not only have the wrong seating arrangements, but they’ve also sent the dinner invitations for the wrong reason.

Jesus now turns and speaks directly to this supreme court justice, if you can imagine his calm courage – and He says to him here in **verse 12**;

“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.” Luke 14:12

Now wait a second – Jesus isn’t against having dinner with your family and friends or even rich neighbors – they need to be around you too.

Jesus just wants us not to limit the invitation list to friends, family, and neighbors.

But Jesus is also cutting to the heart of this invitation list – this religious leader is caught up in a payback scheme.

Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, [Luke 14-24: The Year of the Lord’s Favor](#) (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 19

A hospitality quid pro quo – I’ll invite you over to meet VIP’s and make some contacts and prove your social status – **key word here in verse 12** – I’ll get **repaid** by enhancing my own reputation at your banquet.

This kind of dinner wasn’t kindness, it was selfishness.

Wiersbe, p. 13

So Jesus effectively says, “Why don’t you try this sometime” – **verse 13**;

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because – note this – they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid/rewarded at the resurrection of the just.” Luke 14:13-14

By the way, the poor, crippled, lame, and blind were never invited to public banquets – and certainly not private dinners – especially in this company of religious VIP’s. And that’s because they weren’t good for anybody’s reputation. They can’t pay anybody back.

So don’t waste your time. The Pharisees wanted to make sure they hung around the right people and snubbed the wrong people.

Oh, those wicked Pharisees – I’m glad we’re not like them.

Do you have a clique? A circle of friends sounds nicer. Maybe you’re one of those people who’s on the outside looking in.

The same advice goes to both – why don’t you look for someone who’s being overlooked – include someone who’s being excluded – go find somebody who’s being forgotten – and that will demonstrate the heart of Christ.

After Jesus challenged this religious leader – cutting right to the chase of why his dining room was filled with these other people – you probably could’ve heard a pin drop.

Again, it was deathly quiet.

Some anonymous man spoke up here in verse 15,

“Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Luke 14:15

In other words, he breaks the awkward silence by saying something like “How about that kingdom – won’t that be great – right fellas?”

Swindoll, p. 368

Jesus effectively ignores his comment and now makes a direct application of the gospel invitation to that coming banquet – the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Here’s who’s been invited – and here’s who’s getting in; **verse 16;**

“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.’ But they all alike began to make excuses.” Luke 14:16-18a

You need to note this in the text – all alike began to make excuses; that doesn't mean they all have the same excuse, it means that they all came up with an excuse.

And here's why they had to: Back in this day, two invitations would go out for a banquet or a dinner like this.

Davis, p. 21

The first would go out weeks in advance.

We effectively do the same thing when we mail out invitations with an RSVP. You either send back your regrets, or you send back your acceptance, so they know how many paper plates to set out and how many hamburgers and hotdogs to put on the grill. You can tell what kind of banquets I like to go to.

Evidently, all these people responded that they were coming.

Now at this point, the second invitation is sent out around the village. In the Lord's generation, the first invitation gave the day of the banquet but not the exact time, so this second message would essentially tell them that dinner was going to be ready at a certain hour.

After the host and his household had spent days cooking and preparing and decorating and arranging – the message would go out that it was time to come on over.

Now it's at this point – at the second invitation – that all these people come up with an excuse. This leaves this host with all of this food prepared, and all of these arrangements made ready, at quite an expense to him – this banquet was his gift to them, **verse 16 says**.

But now all this food is going to be wasted, along with all the time and effort – so what's he going to do?

Before we're told, the Lord tells us three of the excuses people came up with – **verse 18**;

The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' Luke 14:18

This excuse is actually a lie – and the guy doesn't care enough about the host to come up with anything better.

In those days, and in our day, nobody buys a piece of land and then goes out to see it. One author writes that land ownership was so precious in the Middle East, that no one bought a field without knowing everything about it – expected rainfall, trees, paths, stone walls – there is no doubt that this excuse was a great insult to the host.

Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume One* (Zondervan, 2002), p. 443

Here's the second excuse – verse 19:

And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' Luke 14:19

If I were the Lord, I would have had him *executed*.

Again, this is such a bad excuse that it's an insult to the host family. Notice here – he's already bought them – and now he's going to test them – to see if they will pull a plow.

History records for us that in the days of the Lord, teams of oxen were sold two ways;

- a. either a small field beside the marketplace was used by prospective buyers to test the team,
- b. or a farmer would invite buyers to his farm on a given day to watch them work.

Ibid

So this man is saying he's bought 10 of them, sight unseen, and he's now on his way to see if they can pull a plow.

You don't buy a car and then go out to see if it has a steering wheel . . . if it'll turn on.

No, you give it a test drive.

Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 15

This excuse was not only a lie but an insult to the host.

Now here's the third excuse – verse 20;

And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' Luke 14:20

He doesn't even ask to be excused – he just says, I got married – as if to imply, my wife won't let me come. I'm not free like I used to be when I could go golfing – I mean – to banquets when I wanted to – I just can't leave the house anymore.

This excuse is not only a ridiculous insult to this host, it's an unfair insult to his wife – he's actually putting the blame for his insulting behavior on her.

I think she'd be happy if he went to the banquet, choked on a hamburger, and died. I'm guessing.

These religious leaders are clearly picking up by now that the host here is God.

Their excuses are all about their possessions and their traditions and their affections, and their associations.

They're going to come to the kingdom banquet on their own terms – when they're good and ready –, and even God isn't going to tell them who's in and who's out.

These aren't just flimsy excuses, they are hostile ones.

Davis, p. 22

A person who rejects the invitation of God is saying this:

What I am doing with my life is more significant than whatever it is that God wants to do with my life.

Whatever I have going on in my life is more important and interesting than whatever God can offer me.

People today aren't going to the kingdom of God, not because they haven't been invited, but because they're not interested.

So what's God going to do about it? He's going to send out some unexpected invitations – **verse 21;**

Then the master of the house became angry and 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.' Luke 14:21

In other words, those who don't believe they are worthy to get in, are gonna be seated.

Verse 22.

And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' Luke 14:22

We've still got some seats available – what now?

Verse 23;

And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highway and 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.'” Luke 14:23

This is a prophetic implication of the invitation list for the Kingdom banquet will extend beyond the Jewish community and out into the Gentile community.

Adapted from Hughes, p. 119

What I love about the response of God here is that the rejection of His kingdom invitation didn't cancel the banquet.

God's going to have a full house. He has determined from eternity past to fill every seat. The question is, has He saved a seat for you?

If not, what's your excuse?

- I'm too young yet – I want to live my life for a while on my own terms;
- I'm too old now – I can't admit I've been wrong about Jesus now;
- I'd have to give up some pleasure in my life.
- I don't need saving – I'm better than people I know who belong to a church.

Adapted from Powell, p. 325

Warren Wiersbe wrote in his little commentary on this text something I hadn't heard before. D. L. Moody, the evangelist and pastor from the 1800s who planted the church today known as Moody Memorial Church in downtown Chicago – preached on this passage for what would become the last sermon he would preach. The title of his sermon was "Excuses." He was ill that night, and he hung on to Sankey's little organ while he preached.

I just so happen to be reading Moody's biography these days, written by his grandson; so this past week, I flipped to the back to see what might've been mentioned. Sure enough, two pages gave the details.

The final meeting was held in the Convention Hall in Kansas City, Missouri on November 16, 1899. The auditorium was packed as he preached. At the end, he said this; Suppose we should write out this excuse tonight? Simply, "To the King of Heaven; while sitting in Convention Hall, Kansas City, Missouri, November 16, 1899, I received a pressing invitation from one of your servants to be present at the marriage supper of the Lamb; I pray – have me excused."

Would you sign that young man? Would you sign that Ma'am? I beg of you, do not make light of it. It is a loving God inviting you to a feast, and God is not to be mocked. You might as well play with forked lightning, or trifle with pestilence – do not trifle with God.

So . . . let me write out another answer: "To the King of Heaven; while sitting in Convention Hall, Kansas City, Missouri, November 16, 1899, I received a pressing invitation from one of your messengers to be present at the marriage supper of Your only-begotten Son. I hasten to reply. By the grace of God, I accept – I will be there.

What's your answer today? If it is "I accept – by faith in Christ alone," – let me tell you, you're heading toward a dinner party – a big one – the wedding supper of the Lamb, and with it, the opening ceremonies for the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

Don't miss it – don't miss it. Before you leave today, say to Jesus, "Lord – save me! And save me a seat at that table!"

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