

July 29
Lesson 9 (NIV)

PARABLE OF THE GREAT DINNER

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 14:25-33

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 14:15-24

LUKE 14:15-24

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

¹⁸ “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

¹⁹ “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

²⁰ “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

²¹ “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

²² “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

²³ “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”



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KEY VERSE

*Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.—
Luke 14:21*

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Retell Jesus’ parable of the great dinner.
2. Identify the two general categories of people who were invited to the dinner.
3. List excuses given today for refusing the invitation of Jesus, and present a response to each.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Jesus’ Eating Habits
- B. Lesson Background

I. The Place (LUKE 14:15)

- A. Sitting with Jesus (v. 15a)
- B. Speaking to Jesus (v. 15b)

II. The Parable (LUKE 14:16-24)

A. Invitation Extended (vv. 16, 17)

B. Invitation Rejected (vv. 18-20)

Making Excuses

C. Invitation Expanded (vv. 21-24)

Unexpected Invitations

Conclusion

A. Keeping First Things First

B. Knowing the Times

C. Prayer

D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Jesus' Eating Habits

Some time ago a study was undertaken to address the question, "What would Jesus eat?" The study investigated common foods of Jesus' day in order to determine what was most likely a regular part of his diet.

The Gospels note that Jesus shared a typical Passover meal with his disciples (Luke 22:15) and ate fish after his resurrection (24:41-43). They also record different times when Jesus ate in homes or ate with his disciples, but no specific menu is mentioned on those occasions.

A more important issue involving Jesus' eating habits, according to the Gospels, is *whom* he ate with. These include Matthew (also known as Levi) the tax collector, in whose house Jesus ate along with "a large crowd of tax collectors and others" (Luke 5:29). He also ate with unnamed Pharisees (Luke 11:37; 14:1-24, the Scripture from which today's text is taken), with various "tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 15:1, 2), with Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-3), and with his disciples (as noted above). In fact Jesus was criticized as being "a glutton" (Luke 7:34).

Jesus' eating habits reveal his desire to reach out to all people—both the sinners who knew they were sinners and sinners such as the Pharisees whose self-righteousness blinded them to the truth about their condition.

Those habits highlight Jesus' purpose for coming into the world. As he told another tax collector, Zacchaeus, "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

B. Lesson Background

The parable of the great dinner in today's text comes not long after Jesus' teaching in last week's text from Luke 13. Following that section of teaching in 13:22-30, some of the Pharisees informed Jesus that he needed to vacate the territory of Perea because Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) wanted to kill him (13:31).

Jesus was not fazed by this threat (which may have been fabricated by the Pharisees in order to diminish the effectiveness of Jesus' ministry). He continued to focus his attention on reaching Jerusalem and lamented over its failure throughout the years to accept the words of God's appointed messengers, some of those even being killed (Luke 13:34, 35). He knew that in just a few months, he would be among that number.

Luke 14 begins with Jesus' entering the house of "a prominent Pharisee" for a meal on a Sabbath Day. We do not know the exact location of this house, but it can be assumed that Jesus was still in the territory of Perea (where the teaching in last week's text occurred). He was being watched closely, apparently to see if he would violate the Pharisees' standards of conduct. After healing a man in the house, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocritical behavior (14:2-6).

Jesus then told a parable aimed at those in attendance at the meal, in order to correct their behavior of selecting prominent seats (Luke 14:10). He then spoke more directly to the man who had invited him to the dinner (14:12). Jesus challenged him to invite the rejects and the outcasts of society—those unable to return the favor. A reward for such generosity may not come in this life, but it will come in God's time: "at the resurrection of the righteous" (14:14). The mention of resurrection prompted a comment from one of the guests in the Pharisee's house, which is where the lesson text begins.

I. The Place

(LUKE 14:15)

A. Sitting with Jesus (v. 15a)

^{15a}. **When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus,**

We noted in last week's study how Luke often recounts situations when people in an audience speak up spontaneously with a question or comment directed toward Jesus. Here, following Jesus' teaching concerning proper dinner etiquette (from a spiritual standpoint), *one* of the guests in the Pharisee's house speaks up.

B. Speaking to Jesus (v. 15b)

^{15b}. **"Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."**

The guest's comment is an interesting one. Jesus has said nothing in the house thus far specifically about *the kingdom of God*. He used the word *blessed* in verse 14 to encourage his listeners to invite to their dinners the outcasts and the neglected. Perhaps this man is trying to one-up Jesus' statement by declaring his own understanding of what blessedness means. Perhaps Jesus' teaching has made this man a bit uncomfortable since neither he nor any other Pharisee seems likely to follow Jesus' advice when planning his next dinner. So his statement may be an effort to turn the conversation in a different direction.

On the other hand, this person may be one of the few in attendance who understands what Jesus has said thus far. He seems to understand that Jesus is speaking of *the kingdom of God*, which will include a heavenly banquet (see Isaiah 25:6; Luke 13:29; Revelation 19:9). The future banquet is a symbol of God's acceptance and reward of the resurrected, righteous people. This ultimate inclusion by God is also the ultimate blessing.

II. The Parable

(LUKE 14:16-24)

A. Invitation Extended (vv. 16, 17)

¹⁶. Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.

Although Jesus’ reply is to the man who has made the previous remark, the reply is certainly intended to be heard by all who are present. That the host in this parable—who undoubtedly represents God—has *invited many* should be understood in light of how such gatherings are typically planned and organized. The initial invitation to a gathering like a *great banquet* amounts to being given a heads-up: be prepared! At some future time the invitation will be followed by an announcement that the banquet is indeed ready. Then it will be time for the invited to come.

¹⁷. “At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

The *banquet* likely takes a considerable amount of time to prepare, to accommodate the many who have been invited. Once everything is in order, a *servant* is dispatched to issue the second invitation: *Come, for everything is now ready*.

B. Invitation Rejected (vv. 18-20)

^{18a}. “But they all alike began to make excuses.

Amazingly (perhaps shockingly to those hearing the parable), the individuals who had earlier been invited to the banquet reply with a series of excuses as to why they cannot attend. The phrase *they all alike* does not suggest that these people conspire to answer as they do. It means, rather, that they all offer reasons why they cannot come.

What Do You Think?

How do we overcome excuses people make to avoid responding to Jesus’ invitation?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When those excuses have an intellectual basis
- When those excuses have an emotional basis
- When those excuses have a volitional basis

^{18b}. “The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

Two issues may be raised regarding this excuse. First, one would not buy a *field* without first going to see it and assess its value. Second, a field can be (re) examined at any time; why does it have to be done right at this moment? No doubt Jesus’ audience sees through the flimsiness of this response. It’s obvious that the man simply does not want to come.

¹⁹. “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

The same critique applies to the second excuse. Why do these *oxen* have to be tested now? As was true with the piece of ground, the time to test the oxen is before the purchase, not after.

HOW TO SAY IT

Antipas *An-tih-pus*.

Demas *Dee-mus*.

Herod *Hair-ud*.

Perea *Peh-ree-uh*.

Pharisees *Fair-ih-seez*.

Zacchaeus *Zack-key-us*.

²⁰. “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

This third individual does not present even any semblance of politeness; there is no “Please excuse me” accompanying his statement, as with the other two. All he says is *I just got married, so I can’t come*.

But this is as poor an excuse as the previous two. Why should marriage keep one from responding to a previously given invitation? Even if this man has gotten married since the original invitation was issued, common courtesy requires that he follow through and attend the dinner once it is ready. Not to do so is to insult the host’s gracious spirit.

It should be noted that these activities that are used as reasons not to attend the dinner are not wrong in and of themselves. There is nothing inherently sinful with buying a field, buying oxen, or getting married. The problem is that these three situations have become nothing more than pathetic excuses to cover the individuals’ unwillingness to come to the dinner. If they really want to attend, they will come.

MAKING EXCUSES

Most people are pretty good at making excuses. It happens in every realm of life. Children blame misdeeds on their siblings or friends. Politicians blame their predecessors, at least during the first few years of their terms in office. Married people excuse their own contribution to the problems in their marriages. Students blame poor grades on their teachers or the subject matter. Examples are legion.

On the other hand, a lot has been said as to why we shouldn’t excuse ourselves. Benjamin Franklin put it this way: “He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.” J. C. Penney built a successful retail chain on this principle: “I do not believe in excuses. I believe in hard work as the prime solvent [solution] of life’s problems.” But as Mason Cooley observed, “Excuses change nothing, but make everyone feel better.” Cooley was only partially right: we may feel better at the moment; but when the truth comes out, the game is over.

Think of the people who excused themselves from attending the feast Jesus spoke of in this parable. They each had what, at the time, might have seemed like a

good reason for declining the invitation. But in the context of this invitation to God's eternal feast, they missed the chance of their lifetimes! Those who reject this invitation may think they are choosing correctly. Oh, how wrong they are!

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What changes are needed for believers to make their relationship with Jesus the highest priority?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Considering distractions of a person's age demographic
- Considering distractions based in cultural expectations
- Considering family fissures that may result

C. Invitation Expanded (vv. 21-24)

21. “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

The host is understandably upset at such cavalier rejections of his invitation, especially when they are accompanied by obviously unacceptable reasons for doing so.

Although angry, *the owner of the house* orders the servant to invite the town's most unfortunate: *the poor* (destitute beggars), *the crippled* (disabled due to injury), *the blind*, and *the lame* (unable to walk). These people are to be found on the main *streets*, perhaps begging, but will also live in the *alleys*, the backstreets of hovels and shacks. They are the very same groups that Jesus had encouraged those in attendance at this gathering to invite to any banquet they may prepare (Luke 14:13).

We can imagine that the fatted calf is roasted, the raisin cakes are baked, the wine has been delivered, and the musicians are already playing. The feast cannot be delayed.

What Do You Think?

How will you help your church reach out to the overlooked people in your community?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding those with disabilities
- Regarding those with addictions
- Regarding the poverty-stricken
- Other

UNEXPECTED INVITATIONS

Each year, the president of the United States delivers the State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress, gathered in the House of Representatives chamber of the Capitol Building. The hall is filled for the event with “important” people. The speech is televised and seen by millions. Presidents of both parties have used the occasion to promote their programs for the nation, hoping to rally the support of the citizenry.

In more recent times, a few ordinary people who represent some element of the presidential agenda have received unexpected invitations. They are seated in a prominent place in the audience. When the president mentions them in an effort to draw sympathetic attention to the presidential agenda, TV cameras zoom in on these newly created celebrities-of-the-moment.

Much like the guests invited by the host near the end of Jesus' parable, the presidential guests are often the victims of life's injustices. However, the invited guests in the parable were not so honored to promote the host's political agenda. Instead, they were summoned to show the Lord's desire to share his feast. But remember: those invited who dishonor the summons cannot reconsider later.

—C. R. B.

22. “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

Even though those in the streets and alleys of the town have not received an earlier invitation, they are more than happy to come. Perhaps, being in the condition they are in, they have never been asked to such a gathering as this. However, as *the servant* reports, *there is still room*.

23. “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’

Now the host instructs *the servant* to extend his invitation even farther. *The roads and country lanes* likely refers to the territory beyond the town limits; we might say “out in the sticks.”

The appeal is not to be given halfheartedly or casually; the servant is to *compel* these residents *to come*. Perhaps this is necessary because at first those in these far-removed locations will find it hard to believe that someone in the town actually wants *them* to attend a dinner. But the host's objective is clear: he desires that his *house will be full*.

What Do You Think?

What additional steps can you take to share God's Word with the lost?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Personally

In cooperation with other Christians

24. “I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”

The ending of this parable does not turn out “happily ever after” for the original invitees. As we contrast those originally invited with those receiving the later invitations, the message of the parable becomes clear: Jesus is describing how God’s invitation to his kingdom is presented first to the Jews. It is they who have received the initial invitation by means of possessing the prophecies of Jesus’ coming and their position as God’s covenant people. But they, for the most part, reject the kingdom as presented by Jesus. John writes, “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” ([John 1:11](#)).

Then the message of the kingdom is offered to a different group, including those scorned by groups such as the scribes and Pharisees. These outcasts are represented by the poor and physically disabled. The third group, in the roads and country lanes, represents the Gentiles, those peoples and nations who are also among the lost whom Jesus came to save ([Luke 19:10](#)). They were described in last week’s text as those from the four corners of the earth who will have the privilege of sitting down in the kingdom of God ([13:29](#)).

The tragic irony is that those first bidden to come to the kingdom (the Jews) are the ones who will be excluded from the dinner; however, they have no one to blame but themselves for being left out. The parable’s message thus ties very closely with Jesus’ statement that concluded last week’s printed text: “Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” ([Luke 13:30](#)).

What Do You Think?

How should we interact, if at all, with those who accepted Christ at one point but now reject Him?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering arguments for seeking them out ([Luke 15:4-10](#); etc.)

Considering arguments for not seeking them out ([Hebrews 6:4-8](#); etc.)

Conclusion

A. Keeping First Things First

While last week’s text included the statement that the first will be last, today’s study could be summarized by considering the importance of keeping first things first. There is no contradiction between the two ideas. Last week’s lesson dealt with the way that God sees people and the manner in which they will be treated on the Day of Judgment; today’s study concerns priorities in the lives of God’s people.

The excuses offered by the three individuals in Jesus’ parable reveal much about the individuals who offered them. Each excuse clearly shows that attending the dinner was not a priority for any of the three. They had something better to do. They could have made time for the dinner—if they had *wanted* to. Attendance was not high on their to-do list, if it was on there at all.


It is still true that the cares of this world and the obligations associated with it can often take priority over the things of God. This is a warning that is found throughout the Scriptures and one that today’s Christian must take seriously. “Do not love the world or anything in the world,” writes John. “If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them” ([1 John 2:15](#)). James is just as direct: “Don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” ([James 4:4](#)).

In the parable of the sower, Jesus described how some of the seed fell among thorns ([Luke 8:7](#)). He later explained that this represents “those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” ([8:14](#)). In his second letter to Timothy, Paul lamented of Demas, who “because he loved this world, has deserted me” ([2 Timothy 4:10](#)). Demas may not have been tempted by a field, by oxen, or by a wife, but something in the world had seized control of his heart.

B. Knowing the Times

During the change to David’s leadership in ancient Israel, some who “came to David at Hebron to turn Saul’s kingdom over to him” are described as those who “understood the times and knew what Israel should do” ([1 Chronicles 12:23, 32](#)). We live in a time when spiritual values are not promoted in any significant, meaningful way by culture. The lure of the world is very strong and begs for our attention through the various media outlets of our time. Our youth are especially the targets of these outlets and must be instructed by both the home and the church. The battle for hearts has never been more intense. Do we know the times? Having that knowledge, do we know what to do with it?

Those are important questions, and we must answer them to protect our own relationship with God first and foremost. Let’s face it: we won’t be much good for the kingdom of God if we’re so focused on protecting others that we neglect our own spiritual well-being. While multitudes clamored for Jesus’ attention, he still realized the need to be alone with the Father from time to time ([Luke 5:15, 16](#)). He realized that his apostles needed rest ([Mark 6:30-32](#)).



Sheet 4—Summer 2018, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Come, Sinner to the Great Banquet

*Come, sinner,
let every soul
Ye need not come
for God hath*

*Come, all ye
sin oppress
ye restless
ye poor, and
and blind
in Christ a*

by Charles Wesley

Visual for Lesson 9. Point to this visual as you say, “Physical malnutrition is easy to spot. But what are some signs of spiritual malnutrition?”

But rest and time alone with God go against the grain of an always-connected, 24/7 culture. Inadequate rest lowers our spiritual defenses. Consider how Satan timed his attack on Jesus: the attack came when Jesus was physically at his weakest ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)). Adequate rest makes possible the effectiveness of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, and the supportive fellowship of other believers.

To know the times and to know what to do with that knowledge has a direct bearing on the cost of discipleship. To attend the great banquet requires not only an invitation to do so, but also the willingness to pay the “opportunity cost” required to be there. From the world of economics, an opportunity cost is the “benefit that a person could have received, but gave up to take another course of action.” We see opportunity cost in [Mark 10:21, 28](#); [Luke 14:33](#); etc. What price are you willing to pay to be at the great feast?

C. Prayer

Our Father, with gratitude we thank you for the invitation we have received to be at your great banquet! May we examine our hearts as the day approaches and destroy all excuses for not attending. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who makes the great banquet possible. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Only the life that puts Jesus first will last.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Divide the class into two groups. Ask one group to list banquets they have attended that were memorable for their delicious food, spectacular settings, interesting guests, etc. Ask the other group to compile a list of the worst excuses they've heard (or given) for not attending an event. After two minutes, call for results. After discussion, say, "Today's lesson offers what may be surprising parallels to our best meals and our worst excuses."

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Face Value" activity from the reproducible page, which can be downloaded. Allow no more than a minute for students to match coins with values. Say, "Depending on condition, the Indian Head penny could be worth more than all the others combined. But that raises an interesting question: What determines value? And what—or whom—do we undervalue because we don't look at the larger picture?"

Into the Word

Read the lesson text aloud to the class. Then announce a closed-Bible true/false test to gauge retention. As you distribute copies of the following test (you create), assure participants that they will score and retain their own tests; you, the teacher, will not collect them. Time limit is one minute.

1. There were four rounds of invitation to the meal.
2. One excuse for not attending was that the invitee's daughter was getting married.
3. One excuse for not attending was the recent purchase of five yoke of oxen.
4. The host of the banquet personally went out to issue the third round of invitations.
5. The poor and the blind were invited during one of the rounds of invitations.
6. Substitute invitations were to be offered to those in "the streets," among other places.

(Answers: 1-F; 2-F; 3-T; 4-F; 5-T; 6-T.)

Discuss results. *Option.* Announce the test before reading the lesson text instead of after.

Alternative. After reading the text aloud, distribute copies of the "Parable Details" activity on the reproducible page. Form students into small groups to answer questions about entries as indicated. See the answer key to the reproducible page for expected responses in the second column.

Responses in the third column should be of a more personal nature than the responses in the second column, depending on class members' spiritual maturity. At a minimum, expect individuals' take-aways to include a sense of gratitude at being invited to the banquet and a realization of the need to be ready to attend when the time comes.

Option. Ask students to use their general knowledge of the Bible to state *why* the first invitees made excuses. Expect responses to include the nature of the Jewish leaders' attitude toward Jesus.

Into Life

Say, "Let's draw parallels between the excuses the first invitees made with the excuses people often make today to spurn Jesus' invitation to enter the kingdom." Jot responses on the board as students voice them. When there are no further responses, go back through the list item by item as you ask, "What would be a good way to answer this excuse?" Encourage free discussion.

Alternative. Give each student a paper plate and a marker. Say, "Take a moment to evaluate how you spend your hours outside of work and sleep. Present those activities on your plate in the form of a pie chart." Challenge students to compare their priorities with biblical priorities. Ask them how they know when they have "too much on their plate" (expect groans at the play on words). Then discuss what needs to happen to correct the problem.

After either activity, wrap up by saying, "It's no surprise that twenty-first-century priorities often crowd out kingdom priorities. Today's parable spurs us to consider our values."