

Date: November 20, 2009

Title: Are You Going to the Banquet?

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Scripture:

**12** Then [Jesus] turned to his host. “When you put on a luncheon or a banquet,” he said, “don’t invite your friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors. For they will invite you back, and that will be your only reward.**13** Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.**14** Then at the resurrection of the righteous, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you.”

### **Parable of the Great Feast**

**15** Hearing this, a man sitting at the table with Jesus exclaimed, “What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the Kingdom of God!”**16** Jesus replied with this story: “A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations.**17** When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, ‘Come, the banquet is ready.’**18** But they all began making excuses. One said, ‘I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.’**19** Another said, ‘I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.’**20** Another said, ‘I now have a wife, so I can’t come.’**21** “The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious and said, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’**22** After the servant had done this, he reported, ‘There is still room for more.’**23** So his master said, ‘Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.**24** For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet.’” Luke 14:12-24 (NLT)

Well, you all know it is coming. The big feast. Turkey day. Thanksgiving. This is that one holiday that can sort of slip up on us without our noticing. Apart from the \$5.00 turkeys and the cans of cranberries on the end of the aisle in the grocery store there is not a lot of hoopla about Thanksgiving. It sort of gets eclipsed by its big sister holiday, Christmas. And of course this makes sense, doesn't it. I mean Christmas is all about buying lots of gifts and decorations and getting together with family so that we can give and receive gifts. And it's about waiting for those after Christmas specials where you can buy your own gifts if you don't get what you want for Christmas.

While Christmas begins to parade around sometime right after Halloween, Thanksgiving has to follow along behind wearing a pilgrim hat and carrying a frozen turkey. For the most part, Thanksgiving is pretty simple, it's usually just a meal; sometimes it's with family and sometimes with friends. But you know I think it is interesting that when Jesus is talking about the coming Kingdom of God he compares it to a meal.

Throughout the scriptures both the Old and New Testament, the sharing of a meal is a very important part of how people relate to each other. Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding feast when he turned water into wine. (John 2:1-10) and Jesus turned the act of sharing bread and wine together into a sacred means of grace for all the church. (Luke 22:20) Several times in the four gospels we see Jesus sharing a meal with people as he teaches and preaches. And even after Jesus' resurrection, there are a couple of times when Jesus shares a meal with his followers. Apparently, Jesus found that there was just something special about sharing a meal with other people.

I think it is still the same today. We probably do it a little less formally, but why do you think we have so many pot-lucks? Sharing a meal is a connecting act. If your daughter or son wants to introduce a serious boyfriend or girlfriend to the family, often times it happens over dinner where the whole family can get to know this new potential addition to the family. When someone wants to make an important announcement, often it is made at some sort of banquet.

In our scripture, Jesus tells the story of a man who decides to have a big feast for all of his friends. (Or at least he thought they were friends) Presumably, the man represents God. Now, you probably noticed that Jesus doesn't give a reason for the feast. He just says that *a man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations*. What do you suppose that feast was about? Do you suppose it was a Thanksgiving feast? The text doesn't say they were having turkey, but they might have. The text doesn't say that the wide screen TV would be on for the big football game, but it might have been. The text doesn't say that the host was going to serve Aunt Janice's mince meat pie, but He might have. All we get is that there was a great feast and all kinds of people were invited to come. I'm guessing the mayor was invited. I'm guessing that the city council members were invited. Probably invited all the movers and shakers from the town, because this was a big banquet.

But, what happened? They didn't come. You can imagine how that must have felt to the man who prepared this great big feast with all the food anyone might want to eat and no one showed up. Not the mayor, not the city council members, not the movers and shakers, none of them. It's really kind of sad isn't it? This big banquet all ready, and not one of the invited guests comes to the table.

So, we don't blame him for what he does next, do we? I mean the table is set; he has all this food prepared. We wouldn't want the food to go to waste. That would be terrible, wouldn't it?

So, when the man sends his servants out into the street to find others who might appreciate a good meal we are not surprised are we. No one is surprised. The servants are ordered to find the cripple and the down-trodden. They were to tell those who would ordinarily not be invited to such an affair that they were now to come to the table. And when even these did not fill up the house the servants were sent to find more.

Now, Jesus does not very often give us the rest of the story, so we are often left to our own imagination to fill in the story a little bit. You know what I think happened after the man threw such a wonderful party? I can imagine that everyone who ended up going to the banquet had such a good time. I can imagine that for days after the banquet people were talking about how much fun they had. And how do you suppose the people who were first invited felt after hearing what they had missed? Pretty rotten, I would guess.

You can hear them talking down at the coffee shop, "Man, did we blow it! Party of the year and we were too busy taking care of business. What were we thinking?"

It was the party of the year and those who were too busy – too preoccupied with other cares missed it altogether.

Do you know what I think? I think that same thing might happen this year too – at Thanksgiving, I mean. I mean we all have this great opportunity to get together and reflect on the blessings that have come into our lives this year. We can take some time to really be with the people we love the most. And if circumstances don't allow for us to actually be together, we can still

spend time being grateful for their presence in our lives. We can take some time to reflect on the best of the blessings that have made our lives what they are and we can thank God for those blessings. And Thanksgiving can be a wonderful banquet in honor of and in gratitude for Jesus Christ, the one who has made all of this possible. We can do that.

Or...we can let it be one more day; one more meal; we can just move on with our lives. We can act like the people in Jesus' parable who were invited to the banquet, but were too preoccupied to show up. And you might say, Well, I'm certainly not going to stand up Aunt Suzie; I'm going to the dinner. I'll be there.

But, I'm convinced that it is quite possible to show up at Aunt Suzie's or Grandma Josie's for Thanksgiving dinner, but never really come to the banquet. Oh, we arrive at the house. We greet everyone politely. We engage in a little polite conversation and then we forget about why we are there. We sit down in front of the TV or we pick up a magazine and we might as well have stayed home because our minds are full of the world all it's distractions and there is really no room for anything else.

This Thanksgiving, God is putting on a banquet and we're all invited. You might be asked to bring the mashed potatoes or the pumpkin pie. Or, you might be asked to share your house or to cook a turkey in your kitchen. You might be invited to simply show up.

I'm convinced that whether you are getting together with dozens of people or with just a few, Thanksgiving day and the meal that usually comes with it is meant to be a banquet of gratitude that is made possible by the one Lord God who created all of it. It's a banquet of gratitude for all God has done in our lives and the lives of others. And if we attend that banquet as completely as we possibly can, fully engaged and as conscious as we can be about what a gift our family or friends are in our lives and how thankful

we are for all of them... then we get to see it – you know that thing we pray for every week, we get to see it: “Thy Kingdom Come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

When we open our eyes and our hearts to all God has done and is doing in our lives we have the chance to actually get to see a preview of the Kingdom of God at a Thanksgiving dinner.

- Oh, I’d hate for you to miss it...just because you’re distracted by the problem you are trying to work out at your job,
- or just because you’re so tuned into the football game that you never really have a chance to think about all you are thankful for,
- or just because you are planning your shopping strategy for the sales that are happening the next day.

There is so much going on in our world these days and much of it really good stuff, but if we are not careful that “good stuff” distracts us and it gets us preoccupied and all too easily we lose sight of and forget to be thankful for the blessings that God showers on us constantly.

In his book, A Hunger for God John Piper writes:

*The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night. For all the ill that Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet table of his love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14:18 – 20). The greatest adversary of love to God is not his enemies but his gifts. And the deadliest appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable and almost incurable.*

*Jesus said some people hear the word of God, and a desire for God is awakened in their hearts. But then “as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life” (Luke 8:14 NASB). In another place he said, “The desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:19 NASB). “The pleasures of this life” and “the desires for other things” are not evil in themselves. These are not vices. These are gifts of God. They are your basic meat and potatoes and coffee and gardening and reading and decorating and traveling and investing and TV-watching and Internet-surfing and shopping and exercising and collecting and talking.*

*And all of them can become deadly substitutes for God.*

*— John Piper,*

*A Hunger for God (Crossway, 1997)*

The things of this world can be so poisonous. With no evil intentions we can get distracted by the good stuff and by doing so miss the very best. I would so hate for you to miss the very best.

It's almost Thanksgiving and the word is... God is preparing a banquet and you're all invited. From what I've heard, you won't want to miss it. It's going to be the best party of the year. Amen.