

DON'T MISS THE PARTY, LK.14:15-25

Parables: Stories with a Secret #5



Intro: (show cartoon of Calvin & Hobbes discussing what Santa sees, and how he rewards you for being good. In this cartoon Calvin ponders hitting Suzie with a snowball because Santa surely doesn't have time to monitor his every move. But when Hobbes points out that Suzie could tell on him, Calvin abandons his plot and hopes that Santa is at least watching him in that moment that he is being so very good.)



◆ In our society, Santa is, in a large way (a large red way) a stand in for God. He has taken on characteristics of God. For example, he is omniscient (all-knowing). He is omnipresent (everywhere at once: he can hit the world globe with gifts in a single night). And he is, at least according to folklore, the rewarder of good, though not essentially a punisher of evil. And now for some observations that the Calvin & Hobbes cartoon strip so perfectly illustrates with it's discussion of Santa Clause: 1) People assume

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that goodness (lets call it righteousness, shall we?) can be a separate entity from the inner heart or will of the person. Like Calvin, we assume we can chalk up good without having to be good inside. In other words, we assume that good is in external acts that once performed are invariably always meritorious on our account. 2) People assume that people (especially themselves) are essentially good on the inside as well. That of course, makes them a shoe-in for presents from Santa, or heaven from God for that matter. So Calvin mutters to himself, "I sure hope Santa(God?) is watching, seeing as I'm being so good." And Hobbes replies, "Unwillingly good, but good nonetheless." as if there is that sort of thing.

◆ This brings us to Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet. The first thing I'd like to remind us of is that...

◆ **1. God very much wants to celebrate and bless human people.** This is a given in Christian theology and caught by the concept of the banquet, though many people inherently assume the opposite. Folks think that God must be convinced somehow to bless us, and that therefore we had better watch for opportunity to impress him. You know, do something good that obligates God to return the favor. But the Bible shows us a God who 1) creates people to fellowship with them, 2) who chases after people when they walk away from him, 3) who provides payment for people who owe him because of their sin, 4) and who promises to bring his family all home in the end to an eternal celebration. The fellowshipping with people was always his intent. Jewish theology knew this as well. Who could be a happier being than such a God? The great Day of the Lord, also known

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as the Resurrection, or the Feast in the Kingdom (referred to in our text today) –was the picture of heaven every Israelite looked forward to.

- ◆ *“In Jerusalem, the LORD Almighty will spread a wonderful feast for everyone around the world. It will be a delicious feast of good food, with clear, well-aged wine and choice beef. In that day he will remove the cloud of gloom, the shadow of death that hangs over the earth. He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears. He will remove forever all insults and mockery against his land and people. The LORD has spoken!” Isaiah 25:6-8, NLT.*
- ◆ Friend, do you know that it is God’s desire to give you goodness? It is his full intention to make you like Christ. It is his intention that you share his happiness. His table must be filled and his feast will take place.
- ◆ *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” John 14:3, NIV.*
- ◆ *““Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.” John 17:24, NIV.*
- ◆ *““Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” Matthew 25:34, NIV.*
- ◆ You might notice that God began preparing this celebration long before you or I ever got the notion in our heads that we should do something good for a change. So lets clear up the notion that God is

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not out to bless humans apart from their behavior. Psalm 103 says he does not treat us as our sins deserve. It says that God's kind of love is as high as the heavens. God leans toward blessing people all the way! Remember too that when he gives a command, it too is part of his ultimate intent to bless the people he loves so much. There is much cause for joy and celebration because of what God is really like!

- ◆ Our next question is, "Will we ultimately share that celebration and blessing?" Well, let's put it this way...
- ◆ **2. My disinterest in God should make me concerned.** This parable is a warning not to assume that because we are blessed, or because we are doing well, or even because we know about God or of God, that we are destined for his heavenly feast. Blessing and disinterest often go hand in hand. A lot of blessed people are very uninterested in God. I know it sounds like a strange combination. Look at it this way: It's said that there are some five things that no nation or culture can survive: wealth, ease, success, prosperity, and comfort. If you read the histories, when a nation gets these things it invariably stumbles and disappears from the map. Persia. Greece. Rome. It's always the same story. Maybe you see that in the United State. So material blessing does not necessarily mean you have a relationship with God.
- ◆ A. You see, when things are well, we tend to forget God or forget even to look to him. This is what's happening with the invitees to the feast in Jesus' parable and to the Jewish audience he's telling the

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story to. On the surface it doesn't seem like the guests are all that sinister a group, does it? No indication that they are drug pushers or even just sharing needles. But look at their excuses! (Here's the surprise.) They're lame, right?! No one buys property without inspecting it *first!* You don't buy a new Cadillac and *then* take it for a test drive. The only legit excuse is the guy who just got married. She probably put him to work on the honey-do list, that's why he can't make it! Still, he doesn't even ask to be excused like the others. He's just not interested. These excuses are on a par with something like, "Ah, I think I might need to clip my dog's nails that night, so I probably can't make it." These folk are not interested in the banquet invitation.

- ◆ **Now** they have no solid reason to stay home, but they don't care about the inviter. Why? My suspicion is that they are too well-off themselves, and therefore proud and self-satisfied. The second set of invitees is by contrast the poor, lame, needy –those not independently well-off. And check the context. Jesus tells this story at a meal in the home of a "prominent Pharisee" (v1). And the other guests are pretty full of themselves (v7 *the guests picked the places of honor at the table*). In the words of Carly Simon, they had "one eye in the mirror as [they] watched [themselves] walk by." When things are going well, we tend not to appreciate help, or God. CS Lewis comments that dozens of people go to Jesus to be cured of some particular sin of which they are ashamed and which may be spoiling their day. (say drunkenness, or a temper). But when Christ has enabled us to overcome one or two circumstances or sins which are an obvious

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nuisance, we are inclined to feel we are good enough now. And we would be obliged if Jesus would now leave us alone! After all, we never wanted to be saints. A descent, ordinary chap will do just fine, thank you very much –so we are disinterested because of our good fortune and our consequent self-assurance. This is dangerous, because these are the folks who don't wind up at the Feast in the Kingdom of God, ie. heaven. So maybe we shouldn't be so quick to complain when we are not materially lavished with blessing, for that very well, and even likely, may aid us in finding spiritual blessing. Either way, let me remind us that God desires to give us both!

◆ *"...put [your] hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." 1 Timothy 6:17, NIV.*

- ◆ B. So how disinterested am I in the invitations of God? Of course his biggest invite is to salvation, right? To be forgiven of sin. To have your name freely written in the Book of Life through the merits of Jesus of Nazareth! Please excuse me, God, but I feel I'm a pretty good person already. I'm not upset with you. And you have no reason to be so with me. Please excuse me.
- ◆ Then there are his invitations to grow our souls through, say, discipleship habits, giving, small group fellowship, service to others, neighborhood revitalizing, etc. It's not that we are mean people, or have anything against anyone. But we don't feel *the need*. We haven't the time. Days are full you know. Even God will have to wait for my schedule. Please excuse me. One member of another church in town commented the other day, "Why is it that church is emptier

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when the pastor is on vacation?" (Well I couldn't help her on that one. I too am never in my church on the Sunday's when the pastor is on vacation!) Maybe I am disinterested in God because I fail to *realize* my need, and his grace. We've already observed his deep desire to grace mankind. Lets consider our need.

- ◆ **3.** In the parable, who are the ones actually at the feast when it starts? Only the humble and the needy sit at God's banquet table. So, **I need to know my need.** Eugene Peterson says that sometimes after we find our way around the countryside of the faith, and acquire a few habits of discipleship our sense of need begins to atrophy. If right now you can think of someone *else* who really needs to hear this sermon, then you can probably understand exactly what he's saying.
- ◆ It was commonly assumed in Palestine that the second set of invitees were suffering in life due to some kind of serious sin. If you weren't blind, lame, crippled, or hungry -well then, you must be a pretty good person. Jesus parable kills that theory dead! The pretty good people were too stupid to say yes to the banquet. The blind, lame, crippled and poor knew when a good thing was offered them. They knew their need. They obviously said yes to the invite because they actually came!
- ◆ Listen. Jesus didn't *just* come to save the riffraff. Or the people without gated housing communities. Or the uneducated. Or the under-skilled. Jesus didn't *just* come to set free the sexually disoriented, or homes with troubled teens. Jesus came to save me!
And I am as dependent on the grace of the banquet as any other.

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The standard for the party in heaven is not “pretty good”. It’s perfection. It’s not “fairly decent lives” with a miscellaneous slip up; it’s complete and utter sinlessness. Guess what? We are all, everyone, in the needy boat!

◆ “We must never imagine that our own unaided efforts can be relied on to carry us even through the next twenty-four hours as decent people. If he does not support us, not one of us is safe from some gross sin. On the other hand, no possible degree of holiness or heroism which has ever been recorded of the greatest saints is beyond what He is determined to produce in everyone of us in the end. The job will not be completed in this life: but He means to get us as far as possible before death.” CS Lewis.

◆ So

◆ 1) we might want to get used to naming our own neediness. And we might do it by

◆ 2) offering regular grace to lowly, needy people, because we are one, and because there are going to be a lot of outcasts, and former low-lives in heaven. One way we can get used to that is by being like the Banquet Owner and inviting them over now.

◆ “Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 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.”” Luke 14:12-14, NIV.

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◆ **Conclusion:** When God invites you to something good, say “Yes”!
When God commands you in a holy way, it is an invitation to life. Say yes! When God wants to have a party for you, say Yes! Never overlook the goodness of God that he wants to lavish on you. Remember that you need his kindness. You and I need his generosity. Celebrate that God is giving, and welcoming, and sharing, and forgiving.