

May I Please Be Excused?

When Good Things Keep Us from the Best Thing

Introduction

The Text

¹⁵ When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” ¹⁶ But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ 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.’ ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’ ¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ ²⁰ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ ²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. 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.’ ²² And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ ²³ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’” (Luke 14:15–24)

Table Talk

- A. In our text for this morning, it’s important to recall that all of this is still connected to that scene that began back up in [v. 1](#).
1. It’s a sabbath day, and Jesus, being somewhat of a prominent figure at this point, is invited to the home of a ruler of the Pharisees to share in some sort of a Sabbath day meal. And many of this man’s friends—from the lawyers and the Pharisees—are gathered around the table with him there.
- B. And Jesus has been talking with them. He addresses the various people around the table bit by bit.
1. In [vv. 7-11](#) He is addressing those “[who were invited](#)” ([v. 7](#)) to this banquet. He saw them all vying for the places of honor nearest the host. I imagine it looked something like when we would play musical chairs as kids. There’s three of us and only two chairs left. I’m diving on that thing if I have to. And Jesus tells them: “Enough with this. Let someone else have the seat. You take the lowest. It is far better to later be honored and told to move to a higher seat than to later be shamed and told to move down to something lower.”
 2. Then in [vv. 12-14](#), Jesus shifts to address not those who have been invited, but that one who did the inviting, the “[ruler of the Pharisees](#)”, the host of this whole affair. And to this man He says in essence: “Well done throwing a party here, but, if I might say so, you’ve got it all backwards. You see, you’ve invited your friends, the people who you relate with, the people who will repay you in one way or another for your efforts. If you really want to throw a

good party, to host like my Father would host, then ‘¹³ . . . when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just’’ (vv. 13-14).

- C. You see, in each of these addresses, Jesus is dealing with people who are self-confident and self-assured and self-congratulating, really.
 - 1. In the first case, you have people who assume they, above all the others, are deserving of the place of honor. In the second case, you have a man who seems to have thought very well of himself for hosting such a respectable event.
 - a. In both cases, Jesus says: “I’m afraid you’ve missed it. You’ve missed the heart of God in all of this and you’re in danger of missing His kingdom altogether!”

“Blessed Is Everyone Who Will Eat Bread in the Kingdom of God!”

- A. And as we move now towards our text for this morning, we see that Jesus is yet once more needing to address the issue. Here now, though, He is speaking to one of the invitees in particular.
 - 1. As Jesus is issuing these warnings and, even, rebukes to all at the party, we read there in v. 15 that: “When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, ‘Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!’”
- B. Now, I don’t know about you, but when I read this, I think: Really? Has this man been listening to anything Jesus has actually been saying up to this point? Jesus has been warning them, rebuking them, expressing concern for them that they might not sit around the table and eat bread in the kingdom of God, and this man, still seems to think somehow that certainly he will be there, even if all the others might not. He doesn’t get it.
 - 1. It’s the sort of thing we are all prone to do—to think that when Jesus says a harsh word, surely He is not talking to us: “My coworker? No doubt. My spouse? Perhaps. But me? Surely not.”
- C. I suppose I open like this as a way of waking us up a bit. Might I encourage you to, even now, lay your heart open before God and invite Him to speak. Let Him surprise. Let Him put His finger on things you rather wish He wouldn’t. Give Him full security clearance to enter the inner chambers of your heart and life.
 - 1. Pause, before we really dive in here, and say something like David did to Him so many years ago: “²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psa 139:23–24).
 - a. We, like these men around the table with Jesus, are prone to self-assurance and self-congratulating. But such things prove worthless in the end. We want to know the truth about ourselves and to be brought into the right with God. That is what matters. And that is what this text is all about!

D. Jesus goes on in [vv. 15b-24](#) to tell a parable to help us see what it really means to eat bread in the kingdom of God, to partake in that banquet hosted by God and His Messiah. The whole story is directed to this man who spoke up, and it is, yet again, Jesus' way of warning him, while at the same time inviting him, and us, into something more.

1. I shall bring out three things for us to consider this morning: (1) A Surprising Threat; (2) A Fundamental Love; and (3) A Compelling Invitation.

(1) A Surprising Threat

The Surprising Threat of Good Things

A. I still remember when my previous pastor back in SLO first preached on this text. At the time it initiated a massive paradigm shift for me. It came down from heaven like a lightning bolt. And I wonder if it may do the same for some of you as well.

B. I suppose the thing that struck me most is what I'm referring to here as "A Surprising Threat." It's really this that I'm signaling towards in the sermon's subtitle: "When Good Things Keep Us from the Best Thing."

C. You see, here was the revelation for me: Good things can keep me from the kingdom of God!

1. We all for some reason have this very externalized sense of Christianity and what's good and bad. We see certain things as bad and other things as relatively harmless or neutral or good. And we think if just stay away from stuff on the bad list and keep moving towards things on the good list that God will be pleased with us and all will go with us.

a. But, in this text, that whole dichotomy that we develop is brought into question.

D. For here now those who are missing out on the kingdom of God are not those who are running off after sex, or swindling people in the marketplace, or overindulging themselves in booze and drugs. They're not Satan worshipers or new agers or angry atheists or whatever.

1. They are simply those who overvalue good things, those who are distracted by good things, those who are unduly attached to good things. And it's keeping them from the best thing: namely, God and His kingdom.

E. Look at the parable again would you. Presumably, the initial invitation for this banquet was sent out to the various invitees many days in advance. And then when finally the day had come and the food had been prepared, a second invitation goes out declaring to all who had earlier RSVP'd that everything is now ready to be enjoyed and everyone ought to make haste to come and partake.

1. But instead of making haste one by one the invitees begin to make excuses: "¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.'¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.'²⁰ And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come'" (vv. 18-20).

- a. I didn't see: "Sorry, the banquet sounds fun, but I'd rather sleep with my neighbor's wife" on the list.
 - b. I didn't see: "Sorry, but I'd rather get drunk with my homies" on the list.
 - c. I didn't see these people talking about how they'd rather cheat, lie, and steal, or whatever. Did you?
 - i. No! All of their responses sound so respectful and all are regarding things that are otherwise very good. One has to take care of his field. Another man has to care for his oxen. The third man has to go home and spend time with his new wife.
- F. One commentator notes that what we see here really boils down to matters of property, occupation, and family, which he says: "[comprise the essential commitments of life](#)" (PNTC). These are not bad things. These are important, even essential things. These are God-created, God-given things, God-blessed things.
- 1. Who, then, could fault them for their concern in these matters? Well, in a word: God does.
 - a. That's the point of this parable. That's why Jesus comes down in [v. 24](#) and says: "[I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.](#)" They're not going to make it. He's warning us about the surprising threat of good things.
- G. With regard to the invitation to this banquet, all three of these men initially accept but finally refuse.
- 1. When the time comes for the banquet, the invitees' true colors are shown. They are interested so long as it is convenient, so long as it fits in their schedule, so long as it doesn't demand they sacrifice or surrender other areas of their life. When it becomes obvious that the kingdom and its banquet will clash with their worldly pursuits and goals, they "kindly" decline. Their heart is not in it. They have other more pressing things to attend to.

From the External to the Heart

- A. Here we begin to understand that it is not merely the externals that make a thing good or bad but what we are doing with the thing in our hearts.
- 1. Is it wrong to have property or possessions or an occupation with responsibilities or a spouse and family? Certainly not. But if your heart attaches to these things in such a way that they become ultimate for you, and more of a priority in your life than even God Himself, well then look out.
- B. We might say it like this: A good thing becomes a bad thing when it becomes an ultimate thing. And you know it's become an ultimate thing when it's an unsundered thing—when you can't let it go, when you can't bear the thought of God changing the course of it, or getting His hands on it, when you don't trust Him with it.
- 1. You know you are at risk of excusing yourself from this banquet if you have unsundered things in your life, if you say to God like He said to the sea at creation: "[Thus far shall you](#)

come, and no farther . . .” (Job 38:11). Are you saying that to God? Do you have boundaries in your relationship with God? Do you have untouchable things, unsundered things?

C. I suppose what we are really asking in all of this is: Do you have another god? If God is your God then everything else is given to Him in love and trust. But if something else is your god, then everything else will be surrendered to it, even God—His word, His ways, and, ultimately . . . His banquet.

1. Do you trust, desire, crave, treasure, love anything more than God? Well then, listen to me closely, it is that very thing that she be your undoing. I guarantee it.

(2) A Fundamental Love

Love and Hate

A. This is now leading us towards the second thing I wanted to consider with you in more detail this morning: namely, A Fundamental Love.

1. Your fundamental love is your deepest attachment, your ultimate allegiance, your supreme treasure. It’s the thing you love more than anything else. You think life will be found there, joy, pleasure, identity, so you are willing to let all else go to get it and to keep it.

B. This is certainly what Jesus is getting us to consider with this parable and it’s what He will come at even more aggressively in the verses that immediately follow in [Luke 14:25-33](#).

1. We shall spend all of next week on this so I shall restrain myself here today, but I did at least want to read some of it to you now. It’s no mistake that Luke puts this discussion right on the heels of our text. In many ways it clarifies and sharpens all that I’ve been saying to this point: “²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ ‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. . . . ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple’” (vv. 25-27, 33).

a. Notice, Jesus is not calling us to hate doing drugs and sleeping around and stuff like this. He’s calling us to hate otherwise good things: father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, your own life.

i. Let it all take second place in love for God. If you don’t get this, then your Christianity won’t even get off the ground!

C. The point here, really, is that you can only be fundamentally allegiant to one thing. You can really only have one fundamental love. And that love will necessarily shape and influence everything else in your life—for good or for bad.

Illustrating the Logic

- A. Now, Jesus' words certainly sound harsh on the face of it, but His logic holds nonetheless. Let me give you a few illustrations so you can see what I mean. Let me show you how good things—when they become ultimate things, unsundered things, god things—become bad and destructive things.
- B. If work is your fundamental love, if your career is where you think you will find your life, your identity, your pleasure, your meaning, then everything else will be shaped by it and sacrificed to it.
1. You will sacrifice wife and kids as you spend more and more time in the office. You missed a birthday last week, an anniversary last year. Gone is the new norm.
 2. You will sacrifice your own health. You can't stop. You can't rest. Your stomach's often in knots. You live on caffeine. You never eat lunch.
 3. You will sacrifice the word and ways of God as you water down your faith, maybe even deny it, since it will cause you to lose points in the corporate world, maybe a little embarrassing. You certainly don't want to be one of those "Jesus Freaks"—how would you get a promotion then? You start cutting corners to pad the bottom line. You start competing and backbiting.
 - a. Your whole life gets shaped, misshaped, by your fundamental love for this false god we call work.
- C. In a similar vein to this, we just watched Free Solo this past week which is about that guy who free solo climbed El Capitan in Yosemite, Alex Honnold. And clearly, this guy's fundamental love we could say is mountain climbing. He's willing to sacrifice everything else to it. And there's this tragic scene where his girlfriend at the time, who's freaked out that he's putting his life in such danger all the time, asks him: "What if later on down the line I ask you to reconsider all of this and to maybe step back from some of the risk and things. Would you do it?" And he basically says: "No. You wouldn't want me to because then I'd resent you for taking away the thing that I love more than anything."
1. In other words, what he is really saying is: "I have one fundamental love that everything else in my life will be shaped by and sacrificed for if need be. And you are not it. If you threaten this love, I will be forced to cut you off. Mountain climbing is it for me. Get over it, or get out of my life." And you just see it as the realization sets in for her that she is clearly second place and may always be.
 - a. Mountain climbing, if that's actually your occupation, it can be a good thing in its place, but when it becomes an ultimate thing it becomes a disastrous thing.
- D. You can do the same with the idea of a significant other. You want a boyfriend or girlfriend or a spouse so badly that you're willing to do whatever it takes to get that.
1. You want to stay true to God for the most part, but after a few months when he's hounding you to have sex and threatening to bail, you just might break down and give him what he wants. "I don't want to lose him! What we have is so special." Is it? He better be one unbelievable dude if you are willing to give up Christ to keep him. Do you see that?

- E. Or what about kids. What a gift from God kids are. And yet they too can become these ultimate, unsundered things, where we start to wrap up all of our hopes and joys and life in them. We'd do anything for them.
1. If they're not liking it at church, well maybe we don't really need to go all that often.
 2. If they want to go to that sleepover that we know there's going to be some shady stuff going down, well we don't want to stick our neck out because we want to be the "cool" parent. We want them to like us.
 3. And then there's the fact that we want them to succeed at all costs. Didn't we just get a prime example of the lengths to which this thing can go with that whole college admission scandal thing? "I've got to get my kid into that big name school. Let's lie on this, cheat on that, throw all our money in, whatever we have to do!"

Shaped for Good

- A. You see how if these otherwise good things become ultimate things in your life, they misshape and end up making a mess of it all. Jesus knows what He's talking about when He says: "Listen, I've got to be first. I have to be before everything else, even your own life, then everything will come into place, everything will be shaped—not for bad, but for good!"
- B. Let me just show how this works out in that first illustration with work. If Christ is your fundamental love, if He is where you find your joy, identity, life, and treasure, well then your work falls into place.
1. You can work hard while you're there but then stop and rest and be with your family and know that the world will carry on without you.
 2. You can make space in your day for reading God's word and prayer.
 3. You can maintain your integrity and humility even in a cutthroat environment because you know He's providing for you and will protect you. You can share with them about Jesus knowing that even if they fire you it'll be okay.

(3) A Compelling Invitation

The Spread and Sprawl of the Gospel

- A. We could keep going, of course, but we need to move on now to consider finally this idea of A Compelling Invitation.
- B. In the parable Jesus tells, when the man's servant returns to tell him that all who originally RSVP'd for his banquet have now, at last, declined, the man is certainly angry at the disrespect he's been shown, but his purpose is not ultimately undone. He just broadens out the guest list.
1. And the picture is of God first coming to the leaders in Israel and finding them unwilling and unresponsive, distracted with worldly pursuits. So He moves beyond them to "the poor and crippled and blind and lame" (v. 21) (the same sorts of people we are told to invite to our dinner parties back up in v. 13).
 - a. The outcasts of society are coming in! These are the sorts of people who have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

- C. But, I wonder if you noticed, even after this, “still there is room” (v. 22). So the man sends his servant out again. Where in the first place he was sent to the “streets and lanes of the city” (v. 21), now he is sent “out to the highways and hedges” that expand even outside beyond the city (v. 23).
1. It is a stunning picture. It is an illustration and anticipation really of the mission of God in the church.
 - a. In the first place, God is reaching people within the boundaries of Israel and the Jews.
 - b. But soon, at the resurrection of Christ and the pouring out of the Spirit, He shall move beyond Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and the ends the earth. He expands from Jew to Gentile—from the “streets and lanes” within the city to the “highways and hedges” that lay beyond it. Such is the move of the gospel. The invitation goes out into all the world!

Inviting You!

- A. And I do suppose, then, that it would be appropriate for me to send it out once more then in this room. I dare not miss my chance to compel you to come to the feast if, in fact, you have not as of yet.
1. There is no more important matter you will have to decide on than whether or not you will attend this banquet. There are two sides that really come together as you weigh it out. A negative and a positive.
- B. On the negative side, we could talk about how you perceive your own need.
1. The people who are self-assured and self-congratulatory, they don't see a need for the Savior and His banquet. But the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, they get it. Do you?
 - a. How desperate do you think you are for grace? Are you dead in sin and justly condemned by God because of it? Are the fires of hell but an empty threat to you or are they an imminent reality? Do you see how you deserve the anger of God, His wrath abides on you, the judgment is yours, it is coming for you, you cannot overcome it, you will not be able to extinguish it? Is that where you are?
- C. Let me tell you, so long as it seems relatively unimportant and marginal, you will put off this decision. Your earthly business will seem more pressing. But when once you see your true state, all else will immediately seem second place, and even trivial. Who cares how your earthly business is faring if you have not settled things with God, with heaven and hell, with eternity?!
1. If I were to tell you that tomorrow the Bay area was going to be struck by a tremendous earthquake and that your house will surely be destroyed, do you think you'd go home from here and worry about the dust collecting on your mantle? No! You would try to get your escape plan in order first. The first order of business is making sure I live. If I don't have my life, who cares if I have a clean house?

- a. And yet we spend all our time on these things and put off the most important thing.
- D. That is the matter to consider on the negative side. Now what about the positive side? On the positive side, we could talk about how you perceive the provision of Christ and the pleasures of God that are made available to you in Him.
- 1. Do you see the One who was put forward as a propitiation for your sin? The One who drank the cup of wrath that had your name on it. What's He doing drinking from that? He's drinking it so that you don't have to. He gets the cup of wrath, you get the cup of blessing.
 - a. This is the point of the Lord's Supper that we are about to partake in. He lifts up the cup and says: ["This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" \(Luke 22:20\)](#). "I will die so that you can feast. So that you can be invited into this banquet, however poor, crippled, blind, lame, and bankrupt you may be physically and spiritually."
- E. Many years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah spoke about this end-time banquet that we all are here being invited to. Listen to how he describes it in [Isa 25:6-9](#): ["6 On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. 7 And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. 8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. 9 It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'"](#)
- 1. Doesn't that sound like a party you want to attend? Do you see it? Do you see the love of God for you in Christ? Do you see the feast that is open to you in Him?
- F. If you get your great need in your sin, and you get God's great provision for you in Jesus, then all that is left for you is to receive this invitation to come. The table's been spread. The invitations have gone out. Let's come to Him together now.