

God's Relentless Mission **Luke 14:12-24**

Have you ever had something you're so passionate about, you're willing to do whatever it takes to make it happen? I think there are a lot of things that could fall into this category. Maybe you've decided you're going to run a marathon. (Picture) A marathon isn't something you just do on a whim. Your body and mind have to be trained for months to get ready. It requires many long hours of running no matter how bad the weather is or how much else you've got going on. I've heard of people waking up at 4:00am to go on a long run so they can get to work on time. Others will run for 3-4 hours on their day off. They'll run in sweltering heat and humidity as well as rain, sleet, and snow. It amazes me how dedicated they can be!

People who enter bike races can be the same way. (Picture) I have a brother who's into biking and one day, I think it may have even been his birthday, he went on a 200 mile bike ride – by himself, just to see if he could do it. And he did! But he didn't just wake up one morning and decide to do it. He spent months in training, doing all kinds of grueling workouts, fine-tuning his diet, learning how to ingest an incredibly high number of calories while riding to fuel his body. It just blew me away to see everything he did and still does because of his passion for riding.

For you it might be something different. It could be going to college or graduate school to earn a degree in something you're passionate about. It might be mastering your voice or an instrument and devoting yourself to lessons and endless hours of practice. It could be buying or building a home, and you pour yourself into it until it's finally accomplished. Most of us know what it's like to have something we're so passionate about, we're willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish it.

This morning we're going to see what that is for God. Does God have something that he's so passionate about that he's willing to do whatever it takes to make it happen? In the passage we're going to study, I think we'll see he does. We'll see he has a relentless mission and there's nothing that will stand in his way – no power of hell, no scheme of man, no weakness or failure on our part that will be able to stop him. But we'll also see it's not just something he's doing, it's

something he calls us to be part of as well. He is moving all things in that direction, so we need to make sure we're on board and partnering with him.

Jesus spoke about God's relentless mission in a parable he gave to a group of people in Perea. (Picture) In one short story he described what God is moving toward, how people were responding, and what would happen in the future. It's a parable that also speaks about us and shows us what our part is. So I want us to see what God is zealous for and why we should join him.

Last week we saw that Jesus was invited to the home of a ruler of the Pharisees for a meal. He was new in that area and they wanted to investigate his teachings. We looked at a parable he told to the guests when he could see they were driven by self-exaltation. He then spoke briefly to the host and finished by telling another parable for everyone, and that's what we're going to focus on today.

First we're going to look at what he said to the host. These things are related to what we saw him say to the guests last week – it had to do with practicing humility and considering the interests of others before your own.

Read 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. 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."

This was a radically different mindset than the people at the party would have been used to. For them it was normal to invite people to a banquet that would be beneficial to them – relatives, friends, people they enjoyed, people who could return the favor. Even though you had the expense of feeding them, there would be benefits, kickbacks and returned favors, so you invited certain people based on your own self-interest.

But Jesus revealed things were different in the kingdom of God. Rather than inviting those who could benefit you, you should invite the poor and needy – those who couldn't pay you back. If you get paid back, that's all the payment you receive – there wouldn't be any reward from God. But if you demonstrate

humility, generosity and kindness by inviting those who can't pay you back, you'll be rewarded in heaven. You'll be demonstrating who God is to the world – he invites us into his kingdom, even though we're poor and aren't able to pay him back for all he's done. And he wants us to humble ourselves and do the same. Give generously to those who can't repay you and you'll be rewarded.

Jesus made it clear that things would be different in the kingdom he was establishing. Now, when he mentioned being repaid at the resurrection, one of the guests at the table perked up and said something, and we read about that next.

Read Luke 14:15-24.

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.'"

So Jesus told this parable in response to what the man said in verse 15: "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" The Reformation Study Bible says this was a conventional utterance that was used regarding the resurrection – a saying that the guests at the party would have been familiar with as they looked forward to the Messianic kingdom, and it was something they all assumed they would be part of. They were Israelites, the covenant people of God, and when the Messiah came and ushered in his everlasting kingdom, they would gather with him and eat bread in the kingdom of God. It was something they believed in and were looking forward to.

But Jesus knew there was a major problem with that assumption because most of them would actually decline the invitation to enter the kingdom of God, because they would reject him as the Messiah. So he told a parable to describe what was actually going to happen.

He compares the kingdom of God to a great banquet. The master of the house represents God, and he has already sent out his servants to give an initial invitation. Back in that time there were two invitations when a banquet was held. The first was like an announcement to save the date. People had to know ahead of time so that they were ready, similar to wedding announcements and graduation announcements today. The second came when the banquet was ready.

In the kingdom of God, the initial invitation had been going out throughout Old Testament history and it took on many forms. There was the book of the Law that contained the instructions for the Tabernacle, priests, and sacrifices. These were all a foreshadow of the coming Messiah, who would come as a perfect Mediator between God and man to open the way to the Holy of Holies by his blood so people could enter his kingdom. There were also many Prophets who spoke from God in various times and places and foretold of the coming of the Messiah and how he would usher in his kingdom.

So the people of Israel knew about the kingdom – they heard the invitation, and in Jesus' day, they were looking forward to it, ready to respond when the second invitation was given. Or so they thought. But Jesus knew it would be a different story because they had a different kind of kingdom and different kind of Messiah in mind.

The time for the banquet had come – the kingdom of God was at hand. The Messiah was in their midst and the second invitation was going out to call the people to come. John the Baptist started it as he called people to repent and prepare for the coming of the Lord. Then Jesus himself gave the invitation. For 2½ years he had been traveling throughout Israel with his disciples, proclaiming the good news, calling people to repent, and inviting them to follow him. The gates to the master's house were open.

But not everyone was responding. Many were making excuses, especially those in the religious establishment. Their excuses were illustrated in the parable:

'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it.'

'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them.'

'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'

The point was these were all lame excuses and the people listening would have known it. No one would buy a field without already examining it – there was no need to skip the banquet to go back to see it after it was bought. In the same way, no one would buy oxen without first examining them. They didn't need to go back and do it again. And when someone got married they were excluded from military service for the first year, but not from other social gatherings, so to say you can't come because of being married made no sense.

The truth of the matter was that these people weren't interested in going to the banquet when it was actually time. And that's what was happening with the religious leaders in Israel. They wanted nothing to do with the Messiah when he actually came. They'd rather keep doing their own thing than join him. And that probably included most of the people who came to hear Jesus that day. They'd just make up excuses and find something better to do.

But notice – that wouldn't stop the master from having his banquet. According to the parable, if the guests who received the initial invitation weren't interested, his servants would hit the streets and invite all the rest – the poor and crippled and blind and lame. These represent the common Jews who weren't tied to the religious establishment of Jesus' day. They probably weren't at the party where Jesus was speaking or part of the "in" crowd when it came to the religious elite. Yet they would be the ones to respond. They would be the ones who made up the first church in Jerusalem that we read about in the beginning of Acts. Hundreds of Jews would come while the religious leaders continued to refuse.

But notice it says there was still more room after these had come, and the master wanted his house filled. So he told his servants to go outside the city to the highways and hedges to compel people to come. This represents everyone else beyond the initial Jewish church in Jerusalem who would come to know and follow Christ – people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. People reached by the Apostle Paul and many other missionaries and faithful believers over the centuries who would continue to extend the invitation further, and further, and

further until the appointed time when the final guest arrived. This includes you and me, as well as the people we reach and invite during our lifetimes. Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 24:14: *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

In this short little story, Jesus described all of redemptive history, and portrayed God’s relentless mission to gather his people and fill his kingdom for the eternal celebration that will soon begin. God’s pursuit of this eternal celebration has been going on since the fall of man in the garden and his mission is relentless. That’s why you and I are even here this morning. That’s why we know about Jesus and the good news of salvation. God will not be stopped. Through countless obstacles and impossibilities, God has carried out his mission with relentless passion and we are his guests who will be eternally blessed.

But we’re not only guests. Everyone who has been welcomed into his kingdom has also been called to be a partner in extending his invitation. We who have tasted his goodness are to go and invite more. There’s still room, and there’s still time. Paul wrote of this in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”*

The question for us to ask ourselves is: Am I joining God in his relentless mission to bring the good news to the highways and hedges? Am I spreading the good news? Or do I keep making excuses, like the people in the parable? The invitation to join the banquet is also an invitation to join the mission. God wants us to spread the word about what Christ has done and what we’ve experienced in him. People need to know what their missing so they might find Jesus as well, and we have the privilege to tell them.