

Message Summary

Does God want a full house? In God's Name, many have employed gimmicks, trickery, and entertainment to fill sanctuaries. In such cases, the goal of filling buildings is successful, but the right purpose for such filling - the preaching of the gospel - is itself forfeited in the process. Jesus clearly does not want this kind of growth. But there is another kind of growth, the growth of real disciples in healthy churches, as more and better disciples are formed. God wants this kind of growth, that his banquet hall may be full.

Over the past couple weeks, Pastor Deric has led us through Jesus' challenges to the Pharisees who invited him to a banquet (Lk. 14:1-14). This week's story opens with a Pharisee's comment: "*Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God!*" (v. 15). Though true and uncontroversial, Jesus gets to the heart of the man's comment. The kingdom surely will be a feast, with all a feast ought to be: food, fun, and celebration, with perfect relationships and God's presence forever, where we can experience God's command to "*taste and see that the Lord is good*" (Ps. 34:8). But attending this feast means dropping worldly priorities and making the kingdom one's ultimate priority.

Despite the feast's grandeur, the invitees made excuses. The first had purchased property, and wanted to see it. Apparently, seeing the property beforehand and being able to see it afterwards were not enough. He had to miss the heavenly banquet with God to survey his plot of land. The second had purchased oxen, indicating a wealthy status. His priorities were more in keeping and managing his earthly wealth than enjoying heavenly glories beyond what money could purchase. Both were polite, and seemed to think their reasons were valid: "*Please have me excused*" (vv. 18, 19). The third, however, saw no reason to request being excused, as his reason was (allegedly) so self-evidently excusable: "*I have married a wife*" (v. 20). The third guest forsook his relationship with God for someone God had made.

The Master (who in the story represents God) responds with anger against those who have ignored his invitation. Unlike human anger expressed for selfish reasons in sinful ways, God's anger is righteous, just, and directed against sin. It is an integral part of the kingdom message. In response, the Master commanded the servant to go to the streets and lanes to invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind (v. 21). Still there was room. The master then commanded the servant to go to the highways and hedges - anywhere with people. The servant was to not only invite, but compel and persuade, those who may not even know the banquet was occurring. Thousands of years later, the force of Christ's commands remain: heed Christ's invitation to the heavenly banquet above earthly priorities, and persuade anyone - everyone - around us to also enter.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Why is the kingdom portrayed as a banquet? What is the best part of the heavenly banquet we get to look forward to? (See esp. Revelation 7:9-10)

What is the difference between gimmicks that falsely represent the gospel just to fill buildings and a righteous desire to see God's house full? How can we fulfill our commission to persuade others to come to the heavenly banquet while also avoiding disingenuous methods to do so?

What is the difference between sinful human anger and God's righteous anger (see v. 21; Nahum 1:2; Rev. 19:15)? Why is God's wrath an integral part of the kingdom message?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.

1. Have you heeded Christ's invitation to attend his heavenly banquet, or are worldly distractions causing you to avoid it?
2. When seeking to persuade others to come to the heavenly banquet, are you too easily discouraged by people's rejection or empty promises? How can you be more steadfast this week in compelling others, despite past or current rejection?
3. What excuses are you prone to make to excuse yourself from the heavenly banquet? In what areas are worldly priorities overshadowing heavenly ones?
4. Like the first two invitees, do material possessions and worldly pursuits prevent kingdom priorities from being ultimate? How can you use good worldly opportunities as tools to make kingdom priorities ultimate?
5. Like the recently married third invitee, are you prone to forsake your relationship with God for a relationship (even a good one!) with someone He made?
6. What does your anger reveal about your priorities? Does it tend to be directed towards righteous causes or unjust, worldly priorities?
7. Do you share God's heart for his house to be full, or are you more concerned with building and filling your own house?
8. Who will you encounter this week that you can compel and persuade to come to the heavenly banquet?
9. Are there any "poor, crippled, blind, and lame" (v. 21) around you that you have overlooked as you persuade some to come to the heavenly banquet?
10. Are you prone towards any illegitimate gimmicks or fraudulent gospels to try to compel others to come to the banquet? How can you preach a more robust gospel this week?

Prayer

- Pray for Our Church:
 - Thank God for inviting us to his heavenly banquet of eternal bliss at the cost of his Son
 - Pray that the Lord would protect our church's hearts from misplaced worldly priorities that distract us from our kingdom mission. Pray that we would have right perspectives of marriage, property, etc., as good gifts entrusted for greater kingdom purposes.
- Pray for Our Community:
 - Pray that God would lead us to compel and persuade many in our community to attend the heavenly banquet. Pray that the Lord would make his house full of many in Etowah county who will heed this heavenly call.
 - Pray for a great expansion of Christ Fellowship's VBS to many neighborhoods in our community, and for many to hear the true gospel and be compelled to come to the heavenly banquet with us.
- Pray for Our World:
 - Pray that the Lord would use Christ Fellowship to compel many around the world to join in the heavenly banquet. Pray for a fulfillment of Rev. 7:9-10.