

His Table – Where Grace Hosts Humble Hearts!

Lk 14:1-24 (text:7-24)

7 April 2019, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 a.m.
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Once, a pastor of the RCNZ arranged to speak with a Christian outreach group in India. He put in a great effort in preparing his lectures and sermons. He also paid the return airfare. Then he departed and flew through the night!

But what a shock awaited him, the next morning, when he arrived at the airport in India! This was what he had to hear: “Sorry, sir!” “We cannot allow you to enter India!”

“But why?” said he!

Came the reply: “Sir, we’ve looked through your NZ passport, but we see no visa for India in there!” “So, sorry, sir!” “We can’t let you enter!”

He tries again, “But, those who have come to pick me up at the airport are standing at the arrival gate!” “They’re waiting for me!” “Can’t you let me in?” “Besides, I have made appointments in India for the next two weeks!” “Please, let me in!”

“Sorry, sir!” “We can’t!” “You have no visa for India!”

And who’s to blame?

Only the pastor!

My brother & sister, what an embarrassment! What a shock! Think of the money wasted – the time lost, and the disappointment for that pastor and those who were expecting him!

Well, according to our Lord Jesus’ parable of v.16-24, greater will be the shock for many when, on the Last Day, they have to hear, “Sorry, you cannot enter My Kingdom, nor can you sit at the Wedding Feast of the “Lamb,” for you have never really received Me!”

So, here is the main message of our text: **Churchgoer, do you really desire entrance to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb? Well, then receive in great humility Jesus Christ the expression of God’s grace!**

Here are the sermon’s main points:

- Receive
- In Humility
- God’s Grace

Receive

It’s Sabbath

It’s mealtime

Jesus is at the home of a prominent Pharisee, and He is observing the hearts and manners of the host and his guests.

So, as a result, He now teaches them three lessons regarding entrance – but entrance to *another meal, a more important meal* – in fact, the *most* important meal, i.e. the end-time wedding feast of the Lamb!

I’ll start back-to-front, i.e. with Christ’s *third* lesson re this end-time meal. It’s a parable! Yes, Christ tells the parable of a man who once gave a great banquet and invited many.

Now here's something important: In those days, hosts gave *two* invitations. The first invitation came several weeks/months before the event. Then a second (final) invitation came *on the day* of the event.

The purpose of the first invitation was to get the exact number of guests. That helped the host to prepare the exact amount of food! Yes, now he knows exactly what & how much he should butcher on the day of the feast:

- If 8 people were coming, well just two chickens will do!
- Or if 20 guests are coming, then one sheep will do!
- Or for 70 people, a calf will be enough.

You see, they didn't have fridges or freezers; everything prepared needed to be eaten up on the same day, so the host had to know in advance exactly what (and how many) animals he should butcher.

Well Christ said (that) that first invitation had gone out!

And all who had received that first invite RSVP-ed, "Yes, we'll come!"

But now comes the morning of the day of the feast!

According to custom, this was the day on which the host sent out his servant(s) to bring the *second* invitation to those who had RSVP-ed "Yes" to the first invitation.

And this is what the servant would say, "Come, for all things are now ready!" (v.17).
(Repeat)

And, indeed, *all things* were ready and *needed* to be eaten.

Now imagine the disaster – yes, the offense – if half or all of those who had RSVP-ed "Yes" to the first invitation, would now say "No!"

What about the food (the meat and all things) that will go off!?

Besides, what slap in the face of the host who had shown affection to those he had invited, and had put his heart and greatest effort into getting all things ready!?

Well, that's exactly what happened in Christ's parable: Those, who had said "Yes" at the first invitation, said "No" at the second!

But the food/feast is ready!

And their excuses are lame – indeed, laughable:

The first one said (v.18), "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it ..."

Well, everyone hearing Christ's parable would immediately laugh, for they very well knew that, according to their customs, no one would first *buy* a field and then go and "see" it.¹

The second person's excuse is just as lame: I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out (v.19).

Again, in those days, you never bought ten oxen unseen. No, at the market where they were on sale, there was a piece of land where you had to first try them out – see how they pull together; their strength, etc.²

¹ No, in that culture, even today, each stonewall, each spring, yes, every path and tree on that land – even the anticipated rainfall were calculated into the price of the section.

What's more, *months* of negotiation went into buying a piece of land.

So, if the first person said I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it ..., "it's like someone today would say, "I have just bought a new house over the phone and I must now go and have a first look at it as well as the neighbourhood around it." Foolish!!

² It's like a farmer, today, would say, "I have just bought five used-tractors over the phone; now I'm on my way to find out their age & model & see if they will (even) start."

Would this farmer's wife not ask him, "Are you insane!?"

So, also man no. 2 had a lame excuse.

The third person's response was, 'I just got married, so I can't come' (v.20).

Another ridiculous excuse!

Weddings were arranged way in advance. So, how could someone who had RSVP-ed "Yes" to the first invitation, now say "No!"? ³

Well, Christ's first listeners would have laughed when they heard these lame excuses! Yes, they would have laughed, but only for a few seconds, for then it would have hit them right between the eyes: "Is Rabbi Jesus perhaps saying (that) *we* are those who said 'No!' to the second invite!?"

And indeed, they would be right if they concluded that, for, through this parable to all the VIP's at that prominent Pharisee's table, Christ was saying as much as:

"I'm God's Messiah! I'm bringing God's final invitation!" "But you have not shown any sign that you received Me!" "Yet you are from God's covenant people, Israel, who said "Yes!" at the first invitation!" "Look, is that not what Israel said at the time of Joshua ... '*We will serve the LORD our God and obey him*'?"⁴ "Now, here I am!" "God's very own Son – *one* with My Father!" "I'm calling you, for all things are ready!" "But look at you – you who once RSVP-ed 'Yes,' you all now say 'No!'"

"So, here is now the disaster: You don't receive Me, your Host!" "So, then there's no entry for you to the end-time wedding feast of the Lamb!"

Dear member of the Reformed Church Wainui (and dear visitor), have you received Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as your Saviour and Lord?

Perhaps you say, "No, Lord Jesus, I'm still young – there's still lots of time left. I first want to enjoy my life!"

Well, didn't you know that you can be young and still follow Jesus, and enjoy your life – on His terms! Besides, how do you know if you'll get a chance later? Couldn't the Lord end your life before you have received Him!?

Perhaps you say, "No, Jesus! I love science! I don't believe the Bible!"

Well, didn't you know that, if the scientist would interpret nature correctly, and the theologian would interpret the Bible correctly, there would be full agreement between the two! For, you see, the same God who created the universe and science with all its laws has also given us His Word! So, if for you the two seem to be at odds, it can only be because you have not yet studied both thoroughly enough.

So, why not receive Jesus as your Saviour & Lord!?

Perhaps you say, "But how do I receive Him?"

That brings us to point 2...

In Humility

You see, at that meal, our Lord observed a typical sinful human trait, i.e. to seek the praises and honour of people, i.e. to curry favour (to "suck up") with important people! Of course, that's the sin of *pride*!

³ For a much fuller description of the customs which would instantly have exposed these three lame excuses, cf. Bailey, K.E. 1983. *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: a literary-cultural approach to the parables in Luke*. Grand Rapids, MI : WB Eerdmans p.95-99.

Also cf. Hendriksen, W. 2004. *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke* (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. *New testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.731-732).

⁴ Cf. Joshua 24:24

Who at that table was the first one guilty of a pride-filled heart?

Well, it's the Pharisee!

You see, what does the name "Pharisee" mean?

It means "Separated!"⁵

Granted, initially, the Pharisees might have chosen that name to show that they're separated *for service to God*.

However, "separated" soon ended up describing something else, i.e. the Pharisees' pride & joy in the fact that they're separated from – and one *cut above* – all others, certainly above the ordinary Jews who did not follow all the Pharisee-invented laws. In fact, the Pharisees used to refer to the ordinary Jew as the *'am ha 'arets*, i.e. the people of the earth (for all practical purposes, "the scum of the earth")!⁶

And the Pharisees loved this status they had acquired for themselves!

They are looked-up to – they're the envy of the town; the cat's moustache!

Well, dear Pharisee, what has happened to humility – humility before God and people?

The pride of the Pharisee – it blinded his eyes and spirit from seeing God!

But look! Even the illustrious guests are *no different* to their Pharisee host – they, too, are craving to be in the "limelight!"

How come?

Well, because they scrambled to have the best seats of honour – closest to their host, the Pharisee!

You see, ancient Jewish texts describe how couches were arranged for special meals at the time of our Lord! The usual custom was to take three three-seater couches and arrange them in a U shape. The host would then sit at bottom of U, and the most honourable guests would then sit closest to him.⁷

What's more, the most-honourable guests were in the habit of coming later than the rest.

Why? Because they know their seats of honour are reserved.

But what would then happen?

Well, that a guest who was ranked fourth or fifth or even lower, would then come squeeze in right next to the host! But then such guest was embarrassed & shamed when the guest who was ranked no.1 or 2 turned up and the lower-ranked guest had to be told, "Move further down the rank!"

Well, says Jesus: Take the lowest seat so that you won't get shamed before all! Be humble!

All people are infected with the sin of pride!

⁵ In Late Hebrew, the word *Pharus* (פָּרוּשׁ), a Qal Passive Participle Masculine Singular "separated," became the word we (via Greek *Pharisaios* [Φαρισαῖος]) now know as *Pharisee*. For the word-root "pharas" (פָּרָשׁ) cf. "make distinct, declare (NH *separate oneself*, Pi. *separate, explain*, so Aramaic פָּרַשׁ, especially Pa.; Syriac פָּרַשׁ (*praš*) *separate, distinguish, explain*, cf. Mand., Nö²²¹);—Qal Inf. cstr. "לְפָרֵשׁ לָהֶם עַל־פִּי" Lv 24:12 (P) *to declare distinctly to them*" (Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 831). Oxford: Clarendon Press).

⁶ On this, cf. Jn 7:45-52 (especially v. 49), "**The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why did you not bring him?'**" ⁴⁶ **The officers answered, 'No one ever spoke like this man!'**" ⁴⁷ **The Pharisees answered them, 'Have you also been deceived?'**" ⁴⁸ **Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?'**" ⁴⁹ **But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.'**" ⁵⁰ **Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them,**" ⁵¹ **'Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?'**" ⁵² **They replied, 'Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.'**" (Emphasis mine).

⁷ For this description and more, cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (apud Hendriksen, *ibid*:721f.)

And look! Was pride not the first sin – the sin that caused the devil to rebel against God!? Unbelievably, even John & James (two of Jesus’ inner-circle disciples) were filled with pride!

Remember how even *they* did the same as the guests in this Pharisee’s house! Yes, remember how the mother of John & James once came to Jesus and asked on behalf of them, “(Lord), *say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.*”⁸

Shocking!

Well, v.11 now reveals that, out of this bad custom, Jesus is making a lesson of eternal value (a second lesson in our text). Yes, Jesus is turning this topical lesson into a parable – parable of the end-time Wedding Feast of the Lamb!

Says He, “*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*”

Why is pride so bad and humility so good?

My brother & sister, because pride kills our dependence on God.

As one commentator⁹ says: Pride lifts up one’s heart against God and “contends for supremacy” with God!

Proud people have self-interest, self-glorification on their minds & in their hearts!

But Pr 16:18 says, “*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall*”?

Is that not why Spurgeon¹⁰ once said – pride is a brainless thing?

But humility?

Well, true humility is a gracious God-sent which opens the sinner’s eyes so that he can see himself through the eyes of God and fall on his knees!

You want to be at that Wedding Feast?

Well, then don’t scramble for honour & glory from people.

Instead, humble yourself before God, for that’s the only way that you will see yourself through His eyes – and the only way in which you will receive the Son of God who is now broadcasting His Father’s final invitation to His table!

Look, take our Lord’s example – He who humbled Himself before the Father – even to the cross of shame for you & me.¹¹ And what did the Father then do?

He exalted Him!

Dear Wainui member (dear visitor), why not in absolute humility before Christ receive His invitation!?

⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Mt 20:21). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁹ Charles Bridges (apud Mahaney, C.J. 2005. *Humility: True Greatness*. Colorado Springs, CO : Multnomah Books. p.31)

¹⁰ Spurgeon (apud Mahaney, C.J. 2005. *Humility: True Greatness*. Colorado Springs, CO : Multnomah Books. p.39)

¹¹ Cf. Phil 2:5-11 *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

But if you exalt yourself, and think you're too clever to believe the Gospel's message, then don't be surprised when, on the Last Day, you hear "Sorry, I don't know you!"

Grace

My brother & sister, there was still one last lesson that our Lord taught over that meal. And that lesson was specifically aimed at the host – i.e. at that Pharisee and all other hosts.

So, Jesus says as much as: "Yes, don't neglect hosting your friends who could one day pay back your kindness." "But, don't forget to invite – and often so – those who cannot pay you back!"

Again, this asks of you & me who, at times, are hosting people, not to seek people's praises and payback! But to invite also those who cannot pay back our kindness – the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind (v.13)!

But look! There's something else which this lesson reveals – something which you don't see at first glance, and that is: it tells you & me something of the heart of our heavenly Father who is so unlike this Pharisee host.

You see, *so much love* does our Father have for sinners, that He, at great cost, invited them to the wedding feast at the end of time!

How did He give that invitation?

Well, by dying for the "lame" and "blind" – for the "cripple;" yes, for you & me while we were still "crook" – still sinners and unattractive!

With that, He purchased our entry to that end-time Wedding Feast of the Lamb and us His bride!

And is not this morning's Lord's Supper table a reminder of that end-time wedding feast!?

So, look, if you have been moved by God's gracious love which He has poured out on the "poor," "crippled," the "lame," and the "blind;" yes, *on undeserving sinners like you & me* – indeed, if you have been deeply touched by God's invitation to the end-time wedding feast of the Lamb and His bride, then why not receive His final invitation which He sent in the shape of His very own Son? Yes, why not receive this final invitation in heartfelt humility before God?

AMEN (2433 words excluding footnotes)