

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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**Broadcast Date:** 11 August 2002

**No.** T0226

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## Four New Testament Suppers: The Great Supper - Luke 14

When most of us, certainly children, receive an invitation to a party, we immediately think, "Who else will be going? When is it all going to happen? Where will it take place? How shall I get there?" The boys will probably be thinking, "What will we get to eat?" Perhaps the girls will be thinking, "What shall I wear?"

Today's message is based upon a parable the Lord Jesus spoke. It is typical of many that Jesus used to teach important lessons. The Lord Jesus, as always, caught the attention of His audience by referring to the sort of everyday occurrence they were all familiar with, in this case a supper, or, as we might say, a feast or a party.

Before we examine something of the detail, we shall have to bear certain things in mind. In general, parables were given by the Lord Jesus to teach major principles. It was not His intention that we should put **every** detail of His parables under the microscope. Acceptance of that will preserve us from making the mistake of thinking that we are intended to look for an application for **every** detail of **every** parable left on record. We are to look primarily for broad principles to follow.

A second, equally vital, point is this. When we first start studying parables we probably gain the impression that they were given to illustrate certain truths in such a way as to make them more easy to understand. As we study them more deeply we come to the conclusion that this is, in fact, the opposite of the truth. Parables were not given to make things easier to understand. They were given in such a way as to make the truth more obscure to the uninitiated, but very plain to those who were let into the secret; those whose eyes were anointed to see. You will remember that the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." Luke 8:10.

Parables, then, were often given by the Lord to mixed audiences, including both His own disciples and a multitude of other people who were **not** His disciples. The multitude rarely understood what He said. The same was true of His disciples themselves, at first, until the Lord Jesus interpreted them afterwards, privately. As we read in Mark 4:10, "When He was **alone**, they that were about Him with the twelve asked of Him the parable." All Christians now have the power to understand all parables. We have the many explanations of the Lord Jesus. We have the power of the Holy Spirit, of Whom the Lord Jesus Himself said, "He will guide you into all truth", John 16:13. If we grasp these overriding principles, we shall be in a far better position to understand the many parables recorded in the Bible as a whole, and the New Testament Gospels in particular.

The story of The Great Supper is given in Luke 14:16-24, but it will make more sense if we look first of all at the way the parable is introduced. Verses 1 to 6 tell us about the Lord healing on the Sabbath, the God-given day of rest. The lesson there is that there could be no **rest** for **the Lord** as long as there was need to be met. In John 9:4 we read His own comment, "I must **work** the **works** of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can **work**." And, again, in John 5:17, "My Father **worketh** hitherto, and I **work**". Verses 7 to 11 of our chapter impress upon us the appropriate attitude in any who are invited to a function like a feast, that is, lowliness, a sense of gratitude to the host, and an appreciation of one's own unworthiness to be present. Verses 12 onwards give us the appropriate attitude in a host, towards those who are to be invited. In round terms, the Lord said, "You can invite your special friends, and people of influence and high social station, any time you like. If you have any idea of what God is like, you will act like Him when you arrange a feast. This is how to do it. This is what you should do. Forget about your high and mighty friends, and your contacts in high places. Give no invitation to any who can say to you, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Invite those who are in no position to return the invitation." Quoting the Lord's own words, "When you arrange a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind", verses 13 and 21 of our chapter. In other words, invite those who cannot return the favour.

The poor couldn't pay for the privilege of being there. The maimed couldn't work to qualify to be there. The lame hadn't the physical ability to get themselves there. The blind needed guidance every step of the way. What a comprehensive picture this is of man in his spiritual need, away from God, at a distance from God because of his own activities, his own sins, and completely incapable of getting back to God as a result of anything he himself can do. As far back as Isaiah 59:1 and 2 we read, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His

face from you, that He will not hear.” What we cannot do for ourselves, God in His grace, must do for us. That, really, is the lesson of The Great Supper.

By the way, this is the first of a series of meditations on major suppers in the Bible. Today we are looking at The Great Supper, a Supper of Grace; this will be followed by the Supper at Bethany, a Supper of Love; then the Lord’s Supper, a Supper of Remembrance; finally, we shall have the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, The Supper of Glory, and The Supper of the Great God, The Supper of Judgment. Notice, also, that all these occasions are referred to as “suppers”. Generally speaking, supper is the last meal of the day, towards the end of the day. All the major suppers of the Bible refer to things that will happen towards the end of the history of God’s dealings with men, and yet He had all of them in mind from the outset, from the very beginning.

Summing up so far, mankind has a deep spiritual need, a need for the forgiveness of sins, a need for salvation, a need which arises because of his own sins. Only God can meet that need. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, came into the world to meet that need. He did so by dying at Calvary, as the scripture says. “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and He was buried and rose again the third day according to the scriptures”, 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4. Again, “By Him, all that believe are justified from all things,” Acts 13:39. God, in His bountiful grace, has provided for man what man could never provide for himself, the forgiveness of sins. But that is not all. God has not only provided us with a perfect Saviour to secure for us the forgiveness of sins. He has prepared a Supper for us to enjoy – a Great Supper - a Spiritual Supper. A Supper which will be deeper, fuller, sweeter, in the presence of the Lord in eternity, in heaven, but which we can begin to enjoy on earth while we wait for the coming of the Lord. The grand thing is that we do not need to put off enjoying the good things which God has provided. We can enjoy them now. In the parable, we read in verses 16 and 17, “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent His servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are **now** ready.”

Here we have a situation where you would think that people would be queuing up for admission tickets. An influential local benefactor, at his own expense, arranges a banquet for all who are willing to come. But, believe it or not, no one was interested. “They all, with one consent, began to make excuse.” That won’t always be possible. We read in Romans 1:20, “(Men) are without excuse”. Then, again, Romans 2:19 says, “Every mouth will be stopped, and all the world be found guilty before God.” 14:12 of the same book tells us, “every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Verses 18 to 20 of our chapter tell us the sort of excuses various men gave. That is, the sort of things they allowed to prevent them from enjoying the good things of the feast they refused to attend. The first one said, “I have bought some land, and I have to go and check it over.” The second said, “I have bought some beasts for my farm and I must go and test them.” The third said, “I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come.”

Before we dismiss these excuses out of hand, as being ridiculous, let us look at them one at a time. Take the first one. “I have bought some land, and I have to go and check it over.” Now, I have the greatest respect for the nation of Israel. God has marked them out to rule the world. God says so, in the Bible. One day they will be used of God to administer God’s kingdom on earth for a thousand years. God says so, in the Bible. I firmly believe that God has equipped them to do so. God has given some of the sharpest minds in the world, the shrewdest business sense, to Jews, as we speak of them. They are, of course, responsible to God for how they use those assets. It is therefore somewhat of a surprise to me to hear of a Jew even thinking of buying a piece of land without first of all giving it the closest examination and giving the title deeds the most intense scrutiny. However, it must have happened. The Lord said so.

On the surface, it seems to be a most trivial pretext to use as an excuse to decline such an attractive invitation. Nevertheless, many people do use similar excuses to avoid hearing God’s invitation to come to Christ and receive all the spiritual good things God has prepared for all those who respond to His wonderful love. Do it yourself jobs around the house, maintenance and decoration, keeping the house and garden tidy, all necessary tasks, yet how paltry as an excuse compared with the joy of responding to the glorious gospel of Christ. Indeed, “What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul,” Mark 8:36. It is right to prepare properly for one’s work and career, and do one’s job with a sense of vocation, but it cannot be right to use that as an excuse to ignore one’s spiritual life and development.

The second excuse is no better, really. “I have bought five yoke of oxen and I must prove them.” Fancy that! Laying out good money, without having tested them to prove them to be suitable for the job they were bought to do! Men do strange things, of course. I remember hearing of a man who bought a horse for work on his farm. When he got to the point of putting the horse to work, he was astounded when it reared up on its hind legs and went through the motions of boxing its new master. Further enquiry determined that the horse had been trained for work in a circus, not on a farm. It is no light thing to ensure that any merchandise is suitable for the purpose for which it is bought. Nevertheless, in the overall scope of things, an effective farmer could be expected to regulate his business affairs so that he could make time for anything he really considered to be important or worthwhile. Likewise, how sad it is when necessary responsibilities of life, business affairs and the like, are used as an excuse for refusing God’s offer of mercy

in the gospel. "Come, for all things are now ready", is still the cry. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest", still cries the Lord Jesus to every weary soul. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light," Matthew 11:28-29.

The third excuse involved the important matter of relationships. "I have married a wife and **therefore** I cannot come." He seems almost to take it for granted. It's as if the man was saying, "I have married a wife and am not allowed to come." Oh, dear! Was his new wife such a bully? One would have thought that he would have sorted out that sort of thing before they got married. Or was it rather that he was just using that as an excuse? Perhaps he should have said, "Thank you very much, but I'm not really interested." In any case, there is no doubt that our natural relationships can have a tremendous effect on our spiritual lives.

If any listener is unmarried, let me give you a piece of advice I have often passed on to keen, young, unmarried Christians. It is this. If you really are a committed Christian, if you really do value your spiritual life, if you really do desire to make spiritual progress, do your utmost to marry someone more spiritual than yourself. There is no doubt about it. There is a greater tendency for a levelling down to occur than a levelling up. Think of one person standing on the ground, and another person standing on a table resting on the same piece of ground. It is much easier, and much more likely, for the person at the lower level, on the ground, to pull the other down from the higher level, off the table, down to ground level, than vice versa. It is certainly true in spiritual things. So do be very, very careful in your choice of special friends. In particular, think very hard, and pray long, before committing yourself to a husband or wife. It might sound selfish, but if you really have your own spiritual welfare at heart, do your very utmost to marry someone you recognise to be more spiritually minded than yourself, someone who can be a spiritual help to you. You will never regret it.

In verse 21, the instruction is given, "Go out quickly." What a lovely picture this is! God is so anxious to bless us. He so wants us to respond to His gospel invitation. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life", John 3:16. God is far more anxious for us to respond to His loving invitation than we ever are to do so. This parable is right on the mark. It gives us a clear, comprehensive picture of our spiritual poverty, our deep spiritual need, the effect and result of our sinful nature and practice. In the goodness of God, He invites us to come to Him through Christ, to enjoy every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus.

The host's final comment is double-barrelled, and most significant. "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." Take the negative side first. None who finally refused the invitation would be present at the Supper. The message for us is equally clear. No one who refuses to come to Christ will share in The Great Supper that God has prepared for those who are His. But, on the positive side, the will of God to bring in untold blessing will not be thwarted. He says, "My house will be filled." The Great Supper will be held. It will be an occasion of great joy. Every allocated seat will be filled. Until the final seat is taken, the opportunity is still there.

*God's love in Christ we see -  
 "Yet there is room!"  
 Greater it could not be -  
 "Yet there is room!"  
 His only Son He gave,  
 He's righteous now to save  
 All who on Him believe:  
 "Yet there is room!"*

*"All things are ready: come!"  
 "Yet there is room!"  
 Christ everything hath done:  
 "Yet there is room!"  
 The work is now complete,  
 "Before the mercy seat"  
 A Saviour you will meet:  
 "Yet there is room!"*

*God's house is filling fast,  
"Yet there is room!"  
Some guest will be the last,  
"Yet there is room!"  
Yes! soon salvation's day  
To you will pass away,  
Then grace no more will say -  
"Yet there is room!"*

Let each one of us make sure that we have responded to God's invitation. Let us confess our unworthiness to be in the presence of God. Let us recognise that only the goodness of God makes it possible for us to return to Him. Only the work of Christ upon the cross discharges the debt to God we have incurred because of our sins. Let us turn in repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, can we be assured that our seat has been secured at The Great Supper.

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