

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001

HOW TO HAVE DINNER WITH JESUS

Luke 14:15-24

By

Steven J. Cole

July 25, 1999

© Steven J. Cole, 1999

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture
Quotations are from the New American
Standard Bible, © The Lockman Foundation

July 25, 1999
Luke Lesson 69

How to Have Dinner With Jesus Luke 14:15-24

Have you ever had dinner with a famous person? If so, you probably paid dearly for the privilege (\$1,000 a plate to have dinner with the President) or you knew someone who got you in the door. Or, perhaps you were privileged to know the famous person yourself. But in any case, dining with a famous person is not something for the masses. Only a few get that privilege.

Today I want to tell you how you all can have dinner with Jesus. You would think that everyone would jump at that opportunity, but as we will see, many turn down the invitation. When I say, "have dinner with Jesus," I am using a metaphor of the joys and delights of being with Him in His kingdom, dining at the Messianic banquet that He provides throughout all eternity. The Book of Revelation refers to it as the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9) and makes it clear that you will want to be there. Jesus Himself referred to it in Luke 13:28-29, where He said that people from all corners of the earth will dine with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom, but many who assumed that they would be included will be cast out. I want to show you how you can be sure that there will be a place at the table with your name on it.

The unstated question that lies behind our text is, "What sort of person will be in the kingdom of God?" The Jewish leaders assumed, "People just like us will be in the kingdom, of course: good Jews who keep the Law of Moses, who follow the traditions of the elders, who keep themselves from ceremonial defilement." If you had asked them, "What sort of people will be excluded from the kingdom?" they would have responded, "Gentile dogs, the immoral, the greedy, dishonest tax collectors—those kinds of scum will not be in the kingdom." But Jesus yanks the rug out from under their self-righteous assumptions by telling a parable.

To catch the full flavor of this parable, you must understand the setting. Jesus was eating in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath. They were watching Jesus carefully to catch Him in some violation of their Sabbath laws (14:1). They

believed that to heal someone was work and therefore not permitted on the Sabbath. They probably planted this man with dropsy right in front of Jesus to trap Him. Jesus was not your typical, "polite" dinner guest who went out of His way not to offend anyone. So, He defied the Pharisees by healing the man (14:1-7).

Next, Jesus watched as these proud men picked out the places of honor for themselves at the table. Then He delivered a pointed message about humility, which must have humiliated the guests (14:7-11). Finally, as if the tension were not great enough already, the Lord told the host that he had invited the wrong guests! He said, "You should have invited the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind instead of all these friends, relatives, and rich neighbors who can return the favor" (14:12-14)! At this point you could have sliced the atmosphere with a knife!

At the end of Jesus' rebuke (14:14), He mentions the resurrection of the righteous. To break the tension and to try to sound spiritual, one of the guests exclaims, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" (14:15). He probably thought that both Jesus and all the guests could agree with this pious comment. Everyone around the table probably nodded in agreement and said to one another, "Amen! It will be wonderful when we're all there, won't it!" Perhaps there was some nervous laughter.

But Jesus wasn't one to pass up opportunities! He was quick and ready to correct wrong ideas in the spiritual realm. And so He told this parable about the great dinner to correct this man, who wrongly was assuming that he and all of his cronies would be present at that banquet due to the fact that they were Jews, and not just any Jews, but Pharisees. They saw themselves a few notches above the common Jewish people, and not even in the same league with pagan Gentiles. Jesus shows them that many of them would not be in the kingdom because they were refusing the Lord's invitation. To their great surprise, many whom they assumed would not be there would in fact be there because they responded to the invitation. The last would be first and the first last (13:30). The answer to the question, "Who will be at God's banquet in the kingdom?" is, those who respond personally to the invitation.

To have dinner with Jesus in His kingdom, you must respond personally to His invitation.

We will look first at the nature of God's invitation and then at the responses to His invitation.

1. The nature of God's invitation: It is broad, free, and ample.

- A. God's invitation is a broad invitation.

Verse 16 states, "He invited many." In the imagery of the parable, the many who first were invited refers to the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day. These men had the privilege of studying the Scriptures. They had read Moses; they knew what the Prophets predicted concerning the Messiah. As Paul puts it in Rom. 3:2, they had the advantage of being entrusted with the oracles of God. When the dinner hour came, God sent His messenger, John the Baptist, to say, "Everything is ready now." But the Jewish leaders made excuses and did not come.

So the Lord expanded the invitation to the "outcasts" of Israel. The Pharisees despised these people as "born entirely in sin" (John 9:34). Many of the prostitutes, tax collectors and other notorious sinners responded to God's invitation and were following Jesus. This proud Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner would never have thought of extending his invitation to these outcasts (14:13), but Jesus is telling him that God's invitation includes those whom the proud Pharisees had rejected.

But there was still room at the master's table (14:22). And so the invitation goes still wider, outside the "city limits" of Judaism, to the Gentiles who are out in the highways and along the hedges (14:23). At His great banquet the Lord will have a great multitude which no one can count from every nation and tribe and people and tongue (Rev. 7:9). God's invitation is a broad invitation! It includes every person from every race, no matter whether his or her background is very religious or completely pagan.

We commit a great error when we make the church an exclusive club for the religiously inclined. Have you ever looked at someone and thought, "That person would not be interested in the gospel because he lives a very ungodly life"? Or, you see someone who looks like he belongs to a motorcycle gang and you think, "That person doesn't look like a good candidate for a Christian!" Or perhaps we see a person whose attire identifies her as a Hindu

or a Muslim. We think, "She has her own religion and way of life. The gospel is not for her." Whenever we think like that (and we all have), we're limiting God's broad invitation of the gospel. His gospel will transform every sinner from every background who will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. To every person on this planet the Lord says, "Come, for everything is ready now."

B. God's invitation is a free invitation.

The servant was not selling tickets for admission. It was not a \$1,000 a plate fundraiser for the kingdom. It wasn't a benefit supper where you kick in whatever you feel led. It wasn't even a kingdom potluck, where you bring a main dish and salad or dessert. The master says, "Come, for everything is ready now." All you need to bring is yourself and an appetite. It is totally free for you, because the host picked up the tab. You eat at His expense.

This is one of the most beautiful things about God's gospel invitation, and yet it is one of the most difficult things for people to accept because it means that they cannot take any credit for themselves. If they can offer something in exchange for the meal, they feel better about it, but to come and eat freely is an affront to their dignity and pride. But there is only one way that God offers His salvation: He pays for it all and all you can do is come and receive it freely. Any other way would bring glory to man. God's way brings all the glory to Him and His grace.

At Christmas one year a pastor hoped to illustrate God's free salvation. He pointed to a beautiful Christmas poinsettia setting on the platform, wrapped in red cellophane with a ribbon, and said, "Whoever wants this gorgeous flower may have it. All you have to do is take it." He waited, but no one came forward to get it. Finally, a mother timidly raised her hand and said, "I'll take it."

"Great, it's yours," said the pastor. But then the woman nudged her son and said, "Go get it for me." The pastor said, "No, whoever wants this plant must come and get it personally. You can't send a substitute." The woman shook her head, unwilling to risk embarrassment. She wouldn't go get it for herself.

The pastor waited, pointing to this beautiful plant that would make a fine decoration in any home. It was free for the taking, but

no one was coming up to get it. Someone snickered, "What's the catch?" "No catch," said the pastor. "It's totally free."

A college student asked, "Is it glued to the platform?" Everyone laughed. "No," the pastor said, "it's not glued to the platform. It's just setting there, free for the taking."

A teenage girl asked, "Can I take it after the service?" The pastor was tempted to give in, but he thought of the verse, "Today is the day of salvation," and shook his head: "You must come and get it now."

He was just beginning to wish that he had never started the whole thing when a woman he had never seen before stood up in the back. Quickly, as if she were afraid that she would change her mind, she strode to the front and picked up the plant. "I'll take it," she said. After she had gone back to her seat, the pastor launched into his message on Romans 6:23, that the *gift* of God is eternal life, free to all who will receive it.

After the service, when most of the people had gone home, the woman who had claimed the poinsettia came up to the platform where the pastor was picking up his Bible to leave. "Here!" She held out her hand. "This flower is too pretty to just take home for free. I couldn't do that with a clear conscience." The pastor looked down at the crumpled paper the woman had stuffed into his hand. It was a ten dollar bill. (Adapted from "Leadership," Spring, 1990, p. 125.)

Friends, you can't stuff the ten dollar bill of your good works into God's hand to pay for His salvation banquet. He provides it all, totally free to you, but at great expense to Himself. Human nature is so inclined to boast in good works that when you tell people the good news about Jesus, you must take pains to make it clear that God's invitation is *free* and *only free*.

C. God's invitation is an ample invitation.

He says, "Come, for everything is ready now." *Everything!* All you can eat and more besides! He makes all the necessary provisions beforehand and puts them on the table. When you walk in the door, you see a table loaded with appetizers. Help yourself! There is a full salad bar, along with soup. Go back as often as you wish. There are several selections for the main dish. Would you

like prime rib or lobster? And there is pie a la mode to top it all off! It is the most fabulous feast you can imagine, all freely provided by the host for everyone who will come and eat.

What a great picture of the abundant salvation God so freely provides for sinners! When you come to His banquet table in Christ, He doesn't just give you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He gives you the works! He is a fountain of living water to wash away all of your sins. He gives you the indwelling Holy Spirit who gives you peace to replace your anxiety, joy to replace your depression, power to overcome your sins and wisdom to make the right decisions. You have fellowship every day with the gracious Savior and the promise of eternity with Him in heaven. The apostle Peter describes it like this: "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2 Pet. 1:3). Long before we ever thought of God, He thought of us and made ample provision for our salvation. His abundant provision means that you are welcome to come to His table and eat until you are satisfied.

With that kind of offer, you may wonder, "How can anyone refuse?" But Jesus' parable clearly warns that some do refuse God's broad, free, and ample invitation.

2. The responses to God's invitation: Some refuse with excuses, while others personally accept it.

To ignore or postpone responding is to refuse the invitation, because the table is ready now. At some point soon, every seat will be full and the door will be shut. Those who procrastinate may miss the opportunity. Let's look first at those who refuse:

A. Some refuse God's invitation with excuses.

Each of those who are first on the invitation list responds with an excuse for why he cannot come. The first man says that he cannot come because he has bought a piece of land and he must go out and look at it. This is a flimsy excuse! Who would buy a piece of land sight unseen? Besides, why does he need to go to look at it at the same time as the dinner? If he wanted to, he could plan to do both. Clearly, he did not want to come to the dinner. He represents the person who is tied up with his possessions or invest-

ments so that he has no time for God. He forgets that this very night his soul may be required of him, and then who will own what he has worked so hard to accumulate?

The second man says that he cannot come because he has bought five yoke of oxen and he is going to try them out. Again, it was a flimsy excuse. No one would buy oxen without first trying them out. Like the first man, this man was caught up with his possessions and his work. He can't even take time off to have dinner with Jesus. He is living for the things of this world, but he is neglecting his soul.

The third man says that he cannot come because he has married a wife. Perhaps he is saying that he couldn't bear to be apart from his beloved for even a few hours. Maybe his wife didn't want him to go anywhere without her. At any rate, he was making an idol of his wife, putting her above his need for God. As Jesus goes on to say, "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" (14:26).

The interesting thing is that none of these excuses was sinful, in and of itself. There is nothing wrong with buying land or animals (or machinery) to work the land. The Bible commends enterprise and hard work. There is nothing wrong with marriage and the love of family. The Bible commands us to love our families. But the point is, things that are legitimate in their rightful place can be wrong if they hinder us from getting right with God. It is not just gross, flagrant sins that keep people out of God's kingdom. Good things wrongly emphasized will do the trick just as well. If a person gets wrongfully caught up with these otherwise good things, he can invent all sorts of excuses for not accepting the Lord's invitation to His dinner.

There may be someone here who is so caught up with your possessions or your leisure pursuits or your career that you are neglecting your soul. Perhaps you are single and longing for a mate and you would consider marrying even a non-Christian, because you think he or she would bring you fulfillment and happiness. You would put momentary pleasure above the eternal pleasure of dinner with Jesus. You're saying, "Lord, I can't come to Your dinner because I have married a wife."

To allow anything to cause you to refuse or put off accepting God's offer of salvation is a foolish decision. The host gets angry at the refusal, because it was a rude personal insult to turn down such a bountiful invitation. God offered His own Son as the sacrifice for sinners to be reconciled to Him. As the author of Hebrews asks, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:3). As the host here declares, "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner" (14:24). The refusal of the first group led the host to send out the invitation to others who accepted his offer.

B. Others respond personally to God's offer in spite of potential excuses.

The striking thing is that everyone who accepted the invitation could have come up with seemingly legitimate excuses for not coming. The poor man could say, "I don't have anything decent to wear to such a feast." The crippled man could say, "I can't get anyone to carry me there." The blind could say, "I can't see to find my way." The lame could say, "It hurts me too much to walk on my bad leg." Those along the highways and hedges, the street people, could say, "I haven't had a bath in days and my clothes are dirty and ragged. I can't come." But they all accepted the offer because the servant convinced them that they were welcome and they clearly knew their own need; they were hungry. They believed the offer and they responded personally to it in spite of the potential excuses they each could have come up with.

The servant didn't run a background check on all these people before he invited them to the feast. Their background didn't matter. He didn't find out their nationality. He didn't ask about their religious background or whether they even had one. He didn't get a promise that they would behave and show proper manners at the dinner table. The invitation was not based on anything in the recipients; it was based totally on the goodness and bounty of the host. All that these people had to do was recognize their hunger, believe that the offer was true, and say, "Yes, I'll come." When they came, they found that the feast was far better than they had ever expected or imagined.

Conclusion

One of the main hindrances that will keep you from having dinner with Jesus is that you are so full of your own goodness that you won't acknowledge your need for His banquet. Your pride will make you say, "I'll bring the salad and dessert." But the Lord says, "No, I provide it all. You just come."

Imagine a multimillionaire who sends his servant out in his limousine to the poorest section of town. The servant tells the chauffeur to stop by a bum in ragged clothes. He gets out and asks, "Would you like to come to a feast at my master's mansion? We'll take you. Please, get in."

The guy on the street eyes the servant warily and asks, "What's the catch?"

"There's no catch; my master is a kind and generous man. He has prepared a meal like you wouldn't believe. Won't you come?"

"I haven't had a bath in days. I haven't washed my clothes in weeks, and these rags are all I own. I would feel out of place at a mansion."

"There will be many others there just like you. The food is on the table and the dinner is about to begin. Just come as you are."

It sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? It is good, but it's also true, according to Jesus. The main catch is, you have to see and admit that you are that needy bum. Spiritually, you have nothing to commend yourself to God. Salvation is not based on anything in you. In fact, it is offered freely *in spite of* you. It is all of God's free grace, not at all of your works, lest anyone should boast.

Jesus is saying to each person, no matter how great your sins, "Come, for I have prepared *everything* for you to be saved from God's judgment and to dine with Me for all eternity." Will you say, "Yes, Lord. I'll come!"

Discussion Questions

1. Jesus seemed to ignore “politeness” at times to jar people out of their spiritual complacency. Should we do likewise? How?
2. If no one can come to Christ without the Father’s drawing him (John 6:44) should we appeal to lost people to come? Why?
3. How can we know if a person’s excuse for not receiving Christ is genuine or a smokescreen?
4. Jesus says, “Compel them to come in.” To what extent can we use persuasiveness or “sales techniques” in evangelism?

Copyright, Steven J. Cole, 1999, All Rights Reserved.