

December 1-5, 2025 Edition

Following
The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 204
The Parable Of The Great Banquet

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This weekend we're continuing with our series looking at the parables of Jesus. This weekend we're looking at a parable that He tells in response to a situation He finds Himself in (He did that a lot). The story starts off like this:

One Sabbath day Jesus went to eat dinner in the home of a leader of the Pharisees, and the people were watching him closely. Luke 14:1 (NLT)

He goes to a party at a Pharisee's house and things get tense for the people at the party because they make it obvious that they just don't understand what He is all about. Here's what happens:

Jesus goes to eat at this Pharisee's house on the Sabbath. If you've been with us through all of this marathon lesson series then you know that the Pharisees had decided it was against the law to heal people on the Sabbath. Not because it was God's rule... it's one of the silly traditions they had come up with to interpret the fourth commandment... honor the 7th day and rest on that day... no work on the 7th day. But Jesus makes it obvious over and over that He's not going to be bound by their silly traditions.

So Jesus is at this Pharisee's house and in comes a sick guy. Now the Pharisees main goal was to honor God. They thought that the Temple had been profaned by the Priests and so they wouldn't go to the Temple anymore. They tried to create little mini Temples in their homes and make their homes completely pure. So there shouldn't have been a sick guy at this party anyways... but there is and once again we see this pattern in Jesus' life. He will go anywhere He's invited... but as far as He's concerned anywhere He goes, everybody's welcome there. So this sick guy sneaks into the Pharisee's house because He knows what Jesus can do and now the Pharisees are watching Jesus to see what He'll do. So He asks them, "is it permitted to heal someone on the Sabbath or not?"

They don't answer because of the way Jesus phrases the question. He doesn't ask if it goes against their traditions to heal on the Sabbath... He asks if it's against the law (knowing it isn't). They won't answer and so Jesus heals the guy (like it's nothing) and sends him away. And then He starts in with them... they've stirred Jesus up and that's never a good thing for the elite. Basically He says that they all work on the Sabbath. That they just pick and choose what they do. They justify what they do but condemn others when they do similar things and that drives Jesus CRAZY!

"Which of you doesn't work on the Sabbath? If your son or your cow falls into a pit, don't you rush to get him out?" Again they could not answer. Luke 14:5-6 (NLT)

They won't answer because they know He's technically right but they don't like His technicalities. Things are getting really tense and everybody starts looking for where they should sit for the meal. Jesus watches as they scramble for the best seats and then He drops this on them:

When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit in the seats of honor near the head of the table, he gave them this advice: "When you are invited to a wedding feast, don't sit in the seat of honor. What if someone who is more distinguished than you has also been invited? The host will come and say, 'Give this person your seat.' Then you

will be embarrassed, and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table! "Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, 'Friend, we have a better place for you!' Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 14:7-11 (NLT)

I guarantee you at this point everyone is paying close attention to where everyone else is sitting. People who got the worst seats are thanking their lucky stars that they weren't fast enough to get the best place at the table. Those who were at the best places had to be feeling even more uncomfortable. If Jesus has good social radar He will start talking about something less controversial. But Jesus does not have smooth social radar. At this point He turns to the host again:

Then he 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. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then at the resurrection of the righteous, God will reward you for inviting those who could not repay you." Luke 14:12-14 (NLT)

Now everybody is thinking about that sick guy who showed up uninvited to the party. Since the Pharisees would never invite the sick, the lame or the poor to their homes this is a full frontal assault against not just this host, but the philosophy of all the Pharisees. They thought that if people were struggling with their health, finances or relationships it was because they had done something wrong and now God was punishing them. Why should they treat people better than God did?

But Jesus is smashing their philosophy to pieces. He's saying that the lowliest people in society aren't there because of God's displeasure but because we live in world broken and infected by sin. Its consequences can be felt in every area on this earth: from our relationships (with God, each other and even our relationship with ourselves) to our health to our finances... our problems are not always a direct result of our own choices.

At this point somebody shouts out a platitude meant to break the tension.

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!" Luke 14:15 (NLT)

I'm guessing they were hoping Jesus would start talking about something less uncomfortable. It doesn't work... Jesus turns to the guy and says, alright... let me tell you a story about what the great festival in the Kingdom of God is going to be like...

And so He tells the parable. A parable about a Lord who invites the important people to a festival. None of the "important" people come so the host tells his servants:

'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame... Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. Luke 14:21-23 (NLT)

That's what happens... what is He getting at? We'll look at that tomorrow.

Tuesday Reflection: One thing I see in this story is that Jesus is making sure we understand... that He is the Lord of the Party. Did you know that? Did you know that Jesus is the Lord of the Party? This is one common theme that He keeps coming back to over and over again in His description of the Kingdom of God.

A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. Luke 14:16 (TLB)

The Kingdom of God is going to be like... a party! Now the parties in ancient Israel were a little different than what I think of when I hear the word, party, or the word, feast. When I hear those words I think of a single event that is a certain duration and after it's done that feast or party is done.

But they didn't think that way in Israel. Some of Israel's "feasts" were one day long... others were up to a week long. Like I said, I always thought of a feast as a single meal... so maybe a better way to say it in English is to call it a "festival". Sort of like the State Fair which lasts a couple weeks or Fur Rondy which lasts... well, I'm not sure but I know it's more than just a single event. Right?

Same thing with the festivals of the Jewish people. It was never just a single meal or a single get together. Their festivals were meant to give them a reason for getting up in the morning. To bring joy. But people being people... somewhere along the line somebody came up with the line, "religion is serious business, we don't have time for frivolity and joy". There were several times in Israel's history where they would ditch the calendar that God gave them. God's calendar had at least 13 feasts that they were to celebrate every year. From time to time some leader would decide that wasn't a good idea and so Israel would go generations without celebrating and it took its toll.

In Nehemiah we read about a guy coming back from Persia to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Part of his plan was to reinstate the festival days that God had given to Israel. He had Ezra, the scribe, read the Law of God to the people and as they heard just how far they had gotten away from living the life God had called on them to lead their hearts were broken and they started crying. But Nehemiah tells them to stop crying and says this:

Nehemiah said, "Go and celebrate with a feast... and share gifts... with people who have nothing. This is a sacred day... Don't be sad, because the joy of the LORD will make you strong." Nehemiah 8:10 (NCV)

Sometimes people will tell you that joy shouldn't be a spiritual discipline. That there's no room for joy in the list of serious disciplines such as prayer, Bible reflection, solitude, fasting... They'll say, "sure... joy is one of the spiritual disciplines but it's the most shallow one. God only threw it in there to appease shallow people (like Pastor Ed...) and it doesn't really have any deep purpose to it."

But not according to the Bible. According to the Bible joy makes you strong. And festivals in your life will help you with that whole joy discipline. Jesus understood this. That's why He was the Lord of the Party. His first miracle was in John chapter 2- turning water into the best wine anyone has ever tasted. Why did He choose that for His first miracle? Why not a less frivolous thing for His first miracle? Because joy is serious business. His miracles were never

just impressive demonstrations of raw power. They were always a snapshot of Who He was and what He had come to do.

One of the things He had come to do was to bring joy. He was the Lord of the Party. More on that tomorrow.

Wednesday Reflection: Now everyone has their own idea of what it means to be the Lord Of The Party... and we don't always get each other's definitions... We all have different definitions of what's fun. But one thing I think the Bible points out quite clearly is that joy is meant to be an integral part of our lives.

I recommend having fun, because there is nothing better for people to do in this world than to eat, drink and enjoy life. Ecclesiastes 8:15 (NLT)

Now somewhere along the way people have sold us the idea that following Jesus is not supposed to be fun. Did you know that verse was in the Bible? I didn't. They never read that verse in the church I grew up in. I'll never forget the first time I read that verse... I was stunned. Seriously? Fun? We're supposed to be making this fun?!?! That's the Old Testament was what I initially thought. The OT has been superseded and so that verse doesn't count anymore. That's what I figured. Then I read this verse here in the New Testament:

The Son of Man came eating and drinking and enjoying life. Matthew 11:18 (Phv)

How about that one... ever know that verse was in the Bible. I see heads nodding... I mean did you know that verse was in the Bible BEFORE you came to Riverside? What does it mean? Jesus did a ton of quoting the OT scriptures. But what He'd do a lot of the time was just quote part of the verse and everybody would automatically fill in the rest of the passage. In first century Israel the OT was part of their national consciousness sort. Everybody knew it. The closest parallel I can think of in America is Christmas carols. If I say, "Hark the herald angels sing..." most of us are going to automatically fill in the rest of the song. Or Frosty the Snowman... or Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer.

That's how it was for them with the OT. And when Jesus is on the cross He says these words:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Psalm 22:1

Why? Well, there are lots of reasons but one thing is, it was the beginning of the 22nd Psalm. As soon as He said those words every Jew who heard Him would have automatically filled in the rest of that Psalm and it's eerie how similar what happened to Jesus is in that Psalm written more than a thousand years before. Now when Jesus says, I came eating and drinking and enjoying life, He's quoting part of Ecc. 8 and everybody would have known it. They would have automatically filled in the rest of that verse and thought to themselves, Jesus is recommending having fun!

Some people would have loved that idea and some would have hated it but it's right there in black and white. That's why at Riverside, Enjoyment has become one of our highest values. We figure, if we are going to do something why not have fun... I mean, Jesus recommended it, right? Who am I to tell Jesus He's wrong? So sometimes we watch video clips that have nothing to do with the point I'm trying to make, just because I think they're fun.

I had someone ask me once... what spiritual goal are you achieving by showing these ridiculous video clips? And I say, that one right there. Enjoying life. Jesus was Lord of the party. Did you ever think of Him that way?

Now a quick word about the negative connotation that word has gotten over the years. There are those of us who have abused the trappings of a party and have become addicted to things associated with parties. Right? And because of that we have brought horrible consequences into our own lives and the lives of others and now when we think of a party... well it's with mixed emotions.

The Festival Of the Lamb in the Kingdom of God will set all of that right. You and I will be able to enjoy the food and drink at that festival with no destructive consequences in our own lives or the lives of those we love. It's going to be amazing...

And it will never end. You'll never get tired of it... you'll never get too much... I don't know exactly what it will be but I know it's going to be the party to end all parties. And Jesus will be the Lord of that party.

Jesus is the Lord of the Party and until we understand that we are going to misunderstand the Kingdom Of Heaven.

Thursday Reflection: One more thing I see in this parable of the Great Banquet in the Kingdom of Heaven- Everybody's Welcome. Jesus tells this parable. A parable about a Lord who invites the important people to a festival. None of the "important" people come so the host tells his servants:

'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame... Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. Luke 14:21-23 (NLT)

Basically, Jesus tells these guys that when it comes to the party to end all parties... when it comes to God setting everything right and ushering in His Kingdom that will last for all eternity, Everybody's Welcome. Now sometimes we are disappointed by that idea. We love that when it comes to us that Everybody's welcome... but what does that mean about that lousy group of people over there? This is an issue that the early church had some serious problems with. How do we decide who to hang out with? Who's ok and who's not?

From what I can tell it always comes down to one thing: What do they think about Jesus? Every time I see the Bible talking in practical terms about how to treat each other I see this concept working itself out.

Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. Romans 14:1 (NLT)

In Rome the struggle was real. You had people who called themselves Christians dividing themselves into two camps based on their views on meat that was sacrificed to idols. And Paul says, don't argue with each other about this. Here's the conflict. In Rome, most of the Christians were not Jewish. They grew up worshipping idols of Jupiter or Apollo or whatever... now when someone sacrifices a bull to Jupiter they would bring the animal to the temple and the priests would kill the animal and burn part of the bull but not all of it. The

rest they would sell to the local butcher who would then sell the steaks the next day at his meat market. The meat that just last night was part of a sacrifice to idols was now on sale at the marketplace.

Meat sacrificed to idols. Should we eat that meat or not? That was the question among the Roman Christians. Some of them figured that if so much of the 10 Commandments revolved around not getting involved with idolatry and so much of the Old Testament was written to warn the Jews to avoid idolatry at any cost, then wouldn't it make sense that God doesn't want us as Christians to eat the meat that had been involved in a ceremony worshiping Apollo? Makes sense to me (but I have Pharisaic tendencies so I tend to naturally lean in that direction).

But there was another school of thought among the Christians in Rome. They figured that Paul said those idols... those foreign gods were nothing so why not eat the tenderloin that came from a cow and not worry about where it was the night before?

It seems like a huge issue. It caused all kinds of problems in the church in Rome. You'd think that Paul would come down on one side or the other but he doesn't. What does he do? He devotes an entire chapter in his book to the Roman church to this issue and finishes up with this:

Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord's help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval. Romans 14:4 (NLT)

Basically Paul says that if you have a problem with the meat then don't eat it, but don't condemn your brothers and sisters in Christ who do eat it. And if you don't have a problem with the meat then go ahead and eat it, but don't condescend to your brothers and sisters who won't eat it. He ties the whole passage together with this verse here:

So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified. Romans 15:7 (NLT)

So what does that mean? Well, it means accept one another just as Christ has accepted you. Does that mean you're not responsible for doing your best to figure out how Jesus wants you to live and then living that way? Not at all. What it seems to mean is that while I'm doing that, I need to let others do the same, even if they disagree with me.

And that leads to a diversity that is incredibly powerful. We stop judging people based on the way they work out their faith and accept them for the unity of Who they follow... Jesus. This is the way Jesus treated everyone He ever came in contact with. You didn't have to clean yourself up to come to Jesus. Everybody's welcome. He sent out invitations to everyone... and all they had to do is show up. Which leads to our final point:

Friday Reflection: The Kingdom is free. There is no charge. You don't have to bring anything. Look at what the Lord says in His invitation in this story:

When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come, the banquet is ready.' Luke 14:17 (NLT)

Everything is ready. So just come. It's not a potluck. You don't have to pay an admission fee. Just come. All the people in the story had to do was show up and they were admitted to the great feast in the Kingdom of God.

Now, that doesn't mean Jesus doesn't have plans for our lives. He does. But those plans begin once we turn to Him and say, I want to come. Can I come? And He says, of course... it's for Everybody... and there's no charge. I've already taken care of the bill.

When we think we have to do something to earn it or make ourselves presentable, we're missing the point. When I say something like, "God could never accept me... I'm too bad or I've done too much or too much has happened to me...", well it looks like humility but it's actually prideful arrogance. To think that any of us could ever do a thing to earn a place at the great Feast in the Kingdom of God is just ridiculous. It's free, but not because it's cheap. It's free because Jesus took care of the bill.

It's like if I was given a free cruise around the world. And I'm not talking about these cruise lines where you get a room and free buffet food but other stuff costs more money. I mean, top of the line, everything you see is already paid for and won't cost you another cent- kind of cruise line. Can you imagine if while I was unpacking my things the person who paid for my cruise noticed that I had brought Top Ramen noodles and Kraft Macaroni & Cheese and several banquet chicken pot pie microwavable dinners? Can you imagine the conversation?

- Why did you bring those?
- What if I get hungry?
- Everything is already paid for.
- I know that's what the brochure said but I don't know...
- Believe me. Everything is already paid for.
- Well then, I'll add this to the potluck dinner so I'm sort of pulling my own weight.
- Not at my table you're not! It's insulting to the chef of the cruise... and you'll embarrass me. Throw that stuff away!

That's what it must look like from Heaven's perspective when we think we're going to bring something to God to justify Him letting us in to the Great Feast in the Kingdom. Jesus is the Lord of the Party. He paid so we all could be invited. All of us. Everybody's welcome and it's free... all you and I have to do is show up.

That's the point of this story. I know what you're thinking... doesn't Jesus expect anything from me? Sure... next week we're going to look at a parable where Jesus talks about the importance of what we do with what we receive when we come to Jesus and accept this free gift that is for everybody... that's another part of the picture. But until you realize that this is free, it's for everybody and all you have to do is show up I will continually be in danger of slipping back into the place where the Pharisees are hanging out. It just seems to make so much sense... but it's not what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

I mean that you have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NCV)