



THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT BANQUET

Part 62 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 14:12-24 | February 13, 2011

Luke 14:12-24

¹² 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. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

¹⁵ 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!” ¹⁶ But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ 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.’ ¹⁸ 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.’ ¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ ²⁰ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ ²¹ 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.’ ²² And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ ²³ 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. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’”

THE BEST MEAL YOU'VE EVER EATEN

Howdy, Mars Hill. Today we are in Luke 14:12-24, the parable of the great banquet. While you're finding your spot in your Bible or on your app, let me ask you a question. Go back with me, think about it, what's the best meal you've ever eaten? What's the best party—not a sinful, “Where did I park my car? Whose lamp shade is this?” party, but non-sinful party you've ever been to? Those great, epic banquets, feasts. Was it a wedding? Was it the birth of a child? Was it a birthday party? Was it an anniversary celebration? Was it a graduation party? Thinking back, looking back in your life, the biggest, best party you've ever been to. And the best meal you've ever eaten. Usually the centerpiece of a good party is a great feast.

I asked Gracie, my wife, this. “Honey, what are your favorite meals you've ever had?” And we had this kind of fun conversation. I found out that my wife is very high maintenance. She said that she loved it when we went to The Herbfarm, which is supposed to be one of the best meals, literally, in the country, over in Woodinville. We both also like El Gaucho, great place for a steak. They'll do flaming Chateaubriand at the table for two. They'll do flaming cherries jubilee or flaming bananas foster at the table, so you get lots of fire, which is pretty fantastic. The sides are amazing. The corn is great.

She also said that she liked it when we went to a place called Iceberg. It was our anniversary. We were in Sydney, Australia, and we went to a place on Bondi Beach, where films have been shot and some of the Olympics were held. And it was this epic, fantastic night. Sun was setting over Bondi Beach and we were eating at Iceberg right on this cliff overlooking the water. We had the most fantastic time. I've got pictures of us just snuggled up and kissing and enjoying one another and having a great anniversary there.

She also said that one of her favorite meals is a meal that we ate when we were in Cape Town, one of the most beautiful cities in the world. We were at Cape Town together, again a restaurant overlooking the water at sunset. And we also had a really beautiful meal together that she enjoyed when we were in Jerusalem right on the beach around the time of her birthday with some dear friends of ours.

So when we travel, and by God's grace we get to travel quite a bit, we like to go out to really nice restaurants, build a fantastic memory, have an epic feast. And Grace talked about those being her favorite meals, her favorite memories, her favorite times.

Mine, well, probably my most favorite of all was at Red Robin of all places. And that was my first date with Gracie. We were seventeen years old. It was March 12, 1988. We were on our very first date and I thought she was so cute. At the time, she had naturally curly hair like springs. If you would pull it, it would bounce back up. And she was just as cute as could be and I was absolutely smitten with her. And it was our big first date and here I am, seventeen-year-old guy. Got my 1956 Chevy that I owned at the time. Should have kept it. Got rid of it, one of the dumbest things I've ever done. And I picked up Gracie and we went downtown, and so we went to a Red Robin that's no longer open and we had our first meal together as seventeen-year-old high school kids. I think we both had burgers. I was so nervous that on more than one occasion throughout the course of the meal, I actually got up and went to the bathroom, not because I had to go to the bathroom, just 'cause I was sort of freaking out. I really liked being with her and I was pretty

nervous.

And looking back on it, Gracie and I were talking the other night when we were snuggled up. And she said that she was nervous as well and she wouldn't eat in front of me because somehow she felt nervous and uncomfortable. So she'd wait for me to go to the bathroom and then she'd eat really fast and then she'd just talk to me when we were back together. That was our first big date time together. Went for a walk along the waterfront, put pennies on the tracks for the trolley so we'd have a little memory of a crushed penny and went for a walk on a beach in another part of the city and sat by the fire and visited. And that was such a fantastic, wonderful time together. It kind of began our life together going in a really beautiful direction, by God's grace.

Some of my other favorite meals and memories, more recently, include my fortieth birthday last fall. We had a chef over to the house and had a bunch of friends over. Nate, my assistant, set up something similar in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We had a great meal outside with Pastor Dave and his family, and Nate and his family.

And what I learned looking back on it is I love to eat outside. I love fresh air and sunshine. When I was a little boy, I built forts and literally tried to move out of the house into my own place in the yard when I was about four or five. I love eating outside if the weather permits it. I love eating in a place where we're not rushed and there's not a crowd, but you could just hang out with your friends and talk and visit. And if it lasts for hours, then that's okay.

And really, a great banquet, a great feast, a great event, it really has a great place. So you're in a place that's nice and conducive and you can hang out. It also includes and requires a good meal, something to eat, and some friends or some people that you're in the process of making friends. Getting to know them, talking with them. People are fascinating, curious, interesting. And you put those variables together and you have this fantastic memory.

Well, this leads us to Jesus' story and I would say it's actually a good thing for you. Be thinking about the favorite meal you've ever eaten, the favorite memory you've ever made around a banquet, a feast, or a holiday. And the Bible talks a lot about these things. When it comes to issues of eating and meals and food, the Bible speaks of those things over a thousand times. Just the word "feast" and derivatives thereof appear over 180 times in the Bible. So the Bible has a lot to say about food and feasting and friendship.

One way of actually looking at human history is as a course of meals, that everything went bad in the garden, where our first parents ate a meal without God. And then, later on, God's people eat a meal with God called the Passover, remembering that God covers their sin and passes over their sin. This leads as well to the coming of Jesus, who frequently eats with people. We've seen it repeatedly in Luke, that God becomes a man, and a lot of his time is spent over meals with friends and foes.

Additionally, this leads all the way up to Jesus' teaching today and will culminate in something called The Last Supper, where Jesus sits down to have a fantastic meal, a banquet, a feast, a Passover celebration with his disciples. Jesus ultimately dies, rises from death, and one of the first things he does is he has a meal with some of his friends. He actually has a breakfast meal. Jesus continues to eat with family and friends and neighbors until he ascends into heaven. And Revelation 19 says at the end of human history is going to be this magnificent party, this fantastic feast, this banquet, the best meal you've ever eaten, the best party you've ever been to.

JESUS' KINGDOM IS A PARTY

And so Jesus, during his teaching while he was on the earth, before he returned to heaven to get this party set up for us in the kingdom of God, he taught a lot about the kingdom of God and he used the language of feasting and of festivals and of celebrating and of banquets. And we see one of those occasions today in Luke 14, where we learn that Jesus' kingdom is a party. Jesus' kingdom is a party.

Luke 14:12-14, "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.'"

Here's my question to you. What's your picture of heaven like? What's your picture of the eternal state like? After we rise from death in glorified new bodies, what do you think eternity will be like?

For some people, it looks horrendous. They think it's nothing but a long, boring church service. Or worse still—I don't know who is in charge of the marketing for heaven, but that guy needs to find another job. Maybe your view of heaven is tragically something like this. Look at that guy. Those wings are far too small to carry him anywhere interesting. And this is kind of this stylized, idealized, discouraging view of the eternal state. My assumption is right now if I invited you all to this eternal existence and we did an altar call, no one would come forward. There's nothing appealing or compelling about that at all. In fact, it's ridiculous. One of my major achievements in life was getting out of a diaper, and one of my primary objectives is to never again wear one.

What does Jesus have to say about heaven? He said it's like a dinner or a banquet. It's like a party. Who doesn't love a party? I think one of the reasons that human beings love to get together and have feasts and celebrations and parties, this includes holidays of various sorts and kinds, is that we were made in the image and likeness of God. Our God is a good, happy, joyous, celebratory, living God. Our God knows how to throw a good party. Our God is going to throw the party to literally end all parties. And made in his image and likeness, we long for parties, we desire parties.

One of the most atrocious things that has happened is that Christians don't party as often as they should or as well as they should because for us we

have what is not necessarily a redeemed view of a banquet, a feast, and a party. And some people say, "Well, we don't want to be gluttons and we don't want to be drunkards and we just don't want to be pleasure seekers." And the answer is, "Well, we want to be worshipers." And worshipers of God are to live wholeheartedly, full-throatedly, passionately for the glory of God and the good of others. And we are given so much grace by God that we should have a sense of joy and celebration and enthusiasm. And we should get together regularly, not just when it's the holidays, but to enjoy one another, the grace of God, throw a banquet, a feast, and a party in anticipation, preparation, and expectation for the eternal state, where we rise from death and we're together forever with God and his people.

So Jesus says it's like a banquet or a party. And so what he goes on to articulate is that this kingdom party, it has a generous menu. It has a very generous menu. When he uses language of banquet, he goes on to talk as well about feast. He's talking about a massive investment, a great expense.

Some of you are too cheap. Some of you don't spend enough money for big events and parties. Some of you will have the attitude of, let's say, Judas Iscariot, who, when a woman gave a lavish gift to Jesus, Judas, who was the betrayer and the thief, said, "Oh, we could have given that money to the poor." Well, sometimes it's good to spend money and to spend it lavishly and to invite the poor. That's exactly what Jesus says, that we don't have a greed motivating us. We have a generosity motivating us. It's good to spend some money, to get dressed up, to throw a great party.

And what Jesus says is, "Don't just be generous with the menu—and be generous with the menu—also be generous with the guest list." Don't just invite those people that are already your friends. It's fine to get together with your friends, but not just your friends. Invite strangers. And what oftentimes happens is we pursue for relationship and friendship and community, people who benefit us. We want to get a meal or a cup of coffee with somebody who's smarter than us or richer than us or more powerful than us because then it allows us to start to build a friendship because relationships oftentimes begin over something to eat and/or drink. And Jesus says, "Don't have that kind of worldly mentality. Don't think, 'Wow, if I could build a relationship with them, this will really be an advantage to me.'"

Jesus says to also invite into your life, into your home, into your parties and celebrations and feasts and meals, people who have nothing to repay with. They don't have social status. They don't have wealth. They don't have affluence. They don't have possessions. They may not even have an education. They may be crippled, lame, and blind. In that culture, these people were not even allowed to be fully engaged in the worship with God's people. They were considered outcasts. Some perhaps would even consider them cursed by God, which they were not. They were loved by God, but their life was filled with sad suffering. Jesus says, "Be generous with the menu and be generous with the guest list." Include in your circle of friends those who are not yet friends, but you're pursuing as friends.

This is the biblical doctrine of hospitality. For some of you, it's a spiritual gift and you're just hospitable, right? I have a daughter and a wife who are fully gifted in hospitality. When it came time to buy a home, Gracie kindly, nicely, with my invitation, she wasn't demanding anything, but I asked her, "Honey, what would work for a home for you?" She says, "Well, we love to entertain and we love to have people over and we love to have parties and crowds, but I hate it if the kitchen is in another room," because she likes to cook and prepare and get everything ready, but if she's separated from everyone else, she always misses out on the conversation and the relationships. She said, "So I like an open floor plan, and maybe an island where everybody could be helping out and visiting and the kitchen could be the center of activity. And as we prepare the meal, we're hanging out together and having snacks and visiting." And so in the grace of God, it took three moves in five years, but we got that home. It's an open floor plan.

And Grace and my daughter Ashley, my oldest, they watch the Food Network all the time. You love the Food Network? They love all the cooking shows. They're always taking notes. They love recipes, they love experimenting. When I went to Turkey a little over a year ago now, they were asking for a long list of spices. I went to the spice market in the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul and had to get a separate suitcase literally just to haul back all the stuff I bought. But a massive amount of what I purchased was actually spices. If you go on the Turkey trip with us this summer, you could do the same. My wife and daughter had a long list of all these exotic spices that were really inexpensive at this more than thousand-year-old spice market in Istanbul. And they had a long list as well they wanted to give to all their friends and everybody else who loves hospitality and loves to cook and entertain. And these are big values that we have to put into our schedule and into our life and into our budget because the Bible commands it, but also because my wife and my daughter, my kids quite frankly as well, they love to have people over.

Sometimes when it comes to this issue of hospitality, people misunderstand hospitality. Hospitality is not just hanging out with Christians. The word "hospitality" in the Bible literally means to welcome the stranger. Fellowship is when you hang out with all your Christian friends. And that's great and it's good and you should. Hospitality is when, in addition to your friends, you invite strangers to hang out with your friends so that they too start to become friends.

That's exactly what Jesus is talking about here. Hosting a party, hosting a banquet, hosting a feast, having a generous menu, having a generous guest list. And as we do these things, what we're showing is something of the character of God, that we can party to the glory of God. We can have a great time and laugh deeply and eat well to the glory of God. And as we do, we're showing something of the character of our God and something of his heavenly kingdom.

What happens is most people have this really religious view of heaven, that we'll just go there, either sit in rows and just be preached at for eternity and not have an emotional response, or that sort of bizarre cartoonish view that has nothing to do with the Bible. And so Jesus here gives us another category. The best meal you've ever eaten, the best party you've ever been to, the best memory you've ever made, better than that is the kingdom of God.

JESUS' KINGDOM PARTY HAS A LOT OF NO-SHOWS

Jesus goes on to teach us, then, that his kingdom party has a lot of no-shows. Luke 14:15–21a, “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,” that is Jesus, “said to him,” the man, “‘A man once gave,’” here’s the parable, “‘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 bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’ Another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the servant came and reported these things to his master.’”

Now the context is this: Jesus is actually sitting at a meal with a bunch of religious guys. And they’ve invited him to be with them and it’s really a setup. It says they were watching him closely in the previous verses. And they brought in a crippled man, hoping to get Jesus to heal him so that they could accuse Jesus of sin for healing on the Sabbath. The whole thing’s just this grotesque religious setup. Well, Jesus corrects them, teaches them. He walks into enemy territory, he deals with all of the crossfire of theological conflict. He’s without sin, he’s loving, holy, and good. He heals the man, he corrects the religious people.

And as he sits at the meal, he says, “You know what? This kind of reminds me of where I’ve come from.” Because Jesus is God come down from heaven. The kingdom of God is like a big banquet and a feast and a party. And when we have these parties, it shouldn’t just look like this party. He’s actually rebuking them, saying that the guest list is not what it should be. There are not enough poor people. There are not enough crippled people. There are not enough needy, hurting, suffering people. There are only religious people, people who have a degree and make a lot of money and live a comfortable life and feel that they’re better than everyone else. Jesus is looking around, “Where’s the single mom? Where’s the kid in the wheelchair? Where are all the people that should be here?”

He’s rebuking them at their own party for their guest list. And he starts talking about heaven and the kingdom of God and the resurrection state being a banquet and a feast and a party. And one religious guy raises his hand. There’s always one religious guy who’s trying to fix the awkwardness and in so doing he makes it more awkward. What he says is, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” What he says is, “Yeah, Jesus, it sounds like a great party. We’re all so glad to be going to your party in heaven.” And Jesus says, “You’re not all going.” This had to be an awkward moment. “This is the best party you’re ever going to get. Not all of you will be at my party.”

This is an important word for us today. We live in a day when, when someone dies, everyone feels awkward and basically just blurts out like this guy, “Well, you know, it’s good now. They’re eating bread in the kingdom of God. They went to heaven. They’re in a better place. They’re with the Lord.” Not everybody is. Not everybody is. Some people die and go to hell. Not everybody’s going to the party.

So Jesus tells this parable, which is a little story that teaches a big idea. And he says that God is glorious and good and he’s the host and he’s picking up the tab and he’s generous with the menu and the guest list. And he sends out two invitations, and in that day you would send out two invitations to a party. The first would be to get everyone to RSVP so you’d have a rough idea of how many guests you would have. And then you’d have to do the preparations of actually collecting the food and slaughtering the animals and preparing the feast and cooking the meat. This is a massive process. They didn’t have the kind of modern kitchens and electricity and, you know, warehouses to go buy large quantities like we do.

So you would send out your first guest list, say, “You’re all invited. Who wants to come?” People would RSVP. And then you’d do all the preparations for the meal and once everything was ready, you would send out your servant to those who had positively replied to the guest list invitation and you would give them the second invitation saying, “The meal is now ready, please get dressed and come. Please get dressed and come.”

LAME EXCUSES

And Jesus says that what has happened to many people is the invitation has gone out. And they’ve RSVP’d. “Yes, I believe in Jesus. Yes, I want to go to heaven. Yes, I want my sins forgiven. Yes, I want to be a Christian.” But ultimately, when it comes time to make that final, official response, the one deep in the heart and the soul, the one that is life-changing commitment, not just a moment, but a lifetime, they have lame excuses.

He gives some examples in the parable of lame excuses. One guy says, “Well, I just bought a field and I can’t go to the party because I need to go inspect it.” How many of you buy real estate sight unseen? In that day, real estate was negotiated over for a long period of time. It had belonged to the families and was passed on from generation to generation. You didn’t transact real estate without a long, complicated, arduous negotiation. And you knew exactly what you were buying ‘cause you had to fix a price to it. That’s a lame excuse.

Another guy says, “Well I just bought a whole bunch of oxen,” which are very expensive, all right? These are beasts of burden. This is what you use. This is like buying heavy machinery if you’re a farmer. It’s like getting a truck and getting a combine, getting a backhoe. You don’t just buy those things, pay for them, and then go see what they look like. You go check ‘em out, you negotiate a price, you purchase them. It’s a lame excuse.

And the third one is maybe the lamest of all. A guy says, “Oh, I can’t come, I have a wife.” Oh, yeah, ‘cause we know that wives hate to get dressed up and they hate to go to free parties and they hate to eat lots of great food and they hate to interact with lots of other people. Wives hate that! They just hate that. They’d rather just sit home and watch TV and eat foods that end in *-itos*, like Cheetos, Doritos, taquitos, things like that. Lame excuses.

Here’s the big idea: an invitation has gone out to all of you. You get to go to Jesus’ party. Jesus is right now preparing the best party in the history of the world. He is planning and preparing the party to end all parties. It’s a feast, a resurrection feast, celebrating the conquering of Satan, sin, death, hell, through the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus. All who are invited are welcome to come.

But how many of you really, you’re not moving toward the kingdom because of a lame excuse? “Well, now I’m not sure about Jesus,” or, “I’m really busy working,” or, “I’m in college now,” or, “It’s not a good season for me,” or, “I’m busy with my job,” or, you know, “I have a lot of hobbies,” or,

you know, “I’m trying to catch up on all the shows I prerecorded on TiVo.” Life is just filled with lame excuses. “I’m working on my car.” “I’m working on my house.” “Oh, we got kids now, I’m distracted.” “I’m single, these are my selfish years, they’re for me.” “Oh, our kids are grown. We get our selfish years back.” Lame excuse after lame excuse after lame excuse for people who at some point in their life raised their hand and said, “I would like to be a Christian,” and Jesus says, “All right, then come!” And they say, “Well, I can’t make it. I’m busy right now.”

And those kinds of people tend to have a presumption that, “Well, because I raised my hand for Jesus at some point in my life, I prayed a prayer, I went to church as a kid, I got baptized as an infant, I cried at camp, I came forward for the altar call, with my grandma I accepted Jesus in my heart, because at some point in the past I raised my hand, I’m fine. I’m going to make it into the kingdom.” That’s the presumption of this religious guy at the meal.

And Jesus says, “No, no, no. It’s not just a one-time decision, it’s a lifetime pursuit.” It’s like a marriage in that way. You don’t just one day say, “I love you and I’m going to marry you,” and then not pursue that person in relationship for the rest of your life. Ultimately that’s not a marriage. A marriage begins in a moment and it continues for a lifetime. And our relationship with God is likened to a marriage, where he loves us and we respond to him but there’s that mutual pursuit throughout the course of our lifetime until it culminates with the wedding supper of the Lamb, the big feast in Revelation 19.

What is your lame excuse? What is keeping you from moving toward Jesus? What lame excuse is getting in the way? What lame excuse when you die, if you die and you’re in hell, you will suddenly realize that you’ve presumed upon God’s grace? You were so busy doing the dishes and going to work and laboring over your GPA and trying to get pregnant that you forgot about God. That’s the big idea.

JESUS’ KINGDOM PARTY IS AN OPEN INVITATION

Jesus goes on to say, though, that his kingdom party is an open invitation. Who’s on the guest list for the kingdom of God? Luke 14:21b–24, “‘Then the master of the house,’” here’s the parable, “‘became angry and said to his servant, “Go out quickly to the streets and the 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, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.’””

Here’s the big idea. Jesus has sent out an invitation and a lot of people raised their hands but they’re really not coming toward him. So he sends out a second invitation and today God is sending you a second invitation. “Hey, what about Jesus? He’s God. He came to take away your sin. He loves you. He’s got a party prepared for you forever,” right? “But you got to come to the party. You got to come to the party.” Are you going to take Jesus up on his offer?

Here in the story, the religious people he’s having a meal with—and some of you would think this is very cruel. He’s sitting in a meal with a whole bunch of religious people and he’s telling the parable and the parable is that the guys who represent them in the story aren’t going to heaven, they’re going to hell. They’re not going to make the party because they’re not moving toward him. That’s a big statement. This is bravery by Jesus.

This had to be an awkward moment. He’s in a religious leader’s house at a formal meal for religious people and he says, “You know what? There’s a party bigger, better than this and you guys were invited and because you’re not loving me you’re not going to make it to my party ‘cause I’m the host and if you don’t want to hang out with me you’re not going to make it to the party. You’re going to hell.” Big statement. Big statement.

Not all of you who think you’re going to heaven are going to heaven. Not all of you who think you’re Christians are, in fact, Christians. Some of you are just religious people who maybe at some point raised your hand for the party but haven’t been pursuing a relationship with Jesus and moving toward him.

And what Jesus is talking about is this is our eternal state, either in hell or in the kingdom of God; that you and I, because of sin, we will die physically. Our bodies will go in the ground and our souls will go to be with the Lord. Paul says, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” There will come a day upon Jesus’ return where, like his resurrection from death, we who are dead will rise. Daniel 12:2 says some will rise to everlasting death, they’re going to hell. Some people to everlasting life, they’re going to the heavenly kingdom party. In that party we will be surrounded with people who love God. Jesus will, in fact, be there.

The Bible says that we will see him face to face, that there’ll be no sickness, there’ll be no suffering, there’ll be no sin. That Jesus says he’ll wipe every tear from our eyes and this world will be remade. There’ll be a new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem. We won’t just be spirits floating around. We won’t just be angels sitting on clouds. It’ll be this world, perfect, minus sin and all of its effects. When God got done with the world in Genesis 1:31 he said it was very good. Sin entered the world and has made much of it very bad. Jesus comes back to put an end to sin and through the resurrection to make all things new and through the new creation to make all things new so that everything is very good. That’s why Paul says, quote, in Philippians 1:23, “It is far better.”

And what I find interesting is that throughout the course of history, Christians have stressed a lot more on hell than heaven. I’ll give you some examples of people who are otherwise helpful. John Calvin, the great Bible teacher, he said very little about heaven, very little about the resurrection, very little about this kingdom party. I looked it up, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, he wrote an entire two-volume systematic theology. He has zero pages committed to the resurrection, the eternal state in God’s kingdom, and this great party that Jesus is hosting. That’s strange. Didn’t even mention the party. William Shedd, he’s a theologian who wrote his dogmatics. He has in his dogmatics eighty-seven pages devoted to hell, suffering and anguish and pain and flames and fury and wrath, which is all true. He has zero pages devoted to heaven. Zero! Nothing about the party.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, someone I personally really admire, love, and respect and was a great British preacher, he wrote a nine-hundred-page systematic

theology, two pages to the resurrection state and the kingdom party. Two pages! And Louis Berkhof's systematic theology, which is sort of the gold standard for Presbyterians, the entire systematic theology, which is quite dense, has only one page on the resurrection state and the kingdom party. Isn't that bizarre?

Yeah, Jesus is about not going to hell. But Jesus is also about going to heaven! Being with God and his people, in joy forever. It's about a party that an invitation is extended to you. All of you who want to go to the party, you're welcome to come through Jesus Christ. In his book *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn makes a good point. He's a great author and a good man. He said, "Christians are kind of like a bunch of astronauts sitting on a shuttle that's just about ready to launch toward Mars. And they look at one another and ask, 'So what do you know about Mars?' 'Nothing.'" Nothing! But that's where we're going!

I love the fact that Jesus comes along and says, "Dear Christian, here's where you're going. It really is fantastic! And it is forever!"

WHO WILL ATTEND THIS PARTY?

So a couple of questions to be answered: Who will attend this party? This great feast? Jesus says the invitation goes out. All the nations are welcome. All the races are welcome. Gender is not an issue. Income is not an issue. Intellect is not an issue. The invitation goes out. Anybody can come to Jesus and can come to Jesus' party!

The invitation is exceedingly generous, unlike so many religions where you have to meet certain qualifications. The invitation goes out to everyone. Those who are healthy, those who are sick; those who are blind, those who can see; those who have means, those who have nothing. Those who could put on fine clothes for a formal event and those who show up next to naked because they are poor beggars. They're all welcome to attend the party, the kingdom party of God.

So anyone who really responds I would say to both invitations, they do raise their hand and say, "I'm a sinner and I need Jesus," and then the rest of their life is actually walking toward the party, walking toward Jesus and his kingdom, repenting of sin, reading the Bible, praying, be a member of the church, be in community. Not that those things save you, but they are movement toward the party. In that day when the invitation went out you'd have to receive the invitation and then you'd have to walk to the party. That's the Christian life. We call it sanctification. There's a moment when you become a Christian. You raise your hand, say, "I belong to Jesus." The rest of your life is walking toward the party, maturity, obedience, holiness, growth.

My hope, my prayer is that none of you are like the religious guy in the parable, saying, "Well, I know I'm going to be there." Don't assume anything. "Work out your salvation," the Bible says, "with fear and trembling." Don't just assume and presume upon the grace of God. Keep moving toward Jesus. It's not just a decision. It's a decision that leads to a lifestyle.

WHAT IS THE DRESS CODE?

Number two, what's the dress code? This is pretty fun. Revelation 19:8, it's one of the last chapters of the Bible, talks about this great, epic, fantastic feast at the end. It says that, "Fine linen, bright and pure," is what the Christians will be wearing. White. White, all white. All the Christians wearing all white, at least for the dinner. People wear white to show that our sins are forgiven and our righteousness is in Christ.

Don't you love it on a wedding day, what color does the bride wear? She wears white. Is it because she's sinless? Ah, no. She wears white to show that she's clean in Christ. She's been expiated, cleansed, made new in Christ. She's forgiven and declared righteous in Christ. See, little girls who grow up waiting for their wedding day, preparing for their wedding day, and anticipating their wedding day, part of that is they really have this innate longing as the image bearers of God for the party at the end, the wedding supper of the Lamb, that history has talked of like a wedding, like it's all about Jesus the groom and the church is the bride. And there's a feast and a party and a celebration. What a glorious portrait of heaven.

What's the best wedding you've ever been to? The bride and the groom, they really did love each other. It was fantastic. The after party was enjoyable. It was such a memory. Did something just resound in your soul saying, "Gosh, this just feels right! This is wonderful!" Ultimately, that's a foreshadowing and a foretaste of the eternal state in the kingdom of God. And so God's people wear white to show that, yes, in Christ we're made clean.

You know what's curious? P-Diddy, Sean John, Puff Daddy, I don't even know what his name is this week, he throws these massive parties. His parties are legendary in L.A., at least that's what I hear. I'm not on the guest list, but pray for me. And what he says is that you're welcome to come to his party but there is a rule: everyone has to wear only white. So if you want to go to Puff Daddy's party, not sure you do, you have to wear all white. And I was reading that on, I think it was MTV or something, one of those great news sources for insightful theological assistance, and it said that you had to wear all white. And I thought, isn't that curious, that a guy whom I don't think knows Jesus, I don't get any evidence that he does, he's an image bearer of God and he knows how to throw a big, fantastic party that's lavish and generous, and he requires that everyone wear white. I know where he got that. He got that from the greatest meal that will ever be held, the greatest party that will ever be held. And I hope that he, too, takes up the invitation and meets Jesus and makes the party.

How many of you ladies on your wedding day you wore white? All of that was practice for heaven. I can still remember my daughter, Ashley, the first time she got married, she was about four or five years old at Disney World in Florida—hang with me, it's actually a good story. Don't start Twittering just yet. Gracie and I had taken her to Orlando and we went to Disney World and we had a fun time. I think I've told you this story before, but that's what happens when you get old, you keep telling the same stories.

And so we were in the hotel room at night at Disney World and Ashley, whom I absolutely adore, she was maybe four or five or something at the time,

she said, "Daddy," she might have called me Papa Daddy, she's called me Papa Daddy for years, "I want to go swimming." I was like, "Honey, it's very late. It's, you know, past your bedtime and we had a big day, we got a big day tomorrow." She gave me that look. If you're a daddy you know what that look looks like. "Daddy, please! We're at Disney World and you're my daddy and I love you and I want to go swimming." "Okay, we're going swimming."

So we put our swimsuits on and we go down to the pool and I'm throwing her in the air and we're swimming. And they got Mickey Mouse spitting water and just had this glorious little sacred moment with my daughter. And came back to the hotel room and she was standing on the bed and she had her swimsuit on and I got the towel and I was toweling her off and drying her hair.

And she took the towel when I had it over her head and she grabbed the ends of it, big white towel, and she held it and she looked at me and she says, "Daddy, will you marry me? Will you marry me?" I lost it, I started crying. If you're a man, you shouldn't cry if you hit your thumb with a hammer, but if your daughter asks you to marry her you should cry. Pick your tears strategically. I thought, "Oh, my gosh, look what's down deep in the heart of my little girl! She wants to wear white and she wants to be loved."

All of that is culminated at the wedding supper of the Lamb, the big kingdom party that Jesus talks about, where the children of God get to wear white and all their sins are forgiven. And they have a feast and a celebration with Jesus. It's great, isn't it? Man, we really need to enlarge our biblical vision of God's eternal kingdom.

WHAT IS THE MENU?

A couple more questions. What is the menu? I know some of you are asking this. You're the foodies, right? You're the foodies. "Oh, what's the menu? What's the menu?" Here it is, Isaiah 25:6 in the NIV, "The Lord Almighty will prepare a feast." You know it's going to be good! Whoever your favorite Iron Chef is, I promise you, Jesus is a better cook. This is going to be such a great menu!

"Of rich food." Oh, I don't know what that means, but it sounds pretty fantastic. It sounds like a lot of spices and maybe some sauces and flavors and maybe a little bit of heat and spiciness. Oh, this sounds very intriguing.

"Rich food for all peoples," isn't that great? Unlike a restaurant where you get what you can afford, at Jesus' kingdom you get what he gives and he's generous. There's going to be poor people who are going to eat the first great meal of their whole life. It's going to be great!

"A banquet," of what? Here's the centerpiece of the meal! "Aged wines, the best of meats, and the finest of wines." That's fantastic! Red wine, red meat, they go together. They're even color-coded in the goodness of God. And I don't know what this means for Methodists and Nazarenes and Baptists and vegetarians. I don't know if they're going to be at the kiddie table with mac and cheese or what, but that's what's ultimately on the menu.

How does that sound? How many of you would be pretty thrilled if I sent you an invitation saying, "You're welcome to come. The best meal in the history of the world. All expenses paid. Some amazing people will be there. It's free. The best wine ever made and the best cuts of beef in the history of the universe!" That's the party that Jesus throws in the end.

So I'll tell you what won't be at the party. And I tell you this so when you throw a party you throw a Christian party, you don't throw a non-Christian party. And when you feast, you don't feast like a single guy! Single guys know nothing about feasting! So I asked the guys to go get me some examples of what will not be at Jesus' feast and when we throw a feast they should not be at our feast. And we were going to go to the grocery store and get some horrible examples of what we'll call godless snack foods. They're not awesome and epic and fantastic and savory and rich. And so we were going to send the guys to the grocery store and instead of sending one of the guys to the grocery store, we could have just sent one of the single guys back to his house.

So here's what will not be—let's see what they got me. There will not be Hamburger Helper in the kingdom of God. There will not be SpaghettiOs in the kingdom of God. There will not be Chef Boyardee Beef Ravioli in the kingdom of God. Glory be to God. There will not be taquitos. Again, I don't think in the kingdom of God anything ending in *-itos*—Doritos, Cheetos, Fritos, taquitos, are no-goes. Not going to happen.

How about this one? Hot Pocket. It's hot like hell. These will be in hell. These will not be in the kingdom of God. Tuna Helper? No, no. Jesus is your helper, the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, is your helper. There's nothing helpful about Tuna Helper. It will not be in the kingdom of God. This is supposed to be macaroni and cheese. And you put it in a microwave, which immediately kills any sense of nutrition, not that it started with any. If there is macaroni and cheese in the kingdom of God, and, Lord Jesus, I humbly request that there would be, it will in fact not be frozen from the store. It will be made by Jesus with good ingredients.

What else do we have? Chex Mix, not going to be there. Jimmy D's Griddle Sticks: pancake batter covering a turkey sausage link on a stick, okay? This is breakfast in hell. This is not going to be in the kingdom of God. Spam I do not think will be in the kingdom of God 'cause when it says the best of meats, this is not it. I don't even know what is in Spam. They don't tell you because it's none of your business. Though it's scary, frightening, and horrific. Swiss Rolls probably won't be in the kingdom of God but that would be okay.

How about this one? Oh, T.G.I.Friday's now has cheddar and bacon potato skins. That will not be in the kingdom of God. Now, the bacon may be, but it will be among the best of meats. They had one in here, too, that I really liked, where was that? What is this? Smucker's peanut butter and strawberry jam sandwich. At what point did peanut butter and jelly sandwiches become so time consuming, complicated, and difficult that we had to prepare them in advance so we could just give them to the children that apparently we do not like?

And my most favorite. This will not be in the kingdom of God. This is Brown Box Wine. It doesn't even have a design. It says Merlot, but it's not. It's not. This is the kind of wine that I think that they will serve in hell. It will be in a box and you'll eat it with your Smucker's Unrustable.

Jesus says, "Aged wines, best of meats, finest of wines." When we get to the kingdom party, it's going to be a fantastic party with a generous menu, a generous guest list.

WHAT WILL THE ENTERTAINMENT BE?

And what will the entertainment be? I know some of you have asked this. "Well, what will the—will there be a band?" Some of you think we're just going to sing the whole time. Some of you are like, "I don't like to sing!" Singing is fun if you can sing. Singing is fun if you love Jesus, but singing forever does sound like a lot.

This is one of my favorite, most perplexing, curious verses in all the Bible. Zephaniah 3:17, a little tiny prophet in the Old Testament, says, "He," that is Jesus, "will rejoice over you with," what? "Gladness. He will quiet you by his love. He will exult over you with loud singing."

When we sit down for this epic meal, you know who's going to be there? The saints in the Old Testament—Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and David and Daniel and Ruth and Rahab. It's amazing. And Paul and Peter and doubting Thomas and Martin Luther and John Calvin and maybe your great-great-great-grandma who loved Jesus and all of these people, people who have suffered a martyr's death, people who have given their life to Jesus and you've never even heard of, but they've got the most fantastic stories.

Don't you love meeting somebody at a party when there's no rush for time, that person is really kind of interesting and you get to hear their story and you're like, "That's fascinating"? Heaven's like that. It's this great party with amazing people who have all got fantastic stories of God's grace. And you get to hear their stories. Some are heroes you've always wanted to meet and some are people you didn't even know were part of the family of God.

And as we're enjoying them, what it says is that then Jesus will come out and it's going to get really quiet. And we're just going to see his face and we're going to see his face of gladness. You're going to see Jesus smile. And you're going to feel loved like you've never felt loved in your whole life. I don't care who's loved you, you've never felt a love like this. And I don't know how many people are going to be there, billions say they're Christians on the earth today. We don't know. It's going to be a huge party. We're all going to see Jesus. We're going to see love in his eyes. We're going to see a smile on his face. And it's going to get really quiet and he's going to sing. Jesus is going to sing. If you love Jesus, that's almost too much to even comprehend. You think of your favorite artist, your favorite musician, the person dead or alive that, "Man, if I could just have a front row seat to one of their shows." Jesus sings over you with love and gladness.

WILL YOU MAKE THE KINGDOM PARTY?

Last question, and I mean this with all sincerity because I love you, will you make the kingdom party? Have you turned from sin? Have you trusted in Jesus, the God who left this great party, came down to earth to be poor, humiliated, mocked, opposed, disdained, falsely accused, arrested, crucified, murdered, buried? Why did he do that? To extend an invitation to you to come to his party by paying your debt of sin so that you could be free to join with him. Then he rose from death, conquering all that was against us. He's our great God and savior.

He ascended back into heaven and right now the Bible says he has gone to prepare a place for us. He's preparing the feast. He's getting the party ready. And he invites you to raise your hand and become a Christian, but also then to pursue a life of relationship, walking toward him and his kingdom, and on the other side of death, I've already told you, the life that awaits you forever. Will you make the kingdom party?

I would just urge you—and I mean this wholeheartedly. There were many at that party, perhaps all, who had the same attitude as the religious guy. "Oh, praise God I'm going to the party!" Ah, are you sure? Are you sure you know Jesus? Are you sure you love Jesus? Are you sure you belong to Jesus? Are you sure you've turned from sin to trust in him? Are you sure you're going to see Jesus on the other side of death and you're going to see him smiling and not shaking his head? Are you sure? So I'd invite you to give your life, your heart, your eternity to Jesus today and to take him up on his salvation invitation to his great party.

KINGDOM PARTY PRACTICE

And lastly, I'm going to give you a couple of things to do and pray for. We're going to have a little kingdom party practice. Most Christians are known by what we're against rather than what we're for. And we tend to oppose all the parties. "Oh, we don't like Mardi Gras and we don't like New Year and we don't like Fourth of July. We don't like these things because people get drunk and they eat too much and they sin and they do things they shouldn't." Well, we don't need to receive parties as the world has them. We don't need to reject them because of the way the world has them. We need to redeem them like God has them. We need to throw parties like Jesus threw a party.

So, number one, I'm going to ask you to throw a great party. Practice for the kingdom of God. You could do this by yourself. You could do this with your family, maybe invite your neighbors and people you don't even know and coworkers and strangers and people who are around you. Or this could be with your community group, you all get together and say, "Okay, Pastor Mark gave us an assignment. We're going to throw a party. What's the menu? What's the theme? Who are we going to invite?" Jesus says the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind.

Invite some people who don't get invited to a lot of really nice parties that are free. Be generous with the menu. Be generous with the guest list. You could do this at someone's home. You could go to—I don't know where you want to go. You want to go to a retirement home, a convalescent home? You want to go to a hospital? You want to go to a battered women's shelter? You want to go to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center? Where do you want to go? Do you want to go help those who are already in need? Do you want to bring the party to them? Do you want to bring them to your party?

I want you as a community group and maybe even linking with other community groups, maybe five or six or eight or ten community groups get together and say, “We’re going to have a huge party and we’re going to rent a space and we’re going to do something really big and we’re going to invite people in. And as God’s people, we’re going to pay for it.” And if you struggle financially with this and you can’t afford it, your community group leader can let us know. We’ve set aside an amount of money to actually provide some resources to help you throw your party because we don’t want money to be the issue. We do want you to be generous.

So, number two, invite old friends, strangers, people in need.

Number three, if you want, write a one-paragraph report and send a photo to party@marshillchurch.org. You know what we’d like to do? Just show those on the campus websites. God’s people having fun with other people whom God loves. And if anyone asks you, “Why are you throwing this party? What is the hook? Are you trying to get me to join something? Sign something? What’s the hook?” Because Jesus said early on, everybody who throws a party, usually they got an ulterior motive. They’re trying to get something in return. Tell them, “You know what? Jesus is a good God. He went to parties. He threw parties. He’s throwing the biggest party ever at the end of time. And as Christians, one of the things that we believe is Jesus wants us to throw some really good parties and love people, so he said to throw this party for you.”

And then lastly, be praying for our biggest party ever. We are going to throw on Easter, by the grace of God, if God wills, the biggest party we’ve ever thrown. It’s going to cost a lot of money. It’s going to be a generous guest list. We’re going to invite anyone and everyone in the entire Puget Sound to join us for one Easter service. Our friends at the Albuquerque campus, our family there, unless they want to fly out, they’re going to do their own service with Pastor Dave and the leadership there.

But here’s what we’ve done. We’ve rented Qwest Field. The football stadium. The baseball stadium was taken. There’s a game later that day. The football stadium is open. We’ll be able to seat over twenty thousand people and just take one section of the stadium with all of the seating, put the stage on the fifty-yard line. We’re going to open it up as a free event. There will be special musicians and activities. We’re working on some fantastic guests. As soon as everything is booked, we’ll notify you and make it all official.

Our goal is twenty thousand-plus people. This entire church, Mars Hill, has not come together for one event, one service, one party since 1996. The first year we started, we had one service and before long we went to two services. And since that time, we’ve never all been in the same room.

So all of the Puget Sound–area campuses, thanks to the unity among all of the campus pastors, have agreed to all come together on Easter morning for what I believe will be the biggest church service in the history of the Pacific Northwest, the biggest party that’s ever been thrown. And we’re going to pay for it and everybody else is going to be able to come for free. We’re going to have fantastic music. Of course the gospel of Jesus Christ will be preached, an invitation will be made to the biggest party of all, the kingdom of God. And we hope and pray that more than five hundred people will meet Jesus and be baptized right there in the football stadium on Easter as a party, practicing for the big party, thanks to the resurrection of Jesus. So be in prayer for that.

Father God, I pray for us as a people. Some of us have only partied in a sinful way. Some of us have not partied enough. Teach us to party, to celebrate, to feast, to laugh, to eat, to enjoy in a way that glorifies you and is good for us. Jesus, I thank you for this parable where we get to see the kingdom is like the best meal we’ve ever eaten and the best party we’ve ever been to. Jesus, it just reminds us of your grace. I pray for those of us who are religious, that are just assuming we’re going to be at the party when, in fact, we may not be. I pray for us, God, that Mars Hill would be a place where it feels like a kingdom party, that Jesus, you’re alive and your grace is poured out and the kingdom is open and the invitation has gone out. I pray for the parties that will be thrown by the people in this church, that they would really get to know and love some new people. I pray for the biggest party we’ve ever thrown, God. By your grace, may Jesus get the glory and may we get the joy and may people accept the invitation to the greatest party of all. In Jesus’ name, amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.