

THE GREAT BANQUET IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Luke 14:1-35

Key Verse: 14:23

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'"

Last week Jesus taught us how the kingdom of God grows steadily from small beginnings to vast dimensions, like a mustard seed grows into a big tree. But it does not happen naturally. Jesus said, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door...." It means we must struggle with God's word until the kingdom of God comes into our hearts and grows. We remember the life of faith of Dr. Samuel Lee. As a mustard seed is small, he was not so tall. Due to sorrow, he could have been too weak to do anything. But through Ephesians 2:10, the kingdom of God came into his heart and began to grow. It worked with mighty power to raise him as a good shepherd for Korea, for America and for the whole world. Likewise, each of us, when we accept one word of God in our hearts, can grow spiritually and be used greatly by God. Shepherd John Peace was once a man with an attitude. After some American boys insulted him, he vowed to crush all Americans' bones by playing football against them with reckless abandon. He crushed a few bones. Then his bones were crushed. As a freshman at UIC, he began one-to-one Bible study with Missionary David Baik. He repented and accepted one word of God. Then, the kingdom of God began to grow in him. He became a shepherd for Americans. Gradually he became a pillar of faith for UIC ministry. Last year, his fellowship grew most remarkably from a "C" class to an "A" class fellowship. He prays to go to Ukraine as a permanent missionary in this year and to invite his family soon afterward. In this way, the kingdom of God is growing and spreading.

Today's passage contrasts the banquet of a Pharisee (1-14) and the banquet in the kingdom of God (15-24). God wants to bring us to his kingdom. The Bible compares human life to a holy pilgrimage to the kingdom of God. There, we will meet Abraham our ancestor of faith, King David, a man after God's own heart, and our Lord Jesus Christ, once slain for our sins, now sitting at the right hand of God as our Judge (2Co 5:10) and Defender (1Jn 2:1). We will meet all those who have lived victoriously as witnesses of Christ and share a blessed banquet in the kingdom of God. Today Jesus teaches us how to obtain this privilege to attend the banquet in the kingdom of God (25-35).

First, Jesus teaches the Pharisees the mercy of God (1-6).

Luke, a Gentile, recorded the account in verses 1-14 to expose the mercilessness of the Pharisees. On a Sabbath, Jesus was invited to dinner by a prominent Pharisee. Probably in his garden was a swimming pool made of massive stones, decorated by a flower garden. And the interior decor of his house was glamorous. The dinner guests were all from the high rank in the society. Obviously, the dinner party was extravagant. However, the motive was suspect. Surprisingly, at this formal dinner, a man with dropsy was there—right in front of Jesus. Those who suffer from dropsy have bad water circulation in the body. As a result, one of their legs might be bigger than an ordinary man's waist. This poor, suffering man was being used by the Pharisees as bait to trap Jesus. The Pharisees prepared this dinner in an attempt to bring charges against Jesus as a violator of God's law. They watched Jesus with hawk's eyes to see if he would heal the sick man on the Sabbath.

Usually, the enemies of Jesus attack first, then Jesus defends himself by teaching the word of God. This time, Jesus attacked them first with a question they had failed to answer previously (6:9; 13:15-16). The mercilessness of the Pharisees was exposed. No doubt, Jesus became indignant when he saw that they were abusing a suffering man. Jesus rebuked them by saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" (3) Verse 4a says, "But they remained silent." Their silence meant their defeat. Jesus lost no time. Jesus took hold of the man, healed him and sent him away. Jesus risked his life to heal one suffering man. Jesus is our good Shepherd. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11).

Jesus did more than heal a man with dropsy. He taught the Pharisees the mercy of God. Look at verse 5. "Then he asked them, 'If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?'" That's right. One would waste no time in pulling him out. The same is true with God. The truth of God is to save men from their miseries and ultimately from their sins, and to give life to those who are perishing. Our God is the God of tender mercy.

Second, Jesus teaches them to be humble (7-11).

Jesus saw that the places of honor at the table were all occupied, and his disciples were probably assigned to the benches in the back for "extras," such as waiters or busboys. So the disciples did not know whether they should be standing there or sitting down on the benches. Jesus told this parable. Look at verses 8,9. "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place." Men of sinful integrity would say, "I am a little better than you. So I must sit in the seat of honor and you must sit in the back." But God's people must not think this way. The children of God must think, "Oh my dear brothers and precious sisters, you must sit in a better place. I can stand or sit on a bench with the servants." James says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Ja 4:6).

Jesus told them to humble themselves. Look at verse 10. "But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests." Worldly people are ready to exalt themselves. But the children of God must learn how to humble themselves. Matthew 23:11 says, "The greatest among you will be your servant." James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." Above all, the children of God must follow the example of humble Jesus. Though Jesus is God, he humbled himself and became a servant of all (Php 2:6-8; Mk 10:45). Let's read verse 11. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Third, invite the poor (12-14).

Jesus saw that the members of the dinner were all the people of rank, gathered to enjoy bragging about some things that were not really true (12). They must have spent much money to enjoy dinner parties among themselves, complimenting each other, saying, "Oh, your outfit is fabulous, darling! Your wig, I mean hair, is exquisite." "Yours, too."

What did Jesus say to them? Look at verses 13,14. "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Jesus wanted them to invite the needy in order to practice the mercy of God. An act of mercy is remembered and repaid, as our Lord promised Abraham as well as all the heroes of faith. When we practice God's mercy we can please God, and in proportion to our service, he gives us a fountain of joy welling up in our souls. Surely our Lord Jesus will say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant!" Matthew 25:36-40 says, "I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me'...'When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" Giving something to the helpless is the same as giving to our Lord Jesus Christ. May God help us to invite the poor through one-to-one Bible study.

Fourth, the great banquet in the kingdom of God (15-24).

God is eager to invite his chosen people to the banquet in the kingdom of God. When one of the Pharisees heard Jesus' teaching, he made a cry out of his wonder, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God" (15b). This Pharisee must have grasped the blessedness of the kingdom of God. Jesus taught him how pleased God is to invite his children to the heavenly banquet, without missing one. Look at verses 16,17. "Jesus replied: 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready."'" In verse 17, "those who had been invited," refers to his chosen people (Ro 9:1-5).

What happened? They blindly rejected God's invitation. What a surprise! One of them said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it" (18b). Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me" (19). Still another said, "I just got married, so I can't come" (20). They rejected God's invitation.

What happened next? Look at verse 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." Here, the owner of the house represents God. God was very sorry because his own people, for whom he had prepared the banquet, rejected his invitation (Jn 1:11). But God did not stop inviting his people; the invitation was extended to the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. They were undeserving people. They represent sinners such as the tax collectors and prostitutes, (Mt 21:32), the poor and needy, even a condemned criminal (Lk 23:43). When they were invited, they were surprised that they were invited. They accepted the invitation with great joy because they knew they were sinners who did not deserve such a glorious invitation. They realized God's deep love through his invitation. They understood Jesus' word, "anybody and everybody."

The servant said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room" (22). Look at verse 23. "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'" Here we learn the heart of God. Our Father God in heaven earnestly desires that the kingdom of God be filled with his precious children. So God began to invite the Gentiles. This reminds us of St. Paul's missionary journeys to Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus and Rome. As Paul preached the gospel, there was a work of the Holy Spirit and Gentiles believed in Jesus. Fruitful churches were established all over the Roman world. Surely, God loves all people of all nations as a father loves his precious children. God is not willing for anyone to perish, but wants everyone to come to Jesus and be saved. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." When we know the heart of God, we can have universal love for all peoples of all nations. When we know the heart of God, we can pray for people in Muslim countries, including Iraq, North Korea and China to hear the invitation to the kingdom of God and be saved. In the heart of God, there is no self-righteousness or condemnation. In the heart of God, there is grace and peace and overflowing joy. Even now, our Lord Jesus invites us, as Revelation 3:20 says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." May God help each of us to accept his invitation.

Fifth, Jesus' disciples must give everything to Jesus (25-35).

Look at verse 25. Large crowds followed Jesus. At the time, Jesus' mind was occupied by his upcoming crucifixion. He must have pictured the trial and condemnation, the mocking, spitting, beating, and the pain of nails driven into his hands and feet. But many of the people around him were carefree and indifferent, like children in the marketplace. Jesus wanted them to make decisions of faith. To make a decision of faith, they must count the cost. Look at verse 26. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple." Here the word "hate" does not give us the right to be cruel to our earthly family members. It means we must overcome sentimental attachments to give Jesus first priority. Only those who deny their sentimentalism can give their first priority to Jesus. One young man, the only son of his parents, accepted the gospel of Jesus for the salvation of his soul and decided to dedicate his life to Christ. He thought his parents would be happy. But they told him, "Don't preach to us. We raised you, remember." Later, he left home to receive shepherd training. God blessed him to find his holy mission as a Bible messenger and to marry a beautiful woman of God. He invited his parents to attend his joyful wedding. But they didn't come. They didn't send any money. Instead they sent a box of cheese. Still, as an only son, he was attached to his parents, especially his mom. By faith, he denied his sentimentalism for the last 20 years. So he could live as Jesus' disciple and be faithful to his mission. There are many such examples in Chicago UBF.

Look at verse 27. "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Jesus stresses the absolute necessity of carrying the cross as his disciple. Here "cross" means to fulfill all of one's human responsibilities and to do God's work, too. One woman of God has lived in a most difficult personal situation during the last year. Suddenly, she lost the support of her husband and became like a single mother with five sons. Just to survive seemed impossible. But she held 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you." Indeed, Jesus' sufficient grace enabled her to glorify God. She not only overcame her situation; she also carried her cross of mission. She faithfully taught the Bible to several needy people. She faithfully served as a stewardess for the Sunday worship service. When she could not be faithful to her mission anymore, she was faithful to her mission. We only thank God for this. May God help all of us to teach the Bible one-to-one wholeheartedly, and at the same time fulfill all of our duties as human beings.

Look at verses 28-32. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who

sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace." These parables teach us that we must count the cost and make a decision of faith to invest our lives in following Jesus. Let's read verse 33. "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

In this relativistic and pragmatic society, Jesus wants us to make a clear commitment to him. Those who do so will be accepted to the great banquet in God's kingdom. This is not just a one-time decision. We must keep Christian flavor by renewing our commitment to Jesus constantly. Look at verse 34. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" There is a young high school student who loves Jesus. He reads the Bible every night until his mother makes him stop and go to bed. He shares Jesus with many of his classmates and they follow him to Bible study. He put a screen saver on his home computer that says, "Repent, sinners." We only thank God for his clear commitment to Jesus. May God help him live as a salty Christian all his days.

In this passage, we learn the heart of God. God loves his people and wants to bring us all back to the kingdom of God to attend his banquet. But we must make a decision of faith to follow Jesus as our first priority. May God enable us to do so.