

Home Church Study Guide—May 9, 2010
An Expensive/ Free Dinner: The Cost of Discipleship (Luke 14)

Jesus was always concerned with deepening people's understanding of the kingdom—so when occasions arrived which provided opportunities to teach, Jesus took advantage. Status seating was very much an issue. At several official meals, the host first chose his seat. Then he offered the rest of the seats in appropriate order according to his perceived value of the guests. This is what Jesus is observing as he begins His parable. Surely Jesus is demonstrating how the whole issue of status determined by where one sits is laughable! Even though Jesus makes fun of their desire for importance, He ends His treatment of this subject with two truths—only through humility can one find true exaltation, and those who seek exaltation will be humbled. Jesus is inviting us to participate in kingdom life by inviting people who have no way of repaying us to sit at our tables and feast on our generosity. Jesus is gently calling us to change our “quid pro quo” way of living (I do this for you, you do this for me) and step into the wonderful kingdom of unconditional love and hospitality. If we would intentionally invite people to our table who have nothing to offer in return, Jesus says we would be blessed by repayment at the final day of accounting. It is important not to get lost in the specific example of “inviting one to dinner.” In Jesus' day, this was *the* way of offering favor with the expectation of a returned favor. The principle Jesus is teaching is bigger than a dinner party for the underprivileged. Jesus is calling us to live in the image of a God, who does not call us to His table because of what we can offer Him, but blesses us because that is His nature. Jesus invites us to fully reject the very idea of status, which is reflected in giving to anyone in need, not just those who can repay.

The parable of the great dinner gives us rich insight into the heart of God. It is a warning to some, but a teaching that brings great joy to those who think of themselves as unworthy to sit at God's table. It seems that His parable is in response to the assumption that the Pharisees and their friends will indeed be at the banquet table of God. Indeed, they were invited, but they made excuses—none of which were deemed justifiable. Then, the owner of the house invited all those who normally would never be invited to such a feast. And after all of these came, there was still room. So the master sent his servants out again, for the table was to be filled, and those first invited would never taste the dinner. We must see this parable as applicable to the final feast in the presence of God. Those first invited had clearly shown they had interests other than God's. The ministry and teaching of Jesus, inviting us to the table of God (the kingdom of God) has made clear that the religious leaders of Jesus' day simply had no interest in God's invitation. They had other things to do. Don't miss the irony of what was happening. Those who presumptuously knew they would be at God's final table had refused to come to it. The kingdom was among them in Jesus. The feast was prepared. But they were too busy with their status, with their own little kingdoms, with their families...so at the invitation to sit with God and feast they turned away. Jesus demonstrated through His ministry what God was doing—all were now invited, for the feast will not be wasted.

Lesson 1: Nothing is worth missing the invitation to God's feast—which is among us now and will be fully realized at the second coming of Jesus. **Lesson 2:** The invitation is now open. We accept it by offering the open generosity of God to those around us. By refusing to live by the standard of “How will this benefit me” and instead serving all, we walk into the feast of the kingdom. **Lesson 3:** The feast will not be wasted. The joy of the banquet and the nature of the feast does not depend on us. Just because we think we are invited doesn't mean we will taste God's dinner. The truly blessed are those who understand the nature of the feast and participate in that feast now by living the life Jesus came to model for us.

We have tried to be authentic disciples with one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom, and the chasm between the two is too wide. We need to stand fully in one and dismiss the other. The materialistic world in which we live will not allow for one to carry the cross of self-death. Jesus' call is to a liberated life that can only be found in carrying this cross. Only then can we respond freely to the call of God to follow His obedient Son into the depths of the kingdom. This radical kind of faith is to see the kingdom for what it truly is and to create new models of undivided faithfulness to Him. Can we let go of our possessive attitudes and embrace a life of open generosity? Can we cultivate a life of fruit-bearing for God's glory and the expansion of His kingdom? This challenge is open to all. However, Jesus makes it clear that for the rich, it is a much more challenging and problematic venture. Most of us are rich. Let's pray that our worthless material possessions don't dilute the salt of discipleship to which we are called. “Let anyone with ears to hear, listen.”

“So What” for Home Church discussion:

1. Do you think we realize the amazing invitation we have been given to sit at the banquet table of God? What can we do to make this more meaningful? (by this I mean life in God's kingdom, not just the Lord's table)
2. In what ways has our commitment to discipleship become a true blessing to those around us?
3. Consider hosting a “kingdom banquet.” Organize a meal together, and intentionally invite those you otherwise would not invite—“the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.”