

SERMON TRANSCRIPT



Ormskirk Christian Fellowship  
Sunday 03 March 2013

## The Favour of God

The passage that we're looking at this morning comes from a conversation that takes place in the home of a prominent Pharisee. He's provided lunch for the other Pharisees and scribes mentioned in verse three, and they've invited Jesus along, because they want to trap him into healing a man, violating the Sabbath and proving that he's not from God. Jesus outwits them. He heals the man, and then challenges their attitudes. They really were hypocrites. Jesus goes on to talk about humility, and he concludes in verse 14 that those who are humble will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

The Pharisees knew he was talking about eternal life. They knew what the resurrection of the righteous was. What Jesus was trying to tell them was that they were too proud to enter the kingdom. Instead of clamouring for chief seats at a banquet or holding their own banquet and inviting only prominent people, they needed to reach out in humility and seek the last place, or reach out in humility and invite the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.

In other words, he was telling them, again, that they'd got everything wrong. They needed to humble themselves if they ever wanted to end up at the resurrection of the righteous. They thought that they **were** the righteous, and the resurrection was their whole hope. They were holding out for the resurrection, because that's all they had to look forward to in their otherwise very difficult, burdensome, painful, self-sacrificing, limiting existence as legalists.

They lived their lives according to very minute prescriptions, often in deprivation, enduring self-sacrifice and endless rituals. The weight of their legalism went down even to the very minute details of eating every day. They were willing to suffer in this life to gain eternal life in the next, and to be free from such limitations in the future. They actually believed that the more rules they kept, the more assured they could be of a part in the resurrection of the righteous, so they added more traditions to the laws of Scripture to keep their place secure.

They pictured it as a banquet. That was because the prophet Isaiah had described it that way. Isaiah 25: "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

So when Jesus speaks of the resurrection of the righteous and it happens to be during lunch, somebody begins to think 'isn't it going to be wonderful when we all get to the great banquet of God, when we all get to the resurrection of the righteous?' In verse 15 he says, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." Almost sounds like a toast, doesn't it? It's almost as if he picks up his cup of wine and says 'Blessed is everyone who will be eating at the banquet in the kingdom of God' and the rest of them say 'here, here'. This is an affirmation of two things. Affirmation that they were going to be there, and affirmation that they didn't accept what Jesus had just said. Basically, Jesus had just told them that they were too proud to enter the kingdom of God. There needs to be a dramatic change. You need to humble yourself, to seek the last place and not the first; but they had nothing but scorn and contempt for the comments of Jesus, if indeed they'd bothered to process them at all.

They were convinced that because of their fastidious and dutiful observance of the law and Jewish traditions, they were going to be part of the righteous resurrection and would be sitting at the great banquet of God, eating in the kingdom. Really, they're just pronouncing blessing upon their own heads, making a toast to themselves, displaying pure arrogance; confident that they were okay, that they would not only qualify to be there, but they'd also have prominent seats. That was so much a part of Jewish thinking that even the disciples got caught up in it. Do you remember James and John sending their mother to ask Jesus if they could sit on the right and left? It was exactly the same mentality. It was in the fabric of how people thought.

Well, Jesus always sought to shatter false religious hope. He never put His arm around a Pharisee and said well, we worship the same God so we're both going to be there. He never put His arm around a scribe who was living in delusion and said to Him, well you're a student of the Old Testament and you're worshipping the God of Israel, and we're both going to be there. He never put His arms around a synagogue crowd and said what you're doing is really good, well done. God is going to accept your religious efforts in his name as being enough. Jesus always sought to shatter false religious hope. He was always honest. Anybody who lives under some kind of misguided assumption that they're headed for heaven needs to know it's not true. They need to be immediately, unmistakably and clearly corrected.

You can't put your arms around people and say well, because you're religious, because you have 'faith' you're okay. Especially in the climate today, where everybody has their own faith, and whatever that might be is fine. Everybody's got faith in something, but it means nothing, unless that faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Why do people trust in religion? Because they think it's going to get them to the resurrection of the righteous. It's going to get them into the kingdom of God. Why do they go through all the rituals and requirements and duties and responsibilities and constraints and moral codes? They make all those sacrifices so that some day they won't have to any more; they'll get to be in heaven. That's how the Pharisees lived. That was how the Jews lived. But it was a delusion, because they weren't headed for heaven at all. Jesus needed to shatter their false hope, to correct them, by telling them this story.

Verse 16: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests." The important words here are great and many. This is a huge event. This is a very wealthy man. He has a dinner in mind, and it's going to be a grand banquet. He invites a huge number of people. The man is obviously prominent because he's got the means to do this. It might well have gone on for days. He invites a huge number of people and the invitation would arrive in a very personal, formal way, just like an invitation would come to you today, for a wedding or some similar kind of event. When **we** get one of those, it tells us where it is, when it is, and exactly what time we're supposed to be there, but in Jesus' time it wasn't like that. The actual day and time were always left open. It would be at some point in the future, to be confirmed, because in a world without clocks and watches, life moved at a different pace, and in a world where you had to catch the animals, kill the animals, clean the animals, cook the animals then get all the vegetables and everything else prepared, a more specific time couldn't be given at the first invitation, so there were always two. The first invitation identified you as somebody who was being invited as an honoured guest, and then you waited to get the second invitation, which basically said (as it does in verse 17 here), "Come for everything is now ready."

This isn't just a lunch at someone's house after the morning service; this is a huge event. The story suggests that everyone sent an invitation has already accepted. Nobody refuses, or it certainly doesn't say so anyway, and according to Jewish custom, that's almost certainly the way it would have been. Pharisees loved to be at banquets, and they always sought the chief seats because these were the places of honour and prominence and public vision. Everybody would have said yes, absolutely. This would be an honour, not only the lavish spread and the great entertainment, but also the status and prominence you'd receive just from being invited.

But at the final hour, when all the animals had been killed and skinned and prepared, when everything had been gathered and was ready and the servant goes to find those who've been invited and says "come now," the most bizarre thing happens. Everybody says that they can't. All of them. They all come up with excuses. Now this is where the Pharisees start laughing. I mean, this is ridiculous; nobody would do that. What a joke. This is churlish, it's rude and it's unrefined. This is outrageous and unacceptable conduct. This would never happen. This kind of breach of courtesy and kindness to a man who had prepared massive feast; to say I'm sorry I'm not going to come - for **everybody** to say that - well, it's a terrible breach of social ethics.

Some near eastern traditions would actually equate this to a declaration of war, because when you're invited to a meal with someone, that's an extension of friendship. So, if you refuse the invitation, that's a statement that you want no friendship with the other person. The Pharisees and the scribes must have been looking at each other and saying this is absurd. In this kind of situation, not even one person would do that, let alone everybody.

And then, just to emphasise the point, Jesus offers three sample excuses. The first, in verse 18, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it." What? Where do you think the field is going to go? What are you going to look at, dirt? You're turning down a lavish banquet to go and look at dirt? That's absurd. The Pharisees would be chuckling here, because this story is getting funnier by the minute. Nobody would do that. The dirt's not going anywhere. It's a lame, absurd, ridiculous excuse.

The second, in verse 19, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out." Listen; if you had five yoke of oxen, you were a very wealthy landowner. If you had that kind of money, you'd have labourers too. You're going to try out your oxen, instead of going to this lavish banquet? You don't think that your oxen could be tried out another time? Can't you delegate the job to someone else? That's ridiculous.

The third, in verse 20, the only one that seems even remotely possible. You're already there, right? Maybe some of you can identify with this one. "I just got married, so I can't come." That new wife of mine, well, she just stamped her sandal and said 'we're not going'. If I was still single I'd be there, but I'm married now and I confess to being henpecked (nothing new under the sun?) Deuteronomy 24 says that if you married a wife, you could take leave for a year from military service, and from having to go away on long business trips and things like that, but a dinner? A banquet? A chance for the wife to get a new frock? Nobody would make an excuse like that. Even if the man was henpecked, he'd probably be so ashamed to admit it, that he'd make up a different excuse anyway.

The story is getting more and more absurd by the minute. There's a problem here; a massive banquet and nobody who wants to attend. So the servant comes back, verse 21, and reports all these ridiculous excuses. The master of the house becomes angry, and understandably so. There's been tremendous effort, a tremendous amount of work and expense gone into this; tremendous generosity and kindness, but all he's been met with is indifference and disdain.

So he says to the 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 show will go on. The preparations are done. We're not going to cancel this event. Every place will still be filled, but they're going to be taken by the most unlikely of people. Don't forget, Jesus has already told the Pharisees in verses 12 & 13, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind." He says it again here. "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town." We're talking about the street people here. We're talking about the beggars and the outcasts who live in the slums, who live in the shanties. We're talking about the outcasts, the untouchables. Go to the poor sections of town. Find the scum, the riffraff, and bring them here.

Well, now the story goes from one kind of preposterous idea (that the people originally invited wouldn't come at all), to an equally preposterous idea (that the master would throw his house open to all and sundry). Neither of these things are remotely 'normal' in Jewish society, and neither would have happened in real life. The original guests would never have turned down the invitation in the first place, and the marginalised of society would never have been asked. Jews prided themselves on never touching outcasts, and scorned Jesus for associating with prostitutes and tax collectors. These people fell way below the waterline of social acceptance.

But the master tells his servant to go and bring them in. The verb **bring** is important here. He had to **bring** these people in, because he knew that there would be resistance. Everybody knew that social protocol was all about reciprocation. If I host a banquet for my rich friends, my rich friends will host a banquet for me; that's the way it worked. The elite stayed together and scratched each other's backs, and the poor stayed together and did the same. These poor people would have said 'Look, I can't repay anything. I've got nothing to give. I don't want to come to the banquet because then I'll be obliged to arrange one in return and I can't do that. I have no capability to do that. I'm not worthy to even come to the house.'

The servant, in verse 22 says, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room." So in verse 23, the master says to the servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in." You have to **compel** them. You need to **bring** the ones from the

town who are going to resist because they can't pay me back and they know they don't belong here. But when you go to the roads and country lanes it's going to be even more difficult, so you'll need to **compel** these people to come in. Never mind **bringing** them, you need to **compel** them. They don't even have houses inside the city; some of them aren't allowed into the city. They live outside the walls; they're highway people. They live in the brothels, inns, roadhouses, trees and bushes along the way. You'll need to **compel** these people to come in.

In verse 24 Jesus says, "I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet." The way this gets translated in the NIV, and to English generally, seems to suggest that it's still the master of the house talking here ... the master of the house saying 'not one of those whom **he** has invited, will get a taste of **his** banquet.' But that's not what it says in the original text. The phrase "I tell you ..." appears six or seven times in the gospel of Luke, and every time, it's at the point when Jesus applies a story directly to his audience. Here, in the original, he moves from talking in the third person, to talking in the first and second person.

Verse 24 is no longer the story ... this is the application. Jesus isn't talking about the master of the house and **that** banquet any more; he's talking to the Pharisees about himself and the Messianic dinner. He's talking about heaven. He's talking about the great banquet of God for the resurrection of the righteous. He's talking about a heavenly celebration; salvation, eternal kingdom, resurrection, life. He's warning the Pharisees 'you too will be excluded from that heavenly banquet ... you also will not be in the kingdom of God ... despite what you think, you too will not be among the blessed ... you will not be there at the resurrection of the righteous.

You see, the real invitation in this story comes from God. He's the master of the house. He's hosting this; a dinner of salvation, the eternal kingdom, the resurrection of the righteous, the heavenly celebration, a lavish banquet in glory; and he's already invited, through the prophets and the men of God and the authors of Old Testament Scripture, all of his guests; the chosen people of God, the nation of Israel, to whom the Scriptures and covenants and promises of the Messiah were originally given. He's already invited them.

They've all said yes. He'd told them that they were his chosen people; that he had prepared and provided for their eternal life. He'd invited them to that eternal life. He'd invited them to that heavenly banquet. He'd invited them into His eternal kingdom and they believed it. They truly believed that they would be resurrected into heavenly glory and blessing. That was their hope. It's still the hope of all religious Jews today. They believe that they will be recipients of all the Old Testament promises. They really do believe that.

At the appointed time, once the lavish banquet had been prepared, the New Testament tells us that God sent his servant to inform those who had already been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready." Some people think this means Jesus himself, some think it means the apostles, and some people think it means both. All we really need to recognise is that they were the messengers and they all said the same thing "Come, for everything is now ready" the kingdom is ready, the door is open, the meal is provided, salvation is here." The nation of Israel, the pre-invited guests, received their second invitation, but they began to make excuses.

They weren't interested in the message of Jesus, even in Jesus himself. When the true gospel of salvation came, they wanted to stone him. One message in the synagogue in Nazareth and they tried to throw him off a cliff. They had no interest in the banquet of God, if Jesus was the door to the banquet hall. They had no interest in the banquet of God, if Jesus was the only way to get there. In chapter 13 verse 34, Jesus said, "I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate." God took a step back.

God had been dishonoured, scorned, affronted. His goodness, his generosity and his kindness had been treated with contempt. 'The master of the house had every right to be angry' the Pharisees concluded ... but so does God with all those who reject his Son. This story may have seemed ridiculous to them at first, but their amusement would be short-lived once they found themselves facing the anger of God. John 3:36 says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them."

When you grasp this, what Jesus says makes far more sense; go out and find the people who are spiritually destitute. Go out and find the people who are broken and hungry. Go out and find the sinners who know they're unworthy. Go out and find those who are ashamed of their wretchedness; the tax collectors and riffraff. Go out and find the beggars, untouchables, those aware of their spiritual uselessness, hopelessness and unworthiness. The banquet is not for the Pharisees, scribes, rabbis and priests; it won't include the stuck-up synagogue elite, but it is open to outcasts. God has chosen the humble and the poor and the lowly and the nobodies.

Verse 23, "Go out to the roads and country lanes." He means to the Gentiles. Go beyond the confines of Judaism. Go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, to people of every tongue and tribe and nation and compel them. If you want a place at **this** banquet, **my** banquet, it's not about saying here I am Jesus, aren't you glad to have me? It's about saying Jesus, I'm not worthy, I don't deserve this, but I call on your favour, mercy and grace.

God gave the first invitation in the Old Testament and reiterates this in John the Baptist. Once everything was ready Jesus himself comes, and with the apostles he preaches and delivers the second invitation. Israel rejects him, so the salvation of God stretches even further, to a small remnant of outcast Jews who do finally grasp it, and then through the great commission, to the Gentiles and to the rest of the world. The favour of God is now upon us.

Maybe you've already received God's invitation to the banquet, but you've used some kind of lame or ridiculous excuse too. Maybe this morning, you're hearing it for the very first time. There are a few things in the bible that we don't entirely understand, but there's absolutely no question about this bit. Anyone who rejects Jesus will never experience the celebration that God has prepared in heaven, for those who love his Son. The gospel is God's invitation to you, but what's **your** response going to be to him?

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Father, we thank you for the power and the potency of this story. We may never know how those Pharisees responded, but we're reminded that your invitation is extended to everyone, even to us; to the broken and humble and meek and mourning and destitute and lowly, to all who recognise how unworthy they are, yet still accept your invitation to enter the Kingdom.

Holy Spirit, we pray that you would extend that invitation with grace and power to every heart here. May there be no foolish excuses, just an embracing of our only hope of salvation, our only hope of eternal life, the Lord Jesus. May the truth we've learned today be useful to us, not only for ourselves, but as we reach out to others. May we, like Jesus, challenge those who live with false hope, or with no hope at all; may your favour rest upon them as well.

As we approach the communion table this morning, thank you for the immeasurable sacrifice that you made for us. We eat and drink in remembrance of you, reminding ourselves of your great love, until you come again. Give us a fresh revelation of our identity in you, as we share this meal in fellowship with one another.

We ask all these things for the glory of your name. Amen.