

THE FEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke 14:1-35

Key Verse: 14:23

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'"

Study Questions:

1. Read verses 1-6. Notice the contrasts in this merciless banquet. (What is dropsy?) What was the Pharisees' plot? How did Jesus show God's mercy and answer his accusers?
2. Read verses 7-11. What did Jesus notice and what did he teach the guests about being humble? Read verses 12-14. What advice did Jesus give his host? Whom should we invite to parties? Why? (Mt 25:36-40)
3. Read verses 15-24. What is this parable about? Who were the invited guests? (Ro 9:1-5) What excuses did invited guests give? Why? Who finally sat down at the banquet table? What is God's kingdom like?
4. Read verses 25-27. What must one overcome in order to be Jesus' disciple and sit at the heavenly banquet? What does he mean by "hate"? "Carry his cross"? In what way is the banquet invitation an invitation to discipleship?
5. Why should diligent Bible students never become complacent? (28-30) What does it mean to count the cost? Why is it worth it? How can we win the war? Read verses 31-33. What does it mean to be like salt?

This passage contrasts the banquet of a Pharisee (1-14) and the banquet in the kingdom of God (15-24). As always, God wants to bring us to the banquet in the kingdom of God.¹ Jesus teaches us that we must ob-

¹*The Bible compares each human life to a holy pilgrimage to the kingdom of God. On the day the holy pilgrimage is completed, there we will meet Abraham our ancestor of faith, and King David, a man after God's own heart, and there we will meet our Lord Jesus Christ, who was once slain for our sins and is now sitting on the right side of the throne of God as our Judge (2Co 5:10) and our Defender (1Jn*

tain the privilege of attending the banquet in the kingdom of God (25-35).
First, a merciless banquet (1-6).

Luke, a Gentile, recorded the account in verses 1-14 to expose the merciless Pharisee's banquet. On a Sabbath, Jesus was invited to dinner by a prominent Pharisee. Probably in his garden was a swimming pool made of massive stones, decorated by a flower garden. And the interior decor of his house was glamorous. The dinner guests were all from the high rank in the society. Obviously, the dinner party was extravagant. The Pharisees prepared this dinner in an attempt to find a charge to accuse Jesus as a violator of God's law. To our surprise, there was a big dinner, and there just in front of Jesus was a man suffering from dropsy. If Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote "Nausea," saw this sight, surely he would have been nauseated! And they watched Jesus to see if he would heal the sick man on the Sabbath.

Usually, the enemies of Jesus attack first, then Jesus defends himself by teaching the word of God. This time, Jesus attacked them first with a question which he had expounded to them before (13:15,16). A Pharisee's banquet, held to accuse Jesus, was exposed. Jesus became indignant when he saw that they were using the man with dropsy as bait to trap him. Jesus rebuked them by saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" (3) Verse 4a says, "But they remained silent." Their silence meant their defeat. Jesus lost no time in healing the man. Jesus took hold of the man, healed him and sent him away. Jesus risked his life to heal the man suffering from dropsy. Those who suffer from dropsy have bad water circulation in the body. As a result, one of their legs might be bigger than an ordinary man's waist. This verse reminds us of John 10:11. It says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

In order to teach the mercy of God, Jesus told them a beautiful story. Look at verse 5. "Then he asked them, 'If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him

2:1). There we will meet all those who have lived victorious lives as the witnesses of our Lord and eat a blessed banquet in the kingdom of God.

out?" That's right. One would waste no time in pulling him out. The same is true with God. The truth of God is to save men from their miseries and ultimately from their sins, and to give life to those who are perishing. Jesus loves us. He is full of grace and truth.

Second, Jesus teaches them to be humble (7-11).

Jesus saw that the places of honor at the table were all occupied, and his disciples were probably assigned to the benches in the back for "extras," people such as professional beggars. So the disciples did not know whether they should be standing there or sitting down on the benches. Jesus told them this parable. Look at verses 8,9. "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. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place." Men of sinful integrity would say, "I am a little better than you. So I must sit in the seat of honor and you must sit in the back." But God's people must not think this way. The children of God must think, "O my brothers and beautiful sisters must sit in a better place. It doesn't matter even if I have to stand or sit on a corner of a bench with professional beggars." James says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Ja 4:6).

Jesus told them to humble themselves. Look at verse 10. "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 your fellow guests." Worldly people are oversensitive to exalt themselves. But the children of God are all supposed to learn how to humble themselves (11). Matthew 23:11 says, "The greatest among you will be your servant." Again, James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." Above all, the children of God must follow the example of humble Jesus. Though Jesus is God, he humbled himself and became a servant of all (Php 2:6-8; Mk 10:45).

Third, invite the poor (12-14).

Jesus saw that the members of the dinner were all the people of rank,

gathered to enjoy bragging about some things that are not really true (12). They must have spent much money to enjoy dinner parties among themselves, complimenting each other, saying, "Oh, your puppy is cute! Your wigs look better than before." "Yours, too."

What did Jesus say to them? Look at verses 13,14. "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Jesus wanted them to invite those who are in need because they are children of God. An act of mercy is remembered and repaid, as our Lord promised Abraham as well as all the heroes and heroines of faith. When we practice God's mercy we can please God, and in proportion to our service, he gives us a fountain of joy welling up in our souls. Surely our Lord Jesus will say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!" Matthew 25:36-40 says, "I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me'...'When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" Here we must learn that giving something to the helpless is the same as giving to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth, the great banquet in the kingdom of God (15-24).

God is eager to invite his chosen people to the banquet in the kingdom of God. When one of the Pharisees heard Jesus' teaching, he made a cry out of his wonder, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God" (15b). This Pharisee must have grasped the blessedness of the kingdom of God. Jesus taught him how much God is pleased to invite his children to the heavenly banquet, without missing one. Look at verses 16,17. "Jesus replied: 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready.'" In verse 17, "those who had been invited," refers by implication to his chosen people (Ro 9:1-5), as well as all the people of the world. Of course, the invitation is to a hunch-backed woman, and to a man whose leg was swollen by dropsy, for they were also the people chosen for a glorious mission.

But they blindly rejected God's invitation. What a tragic story! One of them said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it" (18b). Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me" (19). Still another said, "I just got married, so I can't come" (20). They rejected God's invitation. Those who rejected the banquet of the kingdom of God are those who are distressed by the pain of busy life in this world.

What happened next? Look at verse 21. "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.'" The owner of the house represents God. God was very sorry because his own people, for whom he had prepared the banquet, rejected his invitation (Jn 1:11). But God did not stop inviting his people; the invitation was extended to those who were undeserving. They were the tax collectors, the prostitutes (Mt 21:32), the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. When they were invited, they were surprised that they were invited. They accepted the invitation with great joy because they knew they were sinners who did not deserve such a glorious invitation. They realized God's deep love through his invitation. They learned Jesus' word, "anybody and everybody."

The servant said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room" (22). Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in..." (23) Our Father God in heaven earnestly desires that the kingdom of God be filled with his precious children. But the kingdom of God is still not full. So God decided to invite the Gentiles. In inviting the Gentiles, the owner of the house said, "Make them come in." Our Lord Jesus is gentle like a mother. He does not break a bruised reed or snuff a smoldering wick (Isa 42:3). But as for world salvation purpose, he said, "Make them come in." These days many people don't interfere with others, even when they know that they are dashing toward destruction. They are afraid of violating human rights. To invite people to the feast of the kingdom of God, we must learn from the owner that without heart, or suffering loss, nothing happens. True love al-

ways goes beyond human reason or unreasonable sacrifices. God wants to fill the seats of the banquet of the kingdom of God. In short, God wants to save all people, that no one may perish.

* Why does God want to invite us to the banquet of the kingdom of God? It's because God is our Father and he wants to bring all of us back to his kingdom. God does not want us to perish in our sins. Before knowing God's love personally, each person tortures himself under the power of sin and death. Before knowing God's love personally, no one is happy; no one can see the kingdom of God. The happiest scene of mankind may be eating with Jesus in the kingdom of God. John described this happiness in Revelation 3:20a: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock." God opens the door and is waiting for his second son (Lk 15:20).

Fifth, basic attitude of being a member of the kingdom of God (25-35).

Large crowds followed Jesus (25). At that time, Jesus' mind was occupied by his upcoming crucifixion. So Jesus thought that it was the right time for his disciples to make a decision. Without a decision of faith, none of his disciples could obtain the seats of the kingdom of God. His followers must count the cost.

First of all, in order to obtain the banquet of the kingdom of God, we must overcome our sentimentalism. Look at verse 26. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple." Here in verse 26, the word "hate" does not mean to abandon one's family members at random, but to deny one's sentimentalism. Those who are slaves of sentimentalism cannot give their first priority to Jesus.

Also, in order to obtain membership in the kingdom of God one must carry his own cross of mission (27). God does not accept to his banquet in the kingdom of God those who ignored God's mission assigned to them to carry out while on earth. Verses 28-33 are recorded only in Luke, to awaken those Pharisees who were in the illusion that the banquet in the kingdom of God was their monopoly simply because they were chosen people. This warning applies to us also. In order to obtain the

seats of the banquet in the kingdom of God, we must make a decision of faith to invest our property, made from the dust of the ground, for eternal life and the kingdom of God. Otherwise, we will be dropouts.

Look at verses 28-30. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'" This parable teaches us that we must count the cost, and that it is worth it, though it may be a life investment. In order to attend the banquet in the kingdom of God, we need a strategy. For example, in order to defeat an enemy stronger than ourselves we need a strategy (31-33). The strategy of God's people to win the war is simple: "Trust and obey." That's all. When we depend on God, God will fight for us (Ex 14:13,14). Otherwise we will be dropouts from the banquet in the kingdom of God.

In this passage, we learn that we must thank God, realizing God's deep love to invite us to the heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God.