SM044 The Great Banquet

The religious leaders breathed a sigh of relief. The synagogue service had ended and there was no controversy. Jesus had been present at the synagogue service and when the religious leaders knew he would be there, they shuddered to think that he might heal someone on the Sabbath, which for them was a violation of their laws. But Jesus had not healed and his teaching on the kingdom of God had stirred their hearts.

“Perhaps Jesus is coming to see things the way we see them,” one leader said to his colleagues.

“Perhaps he is coming to his senses and realizing that we must rest and worship only on the Sabbath and that he can heal on other days.”

“I don’t know,” another said. “I still have great concerns over him.”

Another said, “Listen, there’s only one way to find out. Why don’t we have lunch together and invite Jesus to dine with us and to talk about these things.” And without waiting for the others to respond he walked over to Jesus and said,

“Rabbi, we are honored that you would join us today in our synagogue service. Would you do us the double honor of attending our luncheon where we may speak more about your views on the kingdom of God?”

And Jesus, with a smile said, “I would be delighted. Thank you so much!” And so off to the house of one of the religious leaders Jesus and his disciples went.

As the meal was being prepared, Jesus was reclining with the leaders and they talked about the kingdom of God. Other villagers crowded into the dining area. They were not there to eat, but to listen to the discussion of these learned men and to learn. They would stand away from the couches on which the men would recline and away from the small table set in the middle where the food would be placed. They would watch, and listen, and learn.

Everything was going well, there was much discussion, the aroma of the prepared food filled the house, it was almost time to eat and then it happened. A man walked into the room and said, “Is Jesus here?” Immediately everyone stopped talking and turned in the direction of the voice and what they saw brought great discomfort to all. The man was suffering from edema – a condition where too much fluid collected in the tissues of the body which caused great swelling. The man’s legs and arms were huge, disproportioned, and everyone could see that it was difficult for the man to walk or even stand.

“I am Jesus. I am here.”

The man walked toward Jesus and the other leaders. Immediately everyone got up from his place around the table and walked away from the man. Edema, known as dropsy in the ancient world, was considered a disease of greed. Many thought that a person with such a condition would drink water and

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

instead of having his thirst quenched would only become more thirsty. This desire for more and more water caused the swelling and was an outward sign of a soul that thirsted for money and gain. A person who suffered from dropsy was a wicked and evil man, so they thought.

But Jesus did not walk away. He reached out his hands to the man and helped to stabilize him. Then he turned to the other leaders who were standing away from him and this man who was sick and he said to them, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”

This was the question that he continued to press to them. They believed it was not lawful. But Jesus believed that it was lawful and fitting to heal on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was the perfect day to release people from their sickness for the Sabbath was not only a day of rest but also a day to remember how God had released his people from the bondage of Egypt.

Jesus looked around the room as he asked the question, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” But all remained silent and Jesus’ heart was filled with grief as he looked upon their hardness of heart. Then he turned to the man, gripped him tightly and said, “Be healed.” And the swelling in the man’s arms and legs began to diminish in the sight of everyone so that he could stand with greater ease and use his arms and legs as God intended.

Jesus turned to the leaders and said, “If one you has a son or an ox that falls into a well of water, won’t you go and pull him out of the well and save him, even if it is the Sabbath?” And the leaders could make no reply.

Jesus told the man to return home and to tell others how God had had mercy upon him. The people of the village who were standing next to the wall of the dining area were rejoicing with Jesus. The religious leaders were standing to the side muttering and talking as if in great anger over what had just occurred. Then, one of servants stepped forward and said to the host, “Master, all is now ready.”

Immediately, the religious leaders returned to the couch area but as they did Jesus noticed how some of them started picking out the places of highest honor and Jesus said to them,

“When you are invited by someone to a feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, [9] and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give *your* place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you will have to occupy the last place. [10] But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you.

The leaders were embarrassed. They had been caught in their pride. What Jesus said was true and then Jesus said, “Remember, everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Jesus then turned to the one who invited him to the luncheon and said, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

may also invite you in return and *that* will be your repayment. [13] But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind, [14] and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

The leader was shocked that Jesus had said this – a banquet was a sign of esteem. A great leader would invite only his peers and associates, only those of equal social rank. He would not invite people of lower rank and he certainly would not invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. They were cursed of God. They were unworthy.

The leader responded, "Jesus, you have healed this sick man on the Sabbath, which I do not believe you should have done. Now, do you expect me to invite him and others like him to recline with us and to share our meal?" The air was thick with tension but before Jesus could respond one of the other leaders said, "All of us look forward to the resurrection and to the great banquet with the Messiah. Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

"Yes, Amen!" the other leaders said, "May we be counted worthy for that great day. May we be among the righteous and considered without blemish or fault in any way."

Then, they looked to Jesus and one of them said, "Well, Jesus, what do you say about eating bread in the kingdom of God? Who do you think will be worthy for that great day?"

And Jesus said, "Let me tell you a story," and when we return we will hear the story that Jesus told, the story of the Great Banquet.

Interlude

"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.'"

And when Jesus finished, the meal was served and everyone talked about the meaning of the story.

Let's you and I talk about this parable. What did it mean for those who were having lunch that day? What does it mean for you and for me?

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

First, a great banquet was a sign in Scripture of the salvation of the kingdom of God coming to earth. The most famous passage which showed this was Isaiah 25:6-9 which says

In Jerusalem, the Lord of Heaven's Armies
will spread a wonderful feast
for all the people of the world.
It will be a delicious banquet
with clear, well-aged wine and choice meat.
7 There he will remove the cloud of gloom,
the shadow of death that hangs over the earth.
8 He will swallow up death forever!
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears.
He will remove forever all insults and mockery
against his land and people.
The LORD has spoken!

9 In that day the people will proclaim,
"This is our God!
We trusted in him, and he saved us!
This is the LORD, in whom we trusted.
Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!"
10 For the LORD's hand of blessing will rest on Jerusalem.

A banquet, what a fitting description for the coming of the kingdom of God for banquets are times of great feasting and great joy and happiness. But between the time when Isaiah said this and the time in which Jesus told his story a change took place in the thinking of God's people. They thought the banquet was only for them. Isaiah had said that the Lord would prepare a feast for all people of the world, but the religious leaders began making lists of who would make it to the feast and who would not. Only the worthy would make it. Only the righteous would make it. Only those without physical defect would make it.

So, when Jesus said earlier that when a man had a banquet and that he should invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, he was trying to get the leaders to leave their religious traditions that excluded such people and to embrace what the prophet Isaiah had said originally. God loved all people and God invited all to come to his banquet – rich and poor, healthy and healthy, those who had their lives together and those who were a mess. They were all invited, and they only had to come.

In the culture in which Jesus lived, when a great man hosted a banquet, such as the religious leader where Jesus was now eating, he would only invite his peers and associates and would give no thought to those who were in need. So Jesus tells a story about a great man who hosts a great feast for his friends.

When the invitations went out, it would be customary for the invited guests to take this invitation seriously and an acceptance of the invitation would be a firm commitment that they were coming. The host would need to know how many were coming for he would have to butcher the appropriate amount of animals for his guests.

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

If 2-4 guests accepted, he would kill one or two chickens. If 5-8 were coming, he would probably prepare a duck. If 10-15 were coming, he would prepare a young goat. If 15-35, a sheep and if 35-75, a fattened calf.
Once the appropriate animal is killed the guests are duty bound to attend for the meat must be eaten on the day of the banquet.

Then, on the day of the banquet, once the food has been cooked, a servant goes out with the message, "come, all is now ready" meaning that the food is prepared. And this is what Jesus said in the story. Listen to his words again.

A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come, the banquet is ready.'

And those who had received his invitation and who had committed to come would come. But in the story, the people who were invited did the unthinkable. They refused to come. A last minute refusal is rude in any land and among any people. Everything has been done for them – invitations were sent to them and accepted, an animal was killed, meat was cooked, the entire meal prepared, and the guests summoned at the appropriate hour, and then – all at once – excuses.

In the story, the first man said, "I have bought a piece of land and I need to go look it over, please consider me excused." This was a blatant lie. He didn't need to go out and look at his field. No one in that part of the world bought a field without already knowing everything about it. In the first century, due to increasing population, land was limited and extremely valuable. Would a man really buy a field without seeing it and already knowing everything about it?

A purchaser of land in that part of the world would know springs, wells, stone walls, trees, paths, and how much rain could be expected. These would have been itemized and included in the contract. The purchaser will also know who had owned the land for previous generations and how much profit it has yielded.

Sometimes purchasing a field can be a long and complicated process and can even take years. A banquet would be late in the day – and often the final meal. Is a man really going out to look at the field at night or preparing for a journey at night to see a field? And if he is excited about seeing his newly purchased field, surely it will be there the next day! He has already committed to the banquet.

The man is lying. He is insulting the host of the great banquet by making this flimsy excuse. And all who were eating with Jesus knew that the man in the story was lying and insulting the one who had offered the great feast.

The same is true with the second man in the story. This is the one who bought ten oxen – five pairs of oxen. He said, "I have bought five pair of oxen and I need to go try them out to see how well they work together. Please consider me excused." This was another bold-faced lie and this excuse was also given to insult the one who prepared the great feast.

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

Animals such as oxen are sold in one of two ways in that part of the world. First, they will be sold in a market that is next to a plot of ground where the seller can demonstrate how well the oxen work together. No one is going to waste money on oxen that don't work well together.

Another way oxen would be sold would be to arrange a day where prospective buyers would come to a person's farm and watch the owner work the oxen. Then, after observing their work, buyers would make offers based upon what they had seen and negotiations would begin.

But the man in the story says that he bought oxen without even testing them. No one would do that! What a flimsy excuse. What a lie. What an insult!

The third man is the same. He has just married, not on that day for the host would never arrange a banquet for his village on the same day that a wedding took place. In planning a great banquet, the host would carefully consult with others in the village for a day where there would be no conflict. Word would go out and nothing would conflict with the schedule.

So this man has already been married, maybe for only a few weeks and he and his young bride are still in their passionate honeymoon period. But surely he can be away from his young wife for a few hours. He is not being asked to go on a journey. He is not being asked to join a military campaign. He is just being asked to come to a feast in a village. And to use his passion as an excuse to keep from coming was not only an insult but was also considered crude and inappropriate where people did not talk about sex in public and also did not talk about women in public.

The men who were listening to Jesus knew what he was saying. The kingdom of God was like a great banquet. God had sent out invitations to all and his people had initially said, "Yes, we will come." But when the banquet was ready, when the Messiah came with a spiritual feast for all, they began to make silly, flimsy, insulting excuses and refused to enter in to the kingdom of God.

In the story, the banquet host was furious and he said, "Go bring the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame." These kinds of people are not invited to banquets. Only the rich, the prestigious, only the socially superior are invited to such banquets. But in this case the host invited these people to eat with him. In the same way, Jesus ate with sinners and at luncheons lovingly healed people with diseases such as the man with dropsy.

After the master had invited these poor people, there was still room and he told his servant, "Go now into other places. Go outside the village. Go to people we do not know and invite them to come in, overcome their doubt and fear and bewilderment at being invited to a great feast and compel them to come. We will fill our great banqueting hall with these people, but those who were first invited will be left out and will not taste of my meal."

The story was clear for all who had lunch with Jesus on that day. A rich religious ruler had invited Jesus to join him and his colleagues to a great meal. But when a needy man showed up, the ruler did not want anything to do with him, especially because it was the Sabbath. But Jesus healed him. The rulers were trying to exalt themselves by taking the best seats but Jesus said that men should humble themselves.

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org

The ruler wanted to impress with his luncheon but Jesus said he should invite the needy and serve them. The rulers talked about being worthy to enter the kingdom of God but Jesus told a story about those who seemed to be worthy making excuses and lying and insulting God while those who were poor and needy came.

And this is what was happening in the life of Jesus. He came to his people, but the leaders did not receive him. They rejected his invitation. But the poor, the sinners, the needy flocked to Jesus and his offer of the kingdom of God. They feasted with Jesus in the kingdom banquet he was bringing. But the leaders of the land did not come in.

My friend – Jesus is the promised Messiah. Jesus has brought the beginning phases of the kingdom of God to the world. Jesus has invited all to the great banquet that he provides where our true thirst can be quenched and our true hunger can be satisfied. Jesus is offering the kingdom feast to you. What will you do? Will you enter in to his kingdom and feast with him? Or will you make excuses and stay away?

Ending

Copyright © 2013 Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, *Speak!*
Contact us at WGS ♦ PO Box 90047 ♦ San Antonio, TX 78209 ♦ USA
Web – www.WGSpeak.org email – Jonathan@WGSpeak.org