



Catalog No. 931

Luke 14:1-24

Seventh Message

John Hanneman

January 9, 1994

# GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

*SERIES: PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM*

At Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's we like to extend hospitality in our homes, and we look forward to receiving invitations to visit the homes of family and friends. There is one essential ingredient to these festive occasions. No, it's not money; it's food. We love to gather around a table and share food together. Picture the scene: Mother is frazzled; the children are bickering; and father is watching football games on television while the meat burns. Once the confusion ends, however, and everyone settles in at the table, wonderful times of sharing life and friendships usually are the order of the day. I remember one such occasion in my parents' home, although I don't remember being invited. Lying in bed one night as a little boy I heard the sound of people talking and dishes clattering in the living room. I got up to see what was going on and discovered that my parents had invited a number of people over for the evening, and everyone was eating. My mother handed me a plateful of ham, scalloped potatoes and creamed corn. I thought I was in heaven. Ever since, creamed corn has been a favorite of mine.

Many of the important exchanges in life occur around a meal. Food seems to be a good excuse for conversation. In fact, some of our most meaningful interactions take place over good meals. When we want to talk over something with someone, we don't pick a street corner and talk there; we meet at a restaurant, a more natural setting for conversation and exchange.

The fact that so many important conversations take place over meals underlines the importance of hospitality. Perhaps there may well be something deeply spiritual involved. In the gospels we find that much of Jesus' teaching and many of his most intimate conversations took place, not in synagogues, but in homes, during meals. This is true of the setting for our study this morning in the parables of Jesus from the gospel of Luke. Our parable comes from chapter 14 of this gospel. The opening six verses set the context.

**And it came about when He went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread, that they were watching Him closely. And there, in front of Him was a certain man suffering from dropsy. And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they kept silent. And He took hold of him, and healed him, and sent him away. And He said to them, "Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" And they could make no reply to this. (Luke 14:1-6 NASB)**

This meal, shared in the home of a Pharisee, is not the kind of occasion we have been referring to, however. It is anything but a friendly, relaxed supper shared by good friends. The text says, "they [the Pharisees] were *watching* Him closely." "Watching" in this context means "to watch with envy, jealousy, evil intent." The same word is used in Acts of those who were "watching" Saul to kill him; it is used in Luke 6:7 when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand. But the tense atmosphere doesn't faze Jesus in the least. He ups the

ante by healing the man with dropsy. The home, the setting for hospitality, suddenly becomes inhospitable. The dining table, the most natural setting for hospitality, becomes a battleground.

Jesus addresses the watching Pharisees in three parables. He directs the first to the guests, the second to the host. The third parable speaks of that great day when God will host a banquet. It leaves the hearers guessing who is coming to dinner. All three stories are built around the figure of a meal, and all have much to say about hospitality.

In the first parable we learn the proper behavior for an invited guest at a wedding feast. Verse 7:

**And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table; saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both shall come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (14:7-11)**

This first parable skewers the pride of the best and the brightest, the social climbers. Guests at the wedding feast were ranked in importance by their proximity to the host. But the guests in this story were themselves determining where they would sit. The host had to ask them to move when someone more distinguished arrived.

There is nothing profound about this story. What we have here is everyday, commonplace truth. This story catches us in the act, as it were. Perhaps we can illustrate. Have you ever overheard a conversation that went something like this?

"Betty, why did we have to sit next to the Thompsons? We always sit next to them. Can you believe how Martha went on and on about her sick cat? Then all Joe could talk about was his son going to Yale. Did you see how much fun they were having at the Jones' table? If you weren't late, we could have sat with them."

Jesus' first parable is keenly descriptive of what usually occurs at a social function. Everyone immediately wants to know where they are seated and who is sitting next to them. There is much jockeying for the positions of honor. Why do we do this? It is because we are thinking only of ourselves. We want to be part of the "in" group. We are seeking honor, importance, identity.

But Jesus brushes all that aside by saying, "everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." The principle is obvious: we should not treat social occasions and the hospitality of others as a pathway to honor and importance.

Rather, we should concentrate our efforts on serving others by humbly take the least important seat. If God wants us to move to a more honored place, let him make the call.

I confess this used to be a distraction for me. I liked to check out the scene at social events and see where I was sitting. In recent years, however, I have determined that whenever I'm in a room full of people, I will take whatever place is available and talk with one person, rather than working the room, trying to connect with the most important people. Now I wince at how frustrating these occasions used to be when I was conscious of making the right connections. But I have marveled at what wonderful conversations the Lord gives me in these settings when I walk humbly as a guest.

Jesus' second parable has a word on how to be a host. Verses 12-14:

**And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (14:12-14)**

This parable questions the motives of the host. Again, this is ordinary truth; it needs little comment. In this instance, hospitality is seen as little more than social insurance. It is not used for building relationships and enhancing community. People are entertained so they will become indebted to the host.

This kind of hospitality can be likened to frequent flyer mileage: inviting certain people guarantees return invitations. Failure to be invited in return makes the host angry and resentful. A typical conversation between the hosts on such an occasion might go like this:

"Fred, can you believe the Petersons have not had us over to dinner yet? We've had them over three times in a row. I think we should drop them. Let's have the Singletons over next weekend. They always have a big New Year's Eve party; maybe they'll invite us this year."

When you invite people to your home, do you offer your hospitality freely, or are you merely angling for a return invitation? Jesus says we should not use hospitality as a means of controlling others or insuring ourselves social status by putting them in our debt. If we invite only our friends, they have the means to repay us, but there is no reward for this. Hospitality should be directed towards serving the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind—the outcasts who do not have the means to repay. Jesus says it is better to be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

My wife and I do not do very well when we entertain formally. Things just don't seem to work well for us. Her gift is spontaneity, and whenever she exercises her gift, whether it is gathering people in informal settings in our home, on our front yard or at the pizza parlor, wonderful times of fellowship and sharing result. One year we lived in Lincoln, Nebraska, and after I crashed and burned in law school we began inviting people from church to dinner on Friday nights at a restaurant called Chesterfield, Bottomly, and Pot's. It was an open invitation; anyone could come. After awhile we had 15 or 20 people coming. One night we got a call from a couple who hosted our home fellowship, asking if they could join us. They were the Bob and Grace Bunce of that church; they were always opening their

home for hospitality. We asked them to come and we had a wonderful time together. No one was worried about repaying anybody. Most of us as poor students didn't have the means to repay. We were gathering and enjoying life because of our common belief in Christ.

The highlight of our recent Christmas festivities was having a young boy who is a friend of my son, stay with us for the weekend. His mother died when she was 32, and this high schooler has no home. What joy it gave us to extend hospitality to someone in need. He was so excited about coming he wanted to come a day earlier than planned. My wife was so pleased by his staying with us that our own children became jealous of all the attention he got!

Jesus' third parable gives God's perspective on hospitality and what our motives should be when we practice it. Verses 15-24:

**And when one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.' And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.'" (14:15-24)**

This third parable responds to the comment in verse 15, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" The person who spoke up would quickly be alienated from his friends at the table. This parable is rather more complicated than the first two. The "big dinner" refers to a banquet. There are two invitations to the original guests at the beginning of the parable, and two invitations (although these are different) to outsiders complete the story. A double invitation was traditional in the Middle East. The host decided on the amount of meat to provide based on the number of invitees who accepted his invitation. The appropriate animal was then selected and killed; it had to be eaten that night. The host completed the preparations, and at the hour of the banquet he sent a servant to tell the guests that the dinner was ready. The guests who accepted were duty-bound to appear. But in the parable, the guests begin to make excuses for non-attendance. How insulting to the host! A last-minute refusal to attend a great banquet is bad taste in any culture, but in the Middle East it is considered an affront.

Even a passing glance at the text reveals that the excuses offered are ludicrous. The first man says he has bought a field and needs to look at it. This is silly. In the Middle East, no one would buy a field without first checking every square foot of it, the location of the spring, etc. A Western equivalent would be to cancel a dinner engagement by offering the excuse, "I have just bought a new house over the phone and I must go and have a look at it and check

the neighborhood.” The first man is saying that this field which he claimed to have just bought was more important to him than his relationship with the host.

The second man excuses himself by saying that he has bought five yoke of oxen and he must test them. This is ludicrous. In that part of the world, oxen were sold in one of two ways. Either they were sold in the marketplace, where prospective buyers would test them to see if they pulled together (if they would not, they were worthless), or the seller informed the community that he would be plowing with the oxen on a given day and prospective buyers could observe them working together. This would take place before one would begin to negotiate a price. Here the guest is inferring that oxen were more important to him than his relationship to the host.

The third man offers the excuse that he has married a bride. This too is ridiculous. A wedding could not have been held on that day because no village could host two grand occasions on the same day. Further, Middle Eastern men practiced great restraint with respect to their wives; they would not discuss them in a formal setting. This man said he would attend, but now he makes the excuse he is too busy. He does not even ask to be excused.

Although these excuses anger the host, he responds with grace, not vengeance. He begins to invite the outcasts of the city. The original guests think that the banquet can proceed without them, but they are wrong. A second invitation is given to the outsiders, those beyond the community; they are invited so the house can be filled to capacity.

The symbols of the banquet are extremely important. The host, undoubtedly, is God. The dinner is the Messianic banquet that will usher in the New Age (Luke 13:28-34; Isa 25:6-9; Matt 22:2-10, Rev 19:9; Ps 23:5). It is described as a wonderful event, a time when every tear will be wiped away. It might be stretching things to say this, but the servant could very well be Jesus. The original guests were the spiritual leaders of Israel who rightfully were the first ones to receive an invitation. The lame and poor were outcasts within the house of Israel. Notice that this task is completed in the parable. Finally, the guests from the highways are the Gentiles. As the parable ends, notice that this task is not yet completed.

God sent his Servant to summon Israel to his banquet, but the Jewish leaders gave flippant excuses for not attending. So guess who's coming to dinner. The invitation goes to the outcasts in the Jewish community. Finally, the servant summons and compels the Gentiles from beyond the community. The gospel message is for the Jew first and also the Greek. God's banquet table will be complete. Jesus tells the Pharisees that none of the original guests who were invited would taste his banquet. No doggie bags will be provided. You cannot participate from a distance. You either accept the invitation or you do not come at all. The Pharisees thought they were hosting Jesus, but it turned out that God was making an invitation to host them. But they refused his offer.

Now we come to the spiritual application of the parable. The most prominent word in the passage is the word “call” (*kaleo* in Greek). It is used 11 times in verses 1-24, sometimes in compound form. The word for church is *ekklesia*, a favorite word of Paul, meaning, “called out ones, called of God.” The implication is obvious: God is calling, he is inviting, summoning, even compelling us to come to his banquet table. He doesn't coerce, manipulate or propagandize. But he isn't shy or passive either. Christ has come. The hour is here. Through his Servant, God is announcing a Messianic banquet par excellence,

a seven-course meal served with the finest wines. At this wedding feast every tear is wiped away, every sadness fades; no one is crying in their beer. Joy is on everyone's face. But, because Jesus eats with sinners and heals on the Sabbath, the Pharisees cannot share this joy.

If we are worried about occupying the seats of honor and entertaining the right people, Jesus says we are at the wrong party. When we use hospitality for personal gain, we miss God's banquet. We can even be in the right house, but we will be sitting at the wrong table.

There are several implications for us. First, people refuse God's invitation by making stupid, insulting excuses that are not credible. They say things like, “I can't become a Christian because I have to do my laundry”; or, “I'm invited to a party this weekend. Maybe next week.” They are forever finding something to do in order to avoid God's call. We, too, can be like the Pharisees. We make religious excuses to avoid an invitation from God. Do we really want Jesus more than anything else in life, or is he reserved just for Sundays? In order to accept God's gift we must reject many other things. His kingdom and his invitation demand our exclusive loyalty and wholehearted devotion.

Second, God in his grace extends his invitation to the outcasts and the Gentiles. He is not worried about repayment. He even compels people to come so that they will know his invitation is genuine.

Third, God is not limited by people's failure to accept his invitation. If those who receive the first invitations do not come, there will be others who will come. God's house will be full.

Fourth, attendance is by invitation only. But there is the notion of self-imposed judgment inherent in this parable. Those who by their own choice reject God's invitation disqualify themselves from table fellowship. We must enter in. We can't have portions sent out to us while we busy ourselves with other matters.

One commentator put it this way:

The two essential points in His teaching are that no man can enter the Kingdom without the invitation of God, and that no man can remain outside it but by his own deliberate choice. Man cannot save himself; but he can damn himself...He [Jesus] sees the deepest tragedy of human life, not in the many wrong and foolish things that men do, or the many good and wise things that they fail to accomplish, but in their rejection of God's greatest gifts (T. W. Manson, *Sayings*).

What have you done with your invitation? Have you filed it away in your “in basket.” Have you delayed making a decision feeling that something better might come up? Have you made a silly excuse for refusing God's hospitality?

If you have not sent in your RSVP, then God is inviting you this morning. I have your invitation right here. It says,

God the Father invites you to the grand and glorious marriage of his Son and the Church. January 9, 1994.

That's today. “Come to the table,” God calls. The door is open. Your place is ready. He has reserved it for you. The food is delectable; the wine is mature. There is joy beyond compare. Your part is to believe in Jesus, believe that Christ is the Son of God, and that he died on the cross for your sin. Ask for forgiveness now and accept him as you Savior and Lord.

Listen to the words of John as he describes the great marriage supper in Revelation 19:7-10:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” And I fell at his feet to worship him. (Rev 19:7-10)

Jesus, the very thought of Thee,  
 With sweetness fills my breast;  
 But sweeter far Thy face to see,  
 And in Thy presence rest.  
 Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,  
 Nor can the memory find,  
 A sweeter sound than Thy blest name,  
 O Savior of mankind.

If you want to learn about hospitality, then come with us to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico in April. We have been going there every year since 1987 and I am always amazed at the gracious hospitality of those people who don't have one-twentieth of what we have. One year we were in the little village of Uci. Our work was done, and we decided to have an evangelistic outreach to bring our ministry to a close. We would meet for a baseball game and share the gospel afterwards. A couple in the local church, the Priscilla and Aquila of that fellowship, came up with the idea of having a party after that. Following the baseball game a crowd of two or three hundred people gathered and I shared the gospel story. One of our men shared his testimony. He invited a young boy to join him as he spoke. He told the crowd how much this young boy, a new friend, meant to him, and he shared about his friendship with Jesus.

Then we invited the whole village to the banquet at the home of this couple. The streets were lined with people as we walked to their house. I felt I was in first century Israel, walking with Jesus and the disciples. It was a festive, joyful occasion. Someone had brought a pinata for the children. To this day I do not know how everyone was fed. It was a magical time, God-orchestrated and Spirit-led. I compared it to eating at God's banquet table, a glimpse of what lies ahead.

Hospitality restores us to generosity and grace. It can be risky. When you invite someone into your home, you are in a rather defenseless position. But this is what God did, isn't it? He became defenseless. He descended to earth, becoming like us in every way except in our sin, to save us.

Hospitality, then, is a wonderful way to advance the kingdom of God. This is how God does it, and it should be how we do it. If hospitality is seen as anything else, a means to rise in importance, a way of insuring we are invited in return, then it's not hospitality. The model host is God, and we are invited to his great banquet. Hopefully, we haven't made other plans. As we assemble and invite others into our homes let us take our cue from God himself. When we are invited into social settings, and as we entertain others, let us do so with pure hearts, seeking to further God's Messianic age, rather than striving for honor to minister to our own foolish pride.

© 1994 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino