

## **A Jesus Who Welcomes Outcasts**

The Gospel According To Luke

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January 28th, 2018

Luke 14:1-35

### ***I. The Feast***

### ***II. The Invitation***

### ***III. The Cost***

Good morning greetings etc..

Our sermon for today is “A Jesus Who Welcomes Outcasts” the fourteenth chapter of Luke. We’ll read it in a minute but first I wanted to share with you a story.

The story is from this kids book called “The Curvy Tree.” Now, I’ll just tell you right away that I’m going to botch this story. Because I’m a terrible parent and wasn’t fully listening to this story when my daughter was reading it. So if you’re familiar with the kids book, “The Curvy Tree” this is the expanded and improved Duane version.

The story is about a little girl named Mary. I’m not sure if that was actually her name or if she even had a name. She might have just been little girl. Anyway, Mary was from a poor family, from a mixed race mom and dad and didn’t ever feel like she fit in. The kids in her town at her school were better off, involved in things like ballet and sports that she couldn’t afford and didn’t even really like.

What she like to do was plant plants and play in the garden. So she was always dirty, wore these big glasses and always felt like she was different and on the outside of things. You can guess what happened, kids do what kids do and they were not nice to her, didn’t include her, said unkind things to her and one day they hurt her feelings so bad she ran off into the fields crying.

She ran and she ran until she came to this tree. She had never seen the tree before, it was an odd tree, full of all kinds of knots and twisty curvy branches. She stopped at the tree and just sat down and put her heads in her hands. And then, all of the sudden the tree spoke.

He said, “It’s okay little one. I know how you feel.” She said you do? He said, “Yes. You see this whole field used to be full of trees. Nice, big, beautiful straight trees. They always made fun of me because I’m all twisted and full of curves. But one day some foresters came in and they cut down all the straight tree for lumber to make houses, but they left me because I’m crooked and useless.”

What this story taps into is what I think is a way more common feeling than we suspect. In any human interaction we have from the time we are young throughout adulthood there are three different things going on. One, how I see me. Two, how I see you. And three, how I see you seeing me.

And my guess is, more often than not the way we see ourselves is that we’re different than everyone else we see and so we try do our best to adjust our persona so that what others see is something they would like, so that we can be accepted and feel like we belong. The scenes and teaching of Jesus we’re looking at today is all about belonging and how His goal and mission in coming to earth was to do something so that we might be welcomed into His wonderful family as His special honored guests.

So let’s go ahead stand and read it. We’re tackling all of chapter fourteen today. I’ll read it, declare it as God’s Word for us, then we’ll thank Him for it and get into it.

## Luke 14:1-35

One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?" But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, "Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" And they could not reply to these things.

Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, [4] none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

"Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

- Pastoral Declaration: This is the Word of the Lord.
- Congregational Response: Thanks Be To God.

Okay. So here's how I want to go at this today. Sometimes we take it on paragraph by paragraph but today I want to take it on thematically because there are basically three components each section of this text is dealing with and referring to in one way or another, "The Feast", "The Invitation" and "The Cost." Those are the three elements and the big idea or thing I hope you take home thinking about and believing is that, "Through Jesus you belong."

## ***I. The Feast***

So let's get into this first point, "The Feast". This whole episode gets kicked off because Jesus is invited to a dinner party at "a ruler of the Pharisees" house which means this guy was a pretty big deal in the city and Jesus is the honored guest. There's bunch of people there around the table and apparently a number of others in the surrounding courtyard watching the dinner, which was the typical custom.

What happens is pretty quickly Jesus finds out He didn't get invited because this guy and His other high powered friends liked Him but because they are hoping to catch Jesus saying or doing something that would enable them to defraud Him or even arrest Him. That's what verse 1 is telling us when it says, "they were watching him carefully."

Jesus is down, so he obliges, doing something He knew would upset them, healing this guy of dropsy but before they can respond traps them by asking them a question where either answer makes them look like idiots, so they don't respond or say anything. Verse 6 says, "they could not reply to these things."

Jesus then seizes on the opportunity and launches into talking about dinners and wedding feasts that then morphs into this discussion about the great heavenly banquet of God and who is invited and gets to be at the table. We'll talk about the invitation and who gets to be at the table in a minute but before we do, I think it would be fitting for us to pause and first talk about food and feasts.

The Bible talks a lot about heaven and what it will be like. There will be houses and streets and times of work and play, as well as times of worship and times of feasting. Sometimes people think of heaven just as this great unending church service. There will be great worship services but that only one of the things that happens. One of the other primary pictures of heaven is of feasts.

I believe that is because food is important. Food is meant not just for the nourishing of our bodies but also one of the key elements which helps us connect to other human beings. There's something about a meal, eating food with others, which sets the platform for connection. Food and drink, especially if it's alcoholic, are social elixirs.

Interestingly the whole story of personal interaction in the Bible begins at the very beginning with God giving the first man and woman instructions having to do with food. He shows them the garden and tells them they can eat from the fruit of any of the trees in the garden...except one, that would be poison for them.

The Bible kind of starts off in a restaurant with God providing the menu. The man and the woman end up not listening to God and getting sick because of it. The result is God kills the first animal and tells the man he would now have to work hard to get food.

Adam's family works hard making food and populating but things turn quite sour and after a number of years God calls a man named Abraham to leave his home and follow God to a land "flowing with milk and honey." It takes a long time to get there and at one point when his descendants are

wandering across the desert, they are hungry with no food and God does a miracle literally raining food down out of the sky called “manna.”

The people slowly learn to trust God and His provision and one of the things God asked them to do to remind them of that is to once a year have this special passover meal, where they remember God’s goodness and graciousness to them.

When Jesus comes on the scene, almost right away we see Him eating and drinking with his disciples and all kinds of people. So much so that many accused Him of being a drunkard and a glutton.

In Jesus’ most famous sermon, the sermon on the mount He said, “Blessed are those who hunger for they shall be satisfied.”

In Jesus’ most famous prayer He teaches his people to pray by saying to the Father, “Give us this day our daily bread” and says that “man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

Jesus does all kinds of miracles, one time taking a few small loaves of bread and some fish and magically multiplying it to feed 7,000 people who came to see Him and hear Him. Not too long after He does the same thing again, the next time feeding 5,000 people and after that time says “unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no part of me.”

Everyone is confused by that one until right before He goes to die on the cross He has one last meal with His disciples that ends up being called “the last supper” where Jesus says the bread is His perfect life and the wine is His blood to be shed. Jesus dies on the cross, rises again and the first thing He does is have a meal with the disciples and then He ascends to heaven so they can start the church and from that time on every church gathering always had a time where they broke bread and ate it to remember Jesus and what He did.

Jesus promised to return one day and says that when does the final purging of sickness, sorrow and suffering is done away with and His people get to enter His eternal garden city and sit at a table for a fancy feast called “the marriage supper of the lamb” where we drink a new wine and a fattened calf.

The Bible is filled with references to these future feasts, the banquet of God, where all kinds of people are welcomed to the table to eat and drink and enjoy sweet fellowship with Him and one another. Here’s just two.

Isaiah 25:6 “The Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine.”

Revelation 19:7,9 "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come...Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

So when Jesus starts talking about a “wedding feast” in verse 8, they know it’s a reference to the heavenly feast which is why one of the guys pipes up and says in verse 15, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

The way that Jesus talks about this feast in our text, the feeling and sentiment that it carries and instills is this one where you should want to go there, you want to sit at that table and enjoy all the benefits it provides.

So think of it this way. What's the most expensive restaurant you've ever eaten at? Do you have it in your mind? What was it like? Think of the decor and what it looked like. Think of the food and how it tasted. Now think of one of the happiest meals you've ever had. What made it so great. What comes to mind? It's the food AND the people you ate it with isn't it?

The picture Jesus and the Bible paints of the feast is one with the best food and the best people. Getting a ticket to this event is better than a reservation at the best restaurant in the world, better than a ticket to any concert, better than an invitation to any celebrity's house. And it's one where you belong and can't help but desire..to be in a house that has everything and be there because you're actually part of the family who has a regular seat at the table.

So this first point is the backdrop of our text today Life is about relationships and one of the primary ways we experience that is through a meal where we connect with others and feel like we belong. What Jesus invited the man with dropsy, these religious leaders and then the subsequent crowds around, was to look forward to the heavenly banquet and to see Him as the ticket in...that through Jesus, we find we actually belong. Through Jesus outsiders become insiders, outcasts become honored guests.

Jesus indicates that's how we should feel and think about Him and the future but then moves on to address why we often don't feel and think like that. So let's transition and look into that in our next point, "The Invitation."

## ***II. The Invitation***

Anybody here met anyone famous? I got to meet the true and better Duane once, Dwayne the Rock Johnson. He invited to his house in Florida, right on the bay with this pool going right up the edge where his yacht was docked. Just kidding. But wouldn't that be cool?

What Jesus points out in his story is that the invitation to God's table is better than an invitation to anyone else's house but our problem is we to often care more about what other people think than what God thinks. We tend to want to impress other people and get in good with them rather than getting in good with God and responding to God's gracious invitation.

First Jesus says it's an issue of pride. Verse 11, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

It was 1997 when I first recognized that God was calling me to be a preacher. I was 19 years old and very excited. I started picturing myself preaching to thousands and thousands of people in stadiums. And I believed it. I thought I was going to be the next Billy Graham. For sure.

The only job I could get though was as a youth pastor teaching 5 kids on Wednesday nights at a little church here in San Diego. I took my kids to youth camp that summer where there were a few hundred other kids and thought that was my opportunity. I went right up the youth director and suggested that next year he have me be the main speaker.

I'll never forget what he said to me. He turned to me. He pointed a finger in my face and said, "Duane, don't you ever aspire to be anything." And then he walked away. I was dumbfounded and eventually got to talk to him later and he said to just be a humble servant, to be faithful and to let God bring about what He wanted in His time.

That has stuck with me. I think what Jesus is pushing on here is our hearts desire to be recognized and noticed, which is why guys back then would always try to sit near the seat of the guest of honor. Instead Jesus says to be humble.

Be grateful for our invitation to the dinner, recognizing that we probably don't even deserve to be there. We deserve to be cast out due to our sin, faults, and failures. But when we're honest about that before God and admit our need...when God sees that humility He'll see us and honor us.

How's that sit? Are you aiming high? Or are you aiming low? Are you trying to get others to notice you or just wanting God to see you?

Well, after that Jesus switches things up and basically says now think about it from another perspective. We just thought about it from the perspective of being the invited guest, now think about it from the perspective of being the one throwing the party and inviting others.

Who do you invite when you throw a party? Do you only invite people you're close with? People in your same group of friends? People in your same socio-economic status? People of your same race? I mean this is still a real thing right? Weddings. Thanksgiving. Super Bowl parties. Church.

Jesus says to invite everyone, especially those who are seemingly on the outside...the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. Each one of these people would have been put in a class that was considered less than, some of them even labeled unclean. In the first century, a person's class determined who they could marry, what functions they could attend, where they could live, and with whom they were allowed to do business.

Jesus is always trying to make outsiders insiders...trying to pull them in to make them feel like they belong and are welcome. This is a huge goal of our church. We want to be a church on mission like that. Sometimes when I tell people they need to reach out to others and bring them in, I hear things like, "Man my life is already too full. I don't have any time or space for any more people." My response is, "Well...maybe it's time to get rid of some friends to make room for new ones." That's what Jesus did. He brought people in for a bit, then sent them out.

Now, you can look at the poor, crippled, lame and blind classes Jesus gives in a lot of ways. Spiritual parallels are fair I think. Luke has made it point repeatedly throughout the book to focus on the marginalized whether it be people of different races, women, sick people or poor people. Jesus has love for and welcomes all minorities.

So to be fair I think Jesus' harken to that theme. But you can also look at them literally and I thought it be fitting just to mention our Mercy Ministry today. Some of you might not know it but every Tuesday night we feed the homeless here at our church.

Kevin & Laura Cieslukowski and their family are still somewhat new to our church. They've been here almost a year and have just jumped right in. They're pursuing membership and Kevin is interning under Dave Christman as the leader of the Mercy Ministry. I got a chance to talk to Kevin on the phone this week and he just shared his heart on some of the things they've been experiencing and learning.

He said he's been thinking a lot about the untouchables and how Jesus touched the untouchables. A lot of the homeless people are smelly and dirty but so grateful each week they just naturally would go in for a hug afterward to say thank you. At first it weirded him out but now after six month is realizing what that connection and hug means as they are building trust and starting to open up about their stories.

One gal that's been coming is only 23. She just had her birthday, so Kevin and Laura got her some clothes and as a result she's decided she wants to get clean so they took her to a rehab facility this week. Another gal has been experiencing a conversion, opening herself to Jesus and even come to service some Sunday. There's a number of guys showing and just admitting their need for help.

This last Thanksgiving we threw a party for them and Laura sent me this email,

"The very first thing I wanted to do when I woke up this morning was say THANK YOU. My heart was literally bursting last night when everything came together so beautifully for the Thanksgiving feast for our friends in the homeless community. Last night we had a little over 30 people attend the dinner, some new faces and some people who come every single week.

Some of the things I heard people saying besides "THIS IS AWESOME." were, "this reminds me of home.", "This reminds me of my mom.", "This is so delicious.", "WOW." and there were endless "thank you"s. The feast was absolutely perfect. We had everything we needed and enough for people to even have the best part . . . leftovers!

My prayer for last night was that every person that came would feel and experience the love of Jesus. It was moving to me how many people from our church were there with AMAZING home cooked food and desserts with hearts willing to serve and genuinely connect with people. I think about the sign in the Resolved parking lot that says, "God's Glory The Jesus Story San Diego". That sign sums up last night.

Recently verses that brought me to the point of weeping were Matthew 25:35,40 when Jesus said, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in." in verse 40 he said, "Truly I tell you whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me." What an honor to serve Jesus. Thankful to our loving Father who allows us to be part of Him loving His precious people."

Isn't that beautiful and wonderful? It's so exciting to be living out the commands and words of Jesus as a church. And I want our homeless community to know that there will always be a seat for them here. They'll be grateful for your grace for them.

When you have nothing to give back all you have to give is thanks. But Jesus' point out in the last part of the parable that we often are very ungrateful and don't realize what a great gift we've been given in the invitation to the table. He talks about how we often make excuses.

Instead of coming to God's house one guy says, he needs to go take care of his field, another says he needs to go take care of his animals, and another says he just needs to hang out with his wife. You won't believe it but I still hear these exact same excuses all the time.

"Good to see you, missed you last Sunday." "Oh yeah. I had some work on my house I needed to do."

"Hey, we've missed ya." "Yeah, we got a new cat and just can't leave her alone because she meows all the time and disturbs the neighbors."

"Hi, how are you, feel like I haven't seen you two in awhile." "Yeah, we just needed some time away, so we've just been doing some traveling and laying low on Sundays."

Those are all real conversations I've had literally within the last three months. One of our emeritus pastors, Ron Broersma, used to call it GBO. That when it comes to church on Sundays in our culture there's always GBO, which stands for Got a Better Offer.

In a Time magazine article titled, "And On The Seventh Day We Rested" Nancy Gibbs wrote, "Over time, Sunday has gone from a day we could do only a very few things to the only day we can do just about anything we want. The U.S. is too diverse, our lives too busy, our economy too global and our appetites too vast to lose a whole day that could be spent working or playing or shopping."

For many Sunday is Sunday funday now and worshipping God in His house is a dispensable option. But that's now how it's supposed to be. Remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy is actually the 3rd commandment in the 10 commandments. And it's not just about some religious duty but it's about the feast where we a foretaste of it, tasting the goodness of God and experiencing true rest.

Look I'm not trying to be mean here. Just real practical. It's not like you can't ever miss a Sunday. For our staff, I tell them they can miss four a year unless you're sick. That's reasonable I think. And look, I get it. A lot of you are new Christians and new to what it looks like to be a Christian or a mature Christian and I'm just trying to teach us that worshipping on Sunday is meant to shape us and is so good for us.

Mike Cospers in his book, "Rhythms of Grace" writes,

"The weekly gathering shapes our ordinary life, and ordinary life shapes our experience of the gathering. Our burdens and guilt, joys and celebrations inevitably come with us. We gather not to escape these burdens and joys, but to bring them to a place where we acknowledge what is most true, most real, and most valuable. There, in the light of the gospel, all of these emotions and all of the circumstances of our lives are revealed in their proper place, and God speaks a word of peace over them.

So we hold them up as we celebrate and thank, we hold them up as we confess and lament, and in return, we hear the voice of God, thundering from his Word and his Son, pouring out grace upon grace as we remember, recommit, and are sent again into the world."

It's not so much that we have to go to church. It's that we need it. Because we need God and in the gathering, God invites us into His presence and His word to be healed, to be shaped and to be empowered as vessels for His glory. It's a powerful and compelling offer.

So I have a challenge for you. Just set yourself a goal, to come every Sunday for three months straight and see what it does in you. I bet it'll feel different and you'll see what I mean.

God wants his house filled. When this room is full there's just a different energy and it feels good. Jesus said in verse 23, "Compel people to come in that my house may be filled." So I'm doing the best to compel you. You guys with me?

Through Jesus we belong, we're giving invites into His house at His table even though we're all outcasts. It's wonderful privilege and joy.

Alright, let's move on to our last point, "The Cost".

### ***III. The Cost***

This last point is the last third of the chapter where Jesus emphasizes how great a privilege and blessing it is to be part of His family, welcomed into His house and His feast through being His disciples.

First, He uses this hyperbole, "If anyone does not hate..." his family member and his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Now Jesus doesn't literally mean to hate yourself and to hate your kids your spouse and your parents. In other places, He says the direct opposite.

What Jesus is doing is throwing out an attention getter. It grabs you. It makes you think. In comparison to what is gained in being in relationship with God through Him, every other relationship pales in comparison. If any one of those relationships were like you're gonna have to choose, it's Jesus or me, you'd choose Jesus every time.

I married my wife 17 years ago this year. I remember telling her, I promise you, you will always be second. First God, then you then our kids and then everyone else.

Jesus realizes it's a big decision. So He provides a couple analogies which I think are quite encouraging. Jesus doesn't try to manipulate people into becoming His disciples. He says literally says to "sit down", take your time and count the cost.

You might be here and you're just kind of interested, seeking, not ready to sign on the dotted line yet, and that's okay. Jesus says that's a good thing. You should count the cost.

He says it's foolish to start a house project you can't finish. I just built triple bunk beds for my girls. But before I even went to Home Depot I looked up the lumber online and knew it would cost me \$56 dollars. We determined we could afford it and so we did it.

When you sit down and count the cost, whether it's worth being willing to give up and spend your whole life in order to have Him, you'll see it's worth it every time.

Jesus brings up another comparison saying you shouldn't start a fight you're not sure you can win. Countless battles have been lost because one army underestimated the strength of the other.

When you sit down and look at life, it's a losing battle. You can't win it on your own. But when you look at Jesus, you'll see that He is bigger and better than any opposition and that with Him we will surely overcome.

Lastly, Jesus brings up salt. The salt they would get where Jesus was taking was in large from the Dead Sea. The salt, the sodium chloride, is fused in these gypsum crystals. If not cared for properly, the sodium chloride can leak out and all you have is the gypsum that has no flavor and is useless and thrown away.

Jesus' point is that without Him we're like gypsum...salt that really doesn't have any salt in it. So the better option is to be His disciple, where what we do with our lives actually counts for something greater, for eternity.

There is a cost to following Jesus. It costs everything. But He's worth every penny. Jesus and the feast He offers us is worth it.

Through Jesus, though we've been outsiders we become insiders welcomed into the closest circle of His family and it's worth it. Through Jesus we truly belong.

When you count the cost on the scales, the benefits don't even compare. As Jesus said in Luke just a few chapters ago, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it (Luke 9:24)."

## ***Conclusion***

Well, we've covered a lot today. This chapter feels like a full feast.

I started out by telling you the story of the curvy tree. What happens at the end is the girl finds a friend in the tree and for the first time feels like she belongs. She goes back to the village and tells the other kids who follow her out to the tree and when they discover it's wonder she becomes the most popular girl in the whole town, because she's the one who was friends with the tree.

The truth is all of us are outcasts. Every one of us are different. We all want to belong.

Jesus comes to us as one who different than us, He's God in the flesh and yet He knows what it's like to feel different and be left, all alone hanging on a tree so that we might all be welcomed into His family and eat at the table of His Father. Jesus is our curvy tree.

Through the cross, Jesus invites us in, that we might belong to God and become His guests of honor.

## ***Confession***

Lord Jesus. We confess we often proud, wanting to look well before others but not looking at you. We confess we've often shunned your invitation and thought you are not worth it. We humbly confess we need you and ask you to receive us.

## ***Assurance***

Jesus has heard our humble cry. He has welcomed us with open arms and prepared a feast in heaven for us as honored guests. Today we eat and drink tasting the goodness of belonging to Him.