



at the table

MEALS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

THE GREAT BANQUET

Sunday 10 April 2022

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Today we're dealing with the subject: the great banquet. Over the past few weeks, we've been looking at the subject under the general heading: at the table - meals that transform lives. And, I have to confess, if you were to say to me, "Next week I would like you to join me in a fast," I would say, "Yeah, that'd be a good idea." If you were to say to me, "Next week I would like to take you to Lugarno Seafood Restaurant," I would say, "Yes, yes, yes!" So this subject attracts me a lot more than the subject a couple of years ago when we were talking about 'fasting' all the time. It's a good subject! But I'm much more interested in this one.

It's interesting to note that, in scripture, the Bible starts with a meal and ends with a meal. In Genesis 2:16, God said to Adam and Eve, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of good and evil." And of course Eve ate what she shouldn't be eating, something that wasn't good for her, and something that had consequences. It's like the story of my life: I'm currently banned from KFC, and I must confess, every now and then, when Molly's away, I would sneak some; but I always confess because she always knows. My wife could be an A-grade detective so there's no use trying to hide it.

At the end of the scriptures in Revelation 19:19, the angel said to me [John], "Write: blessed are they who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb." This is a great promise, and we'll refer to it later on in the message.

Before we look at the detail of the great banquet from Luke 14:14-24, you can see from the reading that Luke 14:1-24 could well attract a whole series never mind a short message like this - but we'll do the best we can. But it would be good to place it in the context of the whole 24 verses. When we consider the portion from verse 1, we find it can break down

conveniently into four aspects or four responses (there are actually three responses, but we'll call it four):

The first response is to the Pharisees and the Lawyers. But when you look at the banquet, you'll see that it wasn't really a kosher banquet: it was a banquet that had an ulterior motive. In the NIV it says, "One Sabbath when Jesus went to the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched." Then it says, "In from of him was a man suffering from dropsy and Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts of the law, "Is it lawful?" Well, that seems to just come out of the blue, but it didn't. The NIV leaves out the fact that He was answering a statement or He was answering a question. The ESV, that I prefer myself, or the King James says that He answered. He answered them saying this. So it wasn't just done in isolation - it was a response.

So Jesus says, "It is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" I don't want to spend too much time on this, but it's sufficient to say that Jesus' response was very common sense and down to earth. He said, "If your ox or your son or your donkey fall into the well, won't you like them out?" Sure you will! So he appeals to their common sense.

And in His second response, He speaks to the guests and He responds to something He noticed at the wedding. What He noticed at the wedding was there must've been a pecking order at the table because He noticed some people were getting the better seats or the more prominent seats. And He invoked a paraphrase of Proverbs 24:6-7 when it talks about not exalting yourself. The teaching here is that everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted. That's pretty straightforward. I think of a wedding reception where you've got people you really like or you're really close to are near the Bride and the Grooms' table; and people you don't like you put at the back, behind a pillar. Jesus noticed this and He responded, and there's a great teaching here, not to exalt ourselves but to let others exalt us. Yes, time to time individuals will be exalted, but they are to be exalted by other people and not by themselves.

And in His third response, He addresses the host. He says, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and you will be blessed. Though they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." And this is a recurring theme of Jesus' teaching about those who are treated by society and by religious people as not worth anything. His recurring referrals are always to these people, the outcast, people who are looked down upon. And he comes to this point: "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Of course, there was one individual there (and you get them everywhere) who tries to answer a practical question with a spiritual answer. And so this pious guest said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feat of the Kingdom of God... Sometime in the future - it doesn't apply to me now - lame, blind, crippled, doesn't matter right now - as

one day we're going to sit down at the table." In response to this state, Jesus took the opportunity to teach using this parable of the great banquet.

In the scriptures, it's calculated that there are 350 parables. In the scriptures, it's recorded that Jesus taught 35 - only 10%! And if we look at this particular meal, this banquet, it comes down to six bites, if you like.

It says here, "At the time of the banquet, he [the master] sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come.'" This is an invitation to both the believer and the unbeliever. This portion of scripture, this parable, can be looked at historically: it's the Jews and the Gentiles. But also it can be interpreted practically, about the believer and the unbeliever, and that is the focus we're going to have today: It's about you and me, today, as a believer or an unbeliever.

So he says, "Come." Every time the gospel is preached, any time Christ is preached, it's an invitation to 'come'. That's the first thing: the invitation is there. And the invitation is universal. It doesn't matter your status in life; it doesn't matter your position in society; it doesn't matter if you're wealthy or in poverty; it doesn't matter if you have sickness or lameness or blindness; it doesn't matter - the invitation is to you and to me and to everyone. It doesn't matter what colour, what creed; it doesn't matter what country you come from or what culture we belong to - the invitation is there: "Come." That's the first thing that we learn.

In verse 17, we see why he can say, "Come," because he said, "Everything is now ready." Everything that could be done, has been done. When the Lord Jesus Christ hung on the cross in John 19:30, the last utterance He made was, "It is finished." Not only was His sacrifice finished, but everything that God wanted to accomplish for the good of mankind was accomplished on the cross and then, of course, at the resurrection. And that's the thing of Easter that we celebrate. You know, the world may think it has Christmas, but it must never ever take Easter. We must maintain Easter and the real meaning of Easter - it brings us right back to what it's talking about here: the Lord Jesus Christ. As it says, everything has been done. If you're not a believer here today, it's sad. Why? Because everything that can be done, has been done by God for you. And all He says is, "Come."

But of course there are those who made excuses. In Luke 14:18-20 it says, "But they all began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have bought a field, I must go and see it.'" They were all very nice about it - he says, "Please excuse me." But who buys a property without seeing it first? "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'" But who buys a vehicle and doesn't 'kick the tires' before they actually pay for it? These are not reasons - they're excuses. And the other one says, "I just got married and I can't come." Why not?

So these excuses were feeble, and the parable goes on to say in Luke 14:21-23, "The servant came back and reported to the master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered the servant to go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done but there is still room.' And the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and the country lanes and compel them to come in so my house may be full.'"

It uses the word 'compel' - but we must never interpret that as 'force people into the Kingdom'. It means 'convince people into the Kingdom'. When we preach the gospel and when we preach the Word of God, we're trying to convince people. You'll hear it said here from this pulpit from our preachers often, "Does that make sense to you?" And what they're saying is, "Are we convincing you?" It's a good thing to say: are we convincing you to do something, to be something? And this is what he's doing here: he's compelling them to come in "so that my house may be full." You see, the invitation goes out to the needy and to the people who don't feel that they're anything - but the invitation still goes out to those who do! The invitation goes out to the Pharisee as well as the cripple, so that the house may be full.

And the result is, he says, "I tell you, not one of these will taste of my banquet." There's a sting in the tail of the parable. You can't compel if you don't confront. I know it's a popular thing today to say, "We have to present it in a non-confrontational way." That's very modern. But you can't compel if you don't confront. You've got to tell the truth, you've got to tell it the way the Bible says it, the way Jesus would've said it. He confronted all the time! This whole parable, this whole portion, is Jesus confronting the people and the Pharisees and the lawyers and the people who are asking questions - He's confronting them.

The Jews of the day had no valid reason for turning on Jesus or His message. In fact, they had every reason to accept Him as the Messiah. All they had to do was turn to their own scriptures - our scriptures, Isaiah 52 in the last few verses through Isaiah 53 - and you see Jesus: the cross, the reason for His dying, the reason for His coming. They had no excuse.

But the detail that the invitation has been opened up to societies maimed and downtrodden is very important for us to take stock of because He keeps coming back to it, right through His whole ministry. There are types of people whom the Pharisees considered 'unclean' or 'under God's curse'. You can study for yourselves in John 9:1-2 and verse 34 we see the blind man, blind from birth, and even the disciples said, "Who sinned? This man or his parents?" At the end in verse 34, the Pharisees said, "You were born in sin." And Jesus had to correct them. The blind man was considered 'unclean'. But Jesus had always taught that the Kingdom was available to those who were considered 'unclean'.

In Acts 10, on the rooftop of a house in Joppa, Peter had a vision that taught Him about the

unclean and the clean and that God has accepted everyone. He learned the lesson in Acts 10; and then in Galatians, he lost it! He forgot it again! Because we read in Galatians 2:11-14 that Paul had to tell him. Very often, we will learn a lesson from God and after a while we will forget it and we have to relearn it. That's why in scripture, a lot of the teaching of the apostles would say, "Bring it to your remembrance." They're teaching things that have been taught before. Many of us here needn't scorn things we've heard before because we need to hear them again and again because they can get plucked out of us and we can get off track, forgetting what we've already learned even from God Himself.

So the Kingdom is available to those who were considered 'unclean'. Jesus' involvement with the tax collectors and sinners brought condemnation from the Pharisees. But yet, it showed the extent of God's grace. If you look in Matthew 9, 10 and 11 - and even in the very next chapter, Luke 15 - you'll see them condemning Him for associating with tax collectors and sinners.

God's offer of salvation blesses not only the sinning-needy; it's likewise offered to the sinning-self-righteous. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned": the 'good' people and the 'bad' people, we all have sinned, and we need forgiveness, we need Jesus. Those who ignored the master's generous invitation chose their own punishment. When we come to the Judgement Seat of God, nobody will be able to say, "That's not fair." Nobody will ever argue at the Judgement Seat because God is just and He will do the just thing. This ignoring is a tragedy because, for me, the most poignant phrase in the whole parable is found in Luke 14:17, "Come, for everything is now ready." Every time you hear the gospel message it contains, above all, the invitation to come to the table. God loves you and He wants you to come to the table.

Now the question is this: have you come in repentance and faith? Have you accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? If you have, you're sitting at the table. If not, then are you willing to come - even today - to sit at the table God has provided? Then there are those who have already come to the table but are not partaking as fully of the fair as they should be. God not only provided the invitation and the table but He's also provided everything we need for nourishment and service and blessing. And it's a sad thing to see someone who's hungry, and even starving; but it's an even sadder thing to see a person reclining at the table, full of sumptuous food and fare, and still not benefiting from what has been provided for them. They're just sitting there, but they're not partaking, and they're missing out on the blessing that has been provided.

You have a look at my left ear. It looks just like the right one. It looks quite normal. The problem: it's useless! It looks like every other ear but it's useless. It's silent. It doesn't function, at all. But it's sitting there as part of the head. And its mate on the right side is doing everything. I work on 'mono', so if you're on the left side of me and speaking to me I can't hear you. I do lip read, but masks have been no good for that... But that's what I'm

saying. There are those who sit at the table and they look legitimate, they look like all the rest, but they're doing nothing.

So what is the answer to this: how can a Christian benefit most from God's blessing? If you don't take anything away from this, please take this away, this next bit, because to me it's so important. The secret is found in Acts 20:25 where the Apostle Paul says, "The Lord Jesus himself said, 'It's more blessed to give than to receive.'" You say, "Oh I must see the verse and chapter for that!?" Well, it's not there, not in the New Testament, recorded that Jesus said that. So did Paul make it up? No, he didn't. John 30:20 tells us that not everything Jesus said was written down. Paul obviously had this handed down from other apostles and had heard this as a quotation of what Jesus had said. The secret for getting all that God has intended for His people is found in giving. That is the secret of blessing. Giving of our time, of our talents, and of our tithe. When we talk about giving, our minds automatically go towards our wallet or our purse. But that's not what it's about. It's about giving 'ME'! And I'll borrow from Lara's quotation from a couple of weeks ago when she quoted from Romans 12:1, "Therefore," Paul said, "I urge you, brothers and sisters, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. That is your true and proper worship."

And that is the focus that we're doing at the church. That is the part of rebuilding. That is the part of discipleship. That is the part of living as a Christian, day by day by day - not just on a Sunday morning, but day by day by day. It is in blessing. And this is what I want you to take home: the way to blessing is to be a blessing. That's the secret. We all want to be blessed; we all try to get blessing; we come here to receive blessing. That is not where blessing lives. Blessing lives in us being a blessing: in our homes, in our families, in our friends, in our neighbourhood, in our church... Be a blessing! Find out where you can be a blessing to others and I guarantee you, standing on the promise of the Word of God, that you will be blessed because God has provided everything we need.