

# RSVP

LUKE 14.15-24 JANUARY 19, 2014

// **check the time** // Find your way to Luke chapter 14 this morning. We're taking a break today from our verse-by-verse studies through Matthew, but we'll still be spending our time with Jesus who had been invited to a dinner and, while He was there, He shares about an invitation of His own that has been extended to the people of the earth.

Each and every person here today has been specifically invited by God, not just to come to Church, and not even just to have your sins forgiven, but He's invited each of us to follow Him and to hear from Him and to receive from Him. And now, He waits for our RSVP. Because He's not going to force us to listen or receive or follow or be saved.

If you're not a Christian here this morning, the God of the universe has invited you to receive forgiveness and become one of His children. He's invited you to the wedding feast in eternity. And if you *are* a Christian, you're invited today both to that feast *and* to hear and follow and receive from the Lord today.

In the parable we're about to read we discover that these invitations are not only important, but they're very urgent. And so, toward that end, we want to be sure that we are responding and receiving from God the way He wants us to.

Let's start at verse 15 of chapter 14 and see what we see:

**Luke 14.15-24 - Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.' "**

I'm sure most of you know the name Steve Jobs. He was, of course, the founder and CEO of Apple Computers. As of the 4th quarter of 2013, Apple was both the most valuable brand and the most valuable company in the world.

If any of you are Apple fans (or *Dancing With The Stars* fans), you might also know that there was another Steve who started the company with Mr. Jobs back in 1976. His name is Steve Wozniak.

But something most people don't know (I didn't), is that there was a third founding member of the Apple Computer Company, and his name is Ronald Wayne. He was there at the very beginning, but

only 2 weeks after Apple Computers was born, Mr. Wayne sold his 10% share to the Steves so that he could get out. He was concerned about the debt the company would have to take on in order to get off the ground and he decided he didn't want to be a part of that journey.

According to one report, he sold his share for just \$800. Had he held on to his 10%, today it would be worth 35 **billion** dollars.

Mr. Wayne is still alive and I imagine he has more than a few sleepless nights thinking about his decision back in 1976. Looking back at what we know now, we would say that he missed out in a big way.

The parable in Luke 14 shows us a picture of people missing out on an opportunity to be a part of a feast thrown by a great Master.

If we put ourselves into the story we realize that we are invited to be a part of the greatest feast, the greatest Kingdom, the greatest investment ever shared with mankind. A relationship with God is very much an investment because it is not a casual thing, it is an all-encompassing thing and it not only is meant to consume our life here on earth, but it looks forward to incredible reward in heaven.

But, as is the case with any investment, the choice and the responsibility to buy-in is ours. This is one of the points of the parable.

You see, Jesus had been invited to dinner at the home of one of the rulers of the Pharisees. It wasn't a friendly invitation. The dinner had been purposefully scheduled on the Sabbath because, as usual, the Pharisees were trying to find reasons to accuse Jesus and have Him arrested.

But their plan always backfired on them. Because Jesus would minister or heal or forgive the person they brought to trap Him, and as He did it, He would confound these religious hypocrites with His wisdom and the truth of God's love. But, despite their previous failures, they were back at it again. They invited Jesus to dinner on the Sabbath, and they went and found some poor man who was afflicted with dropsy and then they set him in front of Jesus and watched Him closely.

As usual, Jesus healed the man and then He shared with the people at the dinner teachings and parables about living life humbly for the Kingdom of God, looking forward not to honor in this world, but to the rewards God's people will receive at the resurrection.

That's where our text picks up, starting in verser 15, in the midst of all this tension. Let's read it again:

**Luke 14.15 - Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"**

We're not sure who this man is. I think it's safe to say that he was probably one of the Pharisees. But beyond that, we aren't told his attitude or his motives. We don't know how he felt about Jesus, so we'll take him at his word. He's just heard these parables and teachings about the Kingdom, he saw Jesus miraculously heal a broken man, and in that moment he bursts out and says, "That sound **GREAT!** I want in!" He wants to be a part of the feast in God's Kingdom.

Each of us, whether we've been a Christian for 5 weeks or 5 years or 50 years, should look within our hearts and ask ourselves some questions this morning.

You know we're still just a few weeks into the New Year. Culturally speaking, it's a time when you hear a lot of talk and advertising about New Year's Resolutions. The idea is that people evaluate their lives and find places they're not satisfied with or areas they want to work on or improve and then they *resolve* to do some things in order to better themselves.

Our pastor touched on this on Wednesday night if you were at Ignite. If you missed it, you need to listen to the study online, it's the Quickstart of Haggai, but whether you do resolutions or make fun of people who do them, spiritual self-examination is a very important thing if you want to be a growing Christian.

Here's an example of how we can do this. We see this man's outburst of excitement in verse 15. And the question we should ask ourselves is whether we have the same desire to be a part of God's Kingdom. When we think about Jesus or His word or His will, do we have that exclaiming inside that says, "Yes! I want in!"

Because if you honestly look inside your heart and you don't find an excitement to know the Lord or serve the Lord and one day be *with* the Lord, then you have a problem. You're either not saved and on your way to a Christless eternity in Hell, or you're a backslidden Christian and you need revival.

The Lord has detailed some great plans that He has for His people on both sides of eternity. He has plans for your life and your marriage and your kids and your struggles, but those plans aren't going to move forward if we don't have some drive and excitement to be a part of it.

We have a lot of passion for a lot of things, but do you have excitement for the things of the Lord? Not just willingness or compliance, but real excitement? Because if we understand what Christianity is, I think we should be excited to be a part of what the Lord intends to do.

### **Luke 14.16a - Then He said to him...**

There were a lot of people at this dinner. But at this point, Jesus turned His words and attention to the man that had spoken up.

God responds to interest. The Gospels say that Jesus spoke all the time in parables because if a person wanted to understand them they would have to go and follow up with the Lord and interact with Him to get the meaning. They would have to *show interest* before the Lord took them deeper. And that is a principle of the spiritual life. If we want to have a deeper relationship with Christ, if we want to be used more by God, if we want to be overcoming temptation and having stronger hearts and stronger families, then we have to show interest and participate in the work that God desires to do. We've got to plant ourselves in the Lord and press into Him.

There's another parable in Matthew 25 about a group of 10 bridesmaids. Five of them kept themselves occupied with the business of preparation. They planned their lives around the Bridegroom and lived life with Him in mind. The other five thought, "I don't need to do that yet. When I really need some oil, when I really need to get my act together, I'll have time for it, or someone else will be there to do it for me." When the Bridegroom showed up, they wanted the benefits of being His bride, but they refused to live that way, so when the time came, it was too late for them.

God makes a lot of plans and a lot of promises to you in His word. But He responds to interest. The Bible says that if we want a door opened, we need to knock. If we want to find what we're looking for, we need to seek. If we want an answer from heaven, we've got to ask. But *if* we ask and seek and knock God *will* meet us and work in our lives. Jesus 'said to **him**' who showed interest.

**Luke 14.16 - Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many**

God has invited you to His great supper in eternity, and He's invited you today to come and drink of His living water, to taste and see that He is good, not only for the afterlife, but in your life now.

The Lord is not far off and He's not a recluse. He's invited you to come to Him. Come to Him for salvation and the forgiveness of your sins. Come to Him if you are weary and burdened. Come to Him with your fears and your confusion. Come and find rest for your souls. That's the open invitation that has been extended to each one of us. And the dinner He's giving for us is a feast! It's a life of joy and purpose and satisfaction.

**Luke 14.17 - [he] sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.'**

There is an urgency to the invitation of God. '*All things are now ready.*' The meal has been prepared. Thinking about this devotionally for our own lives, the opportunities that God has been preparing for us are ready. The path that the Lord wants us to take with Him is ready. The strength and the peace that He has for the storms in your life have been prepared. If you're not a believer, this invitation is incredibly urgent because, for you, the invitation is for salvation. You've been invited to upgrade your destination ticket from hell to heaven! And the time is now. You have no idea how much longer you will walk this earth and the Bible says that it is appointed to men once to die and after that comes judgement.

But Christians, God's invitation for you to live for His Kingdom today is urgent as well. We don't want to miss anything that He has planned because we're delaying our response to Him.

Here's how the invitees responded in the parable:

**Luke 14.18a - But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses.**

The man who was giving the feast was not an evil man. He wasn't stingy or greedy. It wasn't a fundraiser. He was a kind man with a generous heart. So why did these people who had been invited refuse him?

Well, one of the things it demonstrates is that the natural inclination of our human hearts is to be in rebellion against God.

When you receive salvation, the Lord puts a new nature in your heart. But on this side of eternity we always have that old, sin nature lurking inside of us, and that sinful nature actively seeks to rebel against God.

The Apostle Paul understood this and wrote about it at length. Romans 6, 7 and 8 are a good passage to read about the struggle between the two natures inside of a Christian.

Because of that struggle, the Bible tells us to assault the sin nature and put it to death. Paul spoke of how a Christian should subject the old nature when he said:

**1 Corinthians 9.27 - But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.**

Think about it this way: One of the most popular New Year's resolutions is to get in shape. How do we get our bodies in shape? By doing nothing or by doing something? It's not by doing nothing, it's by eating right and exercising. Because if we do *nothing*, our bodies will not improve, they will deteriorate. If we do *nothing*, no matter who we are, our strength and health will fade away and the fat and weakness and sickness increases. That's the natural way of the human body.

Our spiritual lives are very similar. If we do not attend to our spiritual health, then it will weaken and dry up. It's not that we *generate* spiritual fruit on our own or that we have to make ourselves better Christians. The Bible says that we're like a tree that *will* bear fruit because of the power of God in us. But in order to bear that fruit we have to be in the light and drinking water and stay connected to the soil that we were planted in. If we do that, if we will thirst after Jesus and feed on His word, then our new nature will do what it's meant to do. It will grow and bear fruit and strengthen. But a healthy spiritual life doesn't happen on its own. We have to be a part of the cultivation process.

But let's take a look at the individual excuses these folks made.

**Luke 14.18b - The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.'**

This first fellow had bought a field for himself and, rather than go to the feast, he wanted to go to his field and take a look at it. He had plans for this field. He was going to go and see it and plan what kind of crops he was going to grow there or perhaps what he might build in the years to come. He had a whole set of plans for this field.

When we look at our lives we should be able to tell if we're living for our own field and our own plans or if we've given the Lord control over what the fields of our future will be. This man was wrapped up in his own plan. He had no interest in this feast he had been invited to. He was content with his own plan for his future.

But it's important that we recognize that the Christian life is not whatever we want to do with belief in God added into the mix. The call of Christ is a call to surrender and relinquish our lives.

So, one evaluation we should each make today is what our plans are for the future and how does God figure into those plans? Is He in the position of Master and Designer and Decider over our lives, or have we relegated Him to the position of a silent partner?

The truth is, the Lord *has* a plan for you. He has a field in mind for you to work in and grow in. It may be a field right where you're at right now, or maybe He'll send you to a field where you've never been. As Christians, we no longer have the authority to decide our own futures. The Lord *demand*s to have the position of decision and authority over our plans. We know that His plans for us are good. We know that the Lord has weighed them out and His desire is to bless us spiritually. But if we think that we can make our own plans for our futures and make our own decisions, relegating God to

the position of a silent partner, or just chief adviser, then we are going to miss out on much of what He desires for us. And, even more than that, Jesus said that if we don't take up **His** cross, setting aside our own control over our lives, then we are not worthy of Him.

**Luke 14.19 - And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.'**

This second fellow was on his way to test drive some oxen. In his case it seems that it was his possessions and his job that got in the way of accepting the invitation.

We all know people who value wealth and possessions more than God and even more than other people. It's a terrible thing, but something that we're not immune from. But, what about our work? Here on earth, sometimes we get wrapped up in our work. Whether it's our day-to-day job or projects we do on the side. And that's fine, *as long as we are doing things that our Master wants us to do!* From the eternal perspective, our work is only important if we're doing what God has asked us to do. And if the Lord has invited us to follow Him into some other field or some other opportunity but we ignore that invitation in order to accomplish some other work that we think is important, then we will waste our lives building with what the Bible calls wood, hay and stubble. Things that will burn away when we stand before the Lord and our work is tested.

This fellow said he needed to test drive his oxen. He bought them and he wanted to see if they were going to be profitable for him. Fair enough.

I think it's interesting, because one of the pictures the Bible uses for the Christian life is that we put on a yoke with Jesus Christ, as if we were oxen being yoked together to plow a field. As the end of our lives we will be tested by the One who bought us with His blood. Our work and our faithfulness will be examined and rewarded.

Whatever your job is, no matter how significant or insignificant it may seem in our eyes, if the Lord has asked you to do it, it's important and it matters and it will be rewarded. On the flip side, whatever your job is, no matter how important or prestigious it seems in our eyes, if the Lord *hasn't* called you to do it, it simply doesn't matter eternally. It's a distraction from the things that your King really wants you to be doing in His Kingdom.

Now, notice: both of these guys said the same thing. "I ask you to have me excused."

Our God is full of grace. He is gracious, but He does not excuse. For you who aren't Christians here today, you've been invited to receive salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. You are free to refuse that invitation, but you will not be excused. Acts chapter 4 states plainly that there is no other way, no other name by which you can be saved.

But we Christians are still called to accept the invitation to follow Christ and take up His cross. That's an invitation we must choose to either accept or refuse. There are many Christians who receive salvation but do not relinquish themselves at the cross of Jesus Christ. They won't live for the Kingdom. And the Bible says that they will stand before the Lord and the work of their lives will be burned. They will be saved, but their choices will not be excused. They will be saved as through fire. And I'm confident that none of us want to start eternity that way. But that is determined by our work in this life.

**Luke 14.20 - Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'**

Now, this is just a fake excuse. In Jewish law there were provisions for newlyweds. If a man got married, he wouldn't have to work or go to war for the first year of his marriage. I think that's pretty great! But they were definitely allowed to feast. But, this third man was using his wife as an excuse not to go.

Now, ladies, let me ask you something. If someone came up to your husband today and handed him a couple of gift cards for dinner and a show and said, "Here. Take your wife on a date!" How many of you would say, "Oh no! Please refuse him! I don't want to go out, I just want to stay home and cook and clean by myself!"

Of course his wife would want to go to this feast! But, it's interesting, people often use 'family' as an excuse to not live passionately for the Lord. It's an excuse people use to not serve the Lord and sometimes to not even come and worship Him. People say, "God wants me to put my family first!" And then when the kids get old enough to start playing sports or do activities, suddenly the parents stop serving as much or at all. The family isn't at church as much. All of the nights and weekends start getting spent out at the activity center or the ball field or the lake, rather than the house of God.

I'm not saying that sports are a bad thing or that you shouldn't be involved in those sorts of hobbies. What I am saying is that it's easy for us to convince ourselves that since God wants me to put 'family first', therefore, anything I do with my family is automatically Godly. But that isn't the case.

The truth is, God **doesn't** want us to put family first. He want us to put *HIM* first. And then *HE* will care for and enrich our families. Jesus said very plainly that we have to love Him more than our mothers and fathers and sons and daughters. And He said that if we *don't* love Him more than our families, then we are not worthy of Him. Matthew 10:37.

Don't fool yourself into thinking that enjoying family time will automatically make your family stronger or more spiritual. Family time centered on the Lord, serving Him, being in His house and His presence, will. The rest does not. And if we put family enjoyment in front of obeying the Lord then we're making the same mistake that this man did in verse 20.

**Luke 14.21-23 - So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled.**

We learn some things about this master here. First, we see that he was angry. We should realize that the way we live our lives and the way we respond to God has the potential to bring pleasure to Him or break His heart. Today, the things we do have an impact on the heart of God.

We also see some wonderful things about the master. He wanted a full house. He wanted as many people as he could cram in so that he could bless them with an incredible feast. It was all on his dime and he had taken care of everything. And he was open to have anyone there who was willing to accept his invitation.

That's our God. And that's His invitation. As I mentioned earlier, it's still the New Year. We're still in that time of evaluation. And I know that we each want a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. We all want stronger families. We all want God to use us and impact our lives in greater ways this year than He did last year. That's why you're here - because you *want* to be faithful and follow God.

The encouragement for all of us is that all of those things *are* possible and they're all things God *wants* to do in our lives, but they do not happen on their own. They are found and developed in our lives by walking down the path God has shown to us. It's a path of discipleship. Accepting His invitation to follow Him and taste and see that He is good. To drink deep of His living water. That's how we get there.

But we can't get to all of those wonderful, spiritual promises and blessings if we simply call on the name of Jesus but then go on living the same life with our own plans and our own pursuits and our own methods. Imagine if the disciples had done that!

Pastor and author Francis Chan wrote about answering the call to follow Christ and said:

*"Somehow, many have come to believe that a person can be a 'Christian' without being like Christ. A 'follower' who doesn't follow. How does that make any sense? Many people in the church have decided to take the name of Christ and nothing else. This would be like Jesus walking up to those first disciples and saying, 'Hey, would you guys mind identifying yourselves with Me in some way? Don't worry, I don't actually care if you do anything I do or change your lifestyle at all. I'm just looking for people who are willing to say they believe in Me and call themselves Christians.'...No one can really believe that this is all it means to be a Christian."*

We know that isn't what it means to be a Christian and accept the invitation God has given us to be in a real relationship with Him. It means much more. But it requires that we buy in all the way.

God has incredible store of spiritual power and blessing for His people. We know that. We read about it in His word and we've experienced it in our own lives. We know that God's intention is to pour into our lives and radically fill us and use us. And, as we see in this parable, there is always room for people who want in.

But notice this:

**Luke 14.24 - For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.**

There's always room at God's table, but our seats are not always saved if we reject His invitations. Here's what I mean by that: If you're an unbeliever and you continually reject God's invitation to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, your seat will not be saved after you die. You will be sending yourself to an eternity in hell.

For Christians here this morning, the Lord has openly given each of us the invitation to come and drink and taste and see that He is good. He says, "Come to My table and see that I am good for your marriage. I'm good for your employment. I'm good for your struggles and your worries. I'm good for your parenting." And on and on and on. It's as if Steve Jobs had been able to tell Ronald Wayne, "Here's what Apple computers is going to do." It would be well worth the ride. Well worth the investment. If we accept the Lord's invitation and relinquish our lives to Him, not putting some field or ox or whatever else in front of Him, then He will meet us with a feast.



He has invited you. He is calling you. He's made ready all things so that you can live with His power and His peace and His effectiveness and His satisfaction.

All any of us has to do is accept His invitation and see where it leads today. We go when and where we're invited to go. But it takes real obedience, real excitement and real action. But we can do it.

Go *with* the Lord today and see what He will do.