

Of Invitations and Dinner Parties

Introduction

The Text

¹ One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ² And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" ⁴ But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵ 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?" ⁶ And they could not reply to these things.

⁷ Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, ⁸ "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, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, "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. ¹³ But 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." (Luke 14:1–14)

A Trip to the Mailbox

- A. Imagine with me, you are walking out to get the mail. And as you open your mailbox and pull out the stack of envelopes, you have the typical junk mail and bills and things, but then there's yet one more that catches your eye. You quickly open it and find, to your joy, or perhaps to your dismay, an invitation, to a party or something like this.
- B. Now, freeze the frame, and consider something with me for a moment. Here you have this invitation, how do you decide if you shall accept it? If you will RSVP and attend? What sort of criterion do you have for this? We do it quite instinctively, but I wonder if we are really aware of what's going on in these moments.
 1. Certainly, we run through some of the more normal concerns: Do I have space in my schedule for this event? How does it fit with my other priorities and responsibilities? Will I need to get someone to watch my children? And so forth.
 2. But then, underneath these more superficial concerns, are perhaps the more sinister matters of the heart. Here is where we start to consider things like: Who's throwing the party? Do I even like them? Do they even like me, or are they just trying to get another present or something? What sort of food will they be serving? Does it suit me? Where's it being held? Will it be nice? What will we be doing? Will it be entertaining?

- a. In other words, though we might never put it so bluntly, we are running this invitation through the grid of self-concern and wondering: What's in this for me? If the pros outweigh the cons, well then perhaps I shall attend. But if not, well I think I'll pass.
- C. Now, reverse the image. Instead of receiving the invitation, let's say it's your turn to extend it. Let's say you are the one throwing the party. You are the one stuffing the envelopes and addressing them. This time the question is not "Will I attend?", but "Who will I invite?" Now, I won't belabor the point here, because I think our sets of concerns are quite similar to the above.
 - 1. We have the normal more superficial set that deals with how many can our house hold, what can our budget handle, and so forth.
 - 2. And then again there is that more sinister stuff underneath, where we start to ask things like: Who do I like? Who will be likely to reciprocate in turn? Who might make me look good if I get them to attend? I should definitely invite them. Who might be embarrassing to me if they do? I might just have to pass them on by. And so forth.
- D. As with the way we go about accepting invitations, so too now with the way we go about extending them: It's gross, it's blatantly unchristian, it's self-oriented to the core, and yet, if we're honest, we all do it.
 - 1. And Jesus is, in our text for this morning, putting His finger on this sort of thing and calling for a revolution, for a change.
- E. So we're going to look at three things here: (1) Accepting Invitations; (2) Extending Invitations; and (3) Learning the Way of Jesus.

(1) Accepting Invitations

From the Outsider and Insider

- A. There is one little detail back up in [v. 1](#) that captured my attention last week and I have not been able to shake loose from it. Let me slow things down a bit so you can see it now as well. Look at it again: "[One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees . . .](#)" ([v. 1a](#)). Well, there it is. But I wonder if you are seeing it with me? Here's what jumped out.
- B. Those of us familiar with the gospels and Jesus' ministry have grown accustomed over the years to the idea that He is regularly hanging out with and accepting the invitations of some of the more questionable characters in Jewish society there in that time. He is often found with the outcast and the poor and even the notorious sinner.
- C. We saw this already in Luke's gospel perhaps most pointedly with Levi the tax collector in [Luke 5:27-32](#). Do you remember it? Levi, when confronted with Jesus is so moved by Him that he throws a dinner party and invites Jesus to come over and share a meal with him and all of his tax collector friends. And Jesus doesn't even hesitate. Of course, He's going to accept that invitation.

1. So there He is eating and drinking with these morally questionable folks and standing outside are the Pharisees and scribes grumbling: “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” (v. 30). It’s an outrage. It’s evidence to them that this couldn’t be the Messiah. He must, in fact, be morally questionable Himself if He would keep company with people such as this.
 - a. But Jesus responds to them with these wondrous words: “³¹ Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (vv. 31–32). This is why He’s come! This is what His ministry is all about. Bringing healing to those outside, to those everyone else has written off. And we love this. We rejoice in this.
- D. But, here in our text, we see plainly that these are not the only sorts of people that Jesus has come to keep company with. The tax collectors and sinners, the outcast and broken, the blind and lame, even these cannot fully exhaust the love of God in Christ.
 1. No, it extends beyond them, to the Pharisee and the scribes and the religious. They are a different kind of sick, a different kind of sinner, a different kind of outcast, and Jesus has concern and compassion for them as well.
- E. It’s as we’ll see coming up in [Luke 15](#) with the parable of the Prodigal Son.
 1. Even in the way this parable has been titled historically, we can see that we have this tendency to focus on God’s love for the sinner and outcast. The Father comes running out to his wayward son, He throws a party, He celebrates.
 2. But the parable, it could be argued, is just as much about the elder brother as it is about the prodigal son. There’s another son, if you remember. And he stands not for the sinner and rebellious but for the self-righteous and religious. And when the Father throws the party for the younger prodigal, this elder son refuses to enter in. Why didn’t the Father ever do this for him? He’s been here, obedient all along. And guess what: The Father goes out after this arrogant and religious man too. “Get into the party. I want you in here with Me.”
- F. So, as I read [v. 1 of Luke 14](#), the words leapt off the page at me: “One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees . . .” This man had invited Jesus over to his house for a Sabbath meal . . . and Jesus went to dine with him!

With Malicious Intent

- A. But, even still, I don’t think we yet see just how incredible this move really is. We must remember who these Pharisees are and what opinions they’ve already expressed of Jesus and what they’re already secretly scheming to do to Him.
- B. As in [Luke 5](#), so everywhere Jesus has gone, these religious men have been at odds with Him.
 1. In [Luke 4](#), you may recall, they tried to run Him off a cliff.

2. In [Luke 6](#), after a sabbath healing similar to the one in our text this morning, we read that “they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus” (v. 11).
 3. Matthew’s account of this same story fills this out even further for us, saying: “But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him” (Matt 12:14).
- C. Now, with all this in the background, imagine: Jesus walks out of His home, opens up His mailbox, pulls out an invitation, from one of these sorts of men: “Sabbath meal, this Saturday, my house, dear Rabbi Jesus would you be our guest of honor?” And like a lamb walking to the slaughter, He says: “Okay, I’d love to . . . because I love you!”
- D. Jesus is not naïve, He knows what they are after. Everything in our text seems to indicate that, even during this meal, these men are trying to trap Jesus in some moral or theological dilemma.
1. At the end of [v. 1](#), in the English it says: “[T]hey were watching him carefully” (v. 1b). But the Greek participle under this can carry a more sinister nuance, meaning: “[watch\[ing\] maliciously, l\[ying\] in wait for](#)” (BDAG). That’s what’s happening.
 - a. And it’s lead many commentators to assume that this man with “[dropsy](#)” (or edema), who shows up there in [v. 2](#), was invited specifically by these men to test and trap Jesus into breaking the Sabbath regulations. They were baiting His compassion. They knew He couldn’t resist healing a hurting person.
- E. It’s sick, on so many different levels. And yet, here’s what I don’t want you to miss: Jesus moves towards these men anyways. He accepts their invitation, however malicious their intent.

Invitation-Accepting Savior . . . and Church?!

- A. And I just thought, my goodness! First, what a Savior, who would love His enemies like this! But, then, what kind of a sinner am I, because I simply don’t do this, at least not well.
1. Do you move towards those who are after your hurt with love and compassion or do you justify your burning of bridges and barricading of doors? If that invitation shows up in the mail, I’m throwing it away, I might even burn the thing just to spite them. “I know what you’re doing. You’re just trying to trap me.”
- B. Well, Jesus knows full well what they’re after, but He also knows that they, perhaps above all others, are hurting and in need of His help. So He RSVPs, He hangs that invite on His fridge, He marks the date on His calendar so He won’t forget, and when the day arrives . . . He goes . . . because He loves!
1. If we have an invitation-accepting Savior, are we an invitation-accepting church?

(2) Extending Invitations

Lawyers and Pharisees or Tax Collectors and Sinners?

- A. But now, as I did with the introduction, let’s flip this whole thing around and talk about the invitations we accept, but the invitations we extend.

1. For this, we come to vv. 12-14. Read them with me again now: “¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, “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. ¹³ But 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”
- B. Notice first that Jesus is specifically saying this to “the man who had invited him” (v. 12).
1. This takes on particular significance when we realize the sorts of people that made it on this man’s guest list. Did you notice it there back up in v. 3: “And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees.” That’s who’s around the table! That’s who made the guest list. This man invited other men just like him—of the same status and tribe and pedigree.
 - a. And do remember, the only reason Jesus and this man with edema made the guest list was for the sake of this trap they were trying to set.
 - i. In other words: The invitations this man extended were all about himself—they were shot through with self-regard.
- C. And Jesus is saying here: “Unacceptable!” Those who truly know the heart of God will find themselves moving in the exact opposite direction—as counterintuitive and crazy as it may at first seem.
- D. Is this not the sort of thing we see plainly in Jesus’ own life and ministry?
1. I mentioned earlier how Levi invited Jesus to a dinner party at his house. But I daresay Levi would have never had the courage to extend such an invitation if Jesus hadn’t first extended an invitation to Him: “After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, ‘Follow me’” (Luke 5:27).
 - a. It was a relationship that could offer very little to Jesus. Association with such a man would only tarnish His reputation among those in Israel. And yet Jesus invites him near.
 - i. That’s the sort of life we are being called into here. A life that looks like the love of God.

The Heart of the Matter

- A. Now, I should say that I do not think we are meant to take Jesus wooden-literally here—as in it would be inherently wrong to invite your friends or family over for dinner or to some party you are throwing. He is using these words to get at our hearts—to get us thinking about the motivations that underlie our inviting in the first place.
1. Why do you invite? Why do you want them around your table? Is it to get something from them or to give something to them? Is it to be served or to serve? Is it to get blessing from

them or to be a blessing to them? Is it to extract some benefit for yourself or to offer some benefit to them? That's what He's after.

- a. Have you gotten to a place where you are so full of God that you don't need from other people?
- B. Jesus does something similar with the use of hyperbole to get at the heart in, perhaps, the more well-known verse that follows soon after our text this morning in [Luke 14:26](#): "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."
1. We will see this more clearly in the weeks to come, but He is clearly not saying you must hate all these people, for that would violate the second great commandment. But He is saying that you must love God above all else. And the irony is unless you love God above all else, you will never be able to rightly love anyone else. The first greatest commandment flows into the second. If He is your first love, you will be ready to truly love and serve others.
- C. And so it is here in our text, I think. He is not saying that you are in sin if you invite friends and family to your dinner parties or whatever. But He is saying that your heart ought to be so full and free in God that it no longer matters to you who sits around your table and whether they pay you back, or add anything to your self-image, or not.
1. In fact, He is saying, I think, that when you really taste the grace of God for you in Jesus, there will be a sort of propulsion outward to the broken and the forgotten and the poor and the lame. You will want to make friend and family of those you before would've avoided and ignored. You will invite them in regardless of what they give or take from you.
- D. As we consider how we are doing with these things, I find Tim Chester's words helpful: "Meals can be a visual representation of our hearts. If our hearts are concerned for position, honor, status, or approval, then that will be reflected in our dining etiquette. Consider how your meals express your vision for life. Think about who's invited, how they're served, what you hope to achieve, and the layout of your home. Do they express the vision of the kingdom of God?" (A Meal with Jesus, p. 81).
1. Is your home open? Is there space around your table? If so, for who? What's the criteria? Is it driven with concern for the mission and values of God's kingdom or with concern for those of your own?

(3) Learning the Way of Jesus

Three Suggestions

- A. The question all of this has been leading to, and the question we must deal with in earnest now, is: How do we do this? How do we grow in the ways of Jesus here? Do we have the stamina to move towards our enemies, to press in to our own hurt, to invite in those who take much from us and offer little in return? What sustains such a life? Where does it come from? What ought we do to if we want to see more of this in our own lives?

1. Well, in our text Jesus offers one suggestion outright. And we shall take that as our starting place. But I'll offer up two more for our consideration soon after.

Suggestion #1: Remember Where We're Headed

- A. When we first hear of Jesus saying we will be blessed precisely because a person cannot repay us, do we not immediately think: "Om, Come again" We assume we can't have heard him right. The meaning runs so counter to the way we so naturally feel and behave.
 1. But we heard Him rightly. The only question is did we hear Him fully. For He goes on to explain why such a thing is, in fact, a blessing to us. It's not in light of what's been taken from us—as if Jesus were promoting some sort ascetic self-flogging here—but it concerns what shall be given to us, only not from our fellow man, but from God, and not immediately in the here and now, but in the age to come.
- B. This is the idea that Jesus explicitly points us to in the very last verse of our text there in v. 14: "¹³ But 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).
 1. If this life is all there is, then you better surround yourself with people who can add to you and cut off any who subtract. You have no time for that, no underlying structure that can sustain such relationships.
 2. But if we really believe that all things unfold under the watchful and compassionate eye of our loving Father, then we can know that He will right every wrong in the end, fill every emptiness, satisfy every longing, and so forth. That is His promise, and it sustains the giving and giving.
- C. This is precisely the sort of thing we see sustaining Christ in His ministry. You remember He invites His disciples to His own sort of dinner party in what's become known as the Last Supper. And He breaks bread with His disciples—these men who He knows will all abandon Him, and one around the table even will betray Him He says. And as they're gathered around the table, even though there are so many things He could be worried about with regard for Himself, instead He not only breaks bread with these guys and serves them, He gets down on His knees and washes their feet. He serves and serves these people who only take from Him.
 1. And how does He do it? Well, John, in his account of this story tells us: "² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (John 13:2-5).
 - a. Presumably, Jesus here washes even Judas' feet! He invites Judas to this dinner party and blesses him! How?! Because He knew He would be repaid in the resurrection, "that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had

come from God and was going back to God” (v. 3). Because He knew where He was headed, He could go low and move towards those who would only take from Him and even hurt Him.

- D. Are we living our lives in such a way that they can only be made sense of in light of the “[resurrection of the just](#)”? In other words, are we living so recklessly in love for Jesus and others—where we’re giving our stuff away, and pressing in to our own hurt, and writing checks to meet needs, and going low to wash feet, and rearranging our priorities for the sake of the gospel, and so forth—that people looking in would say: “The only way that makes sense is if eternity and heaven is real. Because these people clearly aren’t pursuing their best life now. They’re living like their best life is yet to come. They’re pouring themselves out to death because they believe that God will raise them to everlasting life in Jesus.”

1. Do we remember where we’re headed?

Suggestion #2: Remember Where We’ve Come from

- A. What will move us outward toward enemy and outcast, the poor, the needy, is recognizing that Jesus has done this very thing for us. We were the enemy. We were the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. And yet Jesus still wants to sit with us around the table.
- B. I couldn’t help but think here of that text in Romans where Paul exhorts the saints there: “[\[W\]elcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” \(Rom 15:7\)](#). I wonder if you see the vast expanse of this command. We are not talking about some stingy little welcome here, where you invite and open your doors to that small group of people you like or get along with or who have mutual interests.
1. No! God welcomed us, though we were His enemies, and He did it by laying His own life down on our behalf. And Paul is saying: “Take that sort of welcome, and extend it to others!” That’s the vast expanse I am talking about.
 - a. Who is excluded from welcome in your home and in your heart? No one! Because no one is excluded from welcome in the kingdom of God if they would come by way of the blood of Christ.
- C. But don’t you see, the only way Paul’s exhortation makes sense here is if we remember where we’ve come from—that we were the enemy and the broken and the lame and He welcomed us in such a stunning manner.
1. If you don’t realize the extent to which Jesus went to move towards you, you will not be moved to go very far towards others either. But if you see it, well, it changes everything!

Suggestion #3: Remember Where Jesus Still Is

- A. What I mean by this third suggestion is that Jesus, by way of His Spirit, is still sitting around these sorts of tables today—with enemies and broken people. That’s where we will find Him.

1. If we close the door on these sorts of people, on these kinds of relationships, what we may not realize is that we also close the door to deeper fellowship with Jesus. We miss it. He is there in the hardship, in the self-sacrificing love.
 - a. These are the tables He still sits around. These are the tracks He still runs on. If we won't follow Him here, then we shouldn't be surprised when we miss Him, when we feel like He is distant, when we are discontent and dissatisfied with life. We won't go with Him where He is.
- B. That's the surprise in all of this. When you open the door to your enemy and those who take from you, you're opening not just to them but Christ. Pull out a seat, not just for them but for Him. He is there. And though people may take and take from you, you will feast in those moments on Him.
 1. There is a fellowship with Christ you can experience in those moments of self-sacrificial love that you just can't experience any other way.
- C. So let me close by asking you to think now of one person. Just one. Maybe it's an enemy that you've been nursing bitterness against. Maybe it's a needy person that you've been trying to avoid because they just feel like a burden, and ask God to help you move towards them in love.
 1. Maybe it means accepting an invitation, maybe it means extending one. But whatever it means, I promise you: Jesus is already there, and He's waiting.