

Introduction: An Awkward dinner. I was a kid from the wrong side of the tracks and my girlfriend who was the daughter of some fairly well-to-do folks in a very privileged neighborhood—she invited me to dinner at her home. Lots of family and guests. And every single second I was there it was painful socially. The dinner guests ignored my very presence most of the meal. The uppity little minx I was dating kept smiling—just waiting for her opportunity to disrupt her dad's dinner. A lull in the conversation and she blurted out—so Jeff—tell us about your street ministry. Not being shy, I launched into a 10 minute conversation about ministering downtown to all the hurting—I told a hair raising story about a drunk I found, a shocking illustration of God's love to a “working girl” who had couldn't count the cost of leaving her life of sin—and when I was done—my girlfriend's mother just changed the conversation. These good, Christian people wanted nothing whatsoever to do with me—and they didn't say another word to me the entire night.

And my Christian girlfriend broke up with me because, as she explained, her mother just could not accept my very existence.

Now I want to take you back 2 millennia—1900 years to a dinner conversation that was just awkward and led to a similar rejection of the guest.

Scripture: Luke 14:1-6 “One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. ² And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” ⁴ But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. ⁵ And he said to them, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” ⁶ And they could not reply to these things.”

Remember how we said it was possible for there to be a person like this with a medical condition present at their dinner. These dinners happened in open courtyards and the townsfolk were invited to come and listen in on these rabbinic conversations about matters of the law. This man is like there on the perimeter listening intently to see what Jesus will say—and maybe hopefully to have him heal them.

This opens the door for Jesus to challenge them again concerning their rabbinic law that allows them to rescue a major source of their livelihood—an ox—but then forbid and outlaw the healing or use of any medicinal aids for *people made in God's image* on the Sabbath.

First we observe in this passage...

1. A gracious invitation to all (14:7-24).

Theirs was an “honor-shame” culture. The key feature of an honor-shame culture in the ancient world is that you got ahead at the expense of others. You brought yourself honor at the expense of—namely by shaming those around you. It’s difficult to describe this cultural air they breath. Jesus did not shame the common man or woman. Instead he elevated them through his teachings and through his healing ministry.

The guests have come to vye for the most honored seats at this large, sprawling dinner table in the portico of this Jewish villa.

The untouchables and castaways of society don’t even attempt to take a seat on a cushion at the table—and never would it occur to them to move forward to the most honored seats.

Moreover they have probably not afforded Jesus the most honored guest spot at the table.

And everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and everyone who humbles himself will be exalted.

Right away the honor-addicts at that table are stunned. Awkward!

Jesus kept pressing the issue “He said to the man who had invited him—when you throw a swaray—don’t invite your honored guests so that they may come and drink their fill of honor and respect due them because of their privileged positions in society. Don’t invite the high-society crowd. Don’t invite the prominent or well-connected. Instead—invite the down-and-outers. The castaways. The indigent, the handicapped, the lame and the sightless. Great will be your reward at the resurrection of the just.”

Then one of the pious and esteemed guests spoke up—no doubt to change the subject—no doubt to clear the air of its thick tension,

“Ah hem. Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

And Jesus just rips into him. “Let me tell you a story...” (vs. 16-24). In the parable Jesus charges them with having other priorities than the sudden inbreaking of God’s kingdom. How inconvenient for God to begin the plan of the ages and to disrupt their daily obsessions and preoccupations. *The invitation comes first to these well-connected Jews*. They are the guardians of the law of Moses—and Jesus does offer it to them first. But the excuses that come are plentiful.

- A new field—real estate needing attention and care.
- A new ox—livestock requiring a bill of sale and proper safe delivery. The field and the Ox are rich man problems in Jesus’ world.
- A new wife—refusal to attend on domestic grounds.

And the host in the parable is riled. Infuriated actually. And so he crafts an interesting, counter-cultural solution.

- Go out to the streets and alleyways of the city and invite the refugees, the blind and lame and people who could not possibly show up with a house-warming gift.
- The astonished group of castaways and refugees come in and fill the banquet hall. But there is still room for more.
- “Then go out even further—to the country roads and hollars—invite every person you see regardless of their station or class or status or income level. Bring those yokels in too. We’ll show those pretentious and preoccupied original guests what a celebration is supposed to look like.

And the banquet hall is filled. This is an illustration of a final dinner—the Marriage banquet of the Lamb. But the OT passage is found in Is. 25:6-9

Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make *for all peoples*

a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

⁷ And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over *all peoples*,
the veil that is spread over all nations.

⁸ He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord God will wipe away tears from *all faces*,
and the reproach of his people he will take away *from all the earth*,
for the Lord has spoken.

⁹ It will be said on that day,
“Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us.
This is the Lord; we have waited for him;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Jesus gives the parable of the final banquet in and it is pictured in...

Rev. 19:6-9

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

The rabbi sitting next to Jesus rejoices over the fulfillment of Isaiah 25—and he forgets its actual wording. Its real context. It is a banquet for all people—for all the nations. For whosoever will accept the invitation of so gracious a salvation.

Second, we see in the text that Jesus addresses...

2. A great cost to those who follow (14:25-33).

Now Jesus turns his attention to the costs associated with embracing him and receiving this free and gracious invitation to salvation. Everything. It. Will. Cost. You and I. EVERYTHING.

Illus. Annie Dillard's essay on the Franklin Expedition to the Arctic titled, *An Expedition to the Pole*. The explorers—Royal Navy Officers who were well adapted to the posh and lavish officer's clubs in Great Britain—had no idea what they would need to explore and survive the harsh conditions to the arctic.

- They brought their 1200 volume library instead of additional coal.
- China place-settings and ornate sterling silver with the initials of the officers etched in them. Instead of extra shovels and ice augers.
- No heavy coats or extra clothing—just the Royal Navy officer's uniforms.
- No plan to cut through the unrelenting and immovable ice.
- No extra food or jerky—only ship storage empty—waiting to be filled and well-stocked.

Years later the Inuit tribe found all the officers—many huddled into thin tents—bodies frozen around ornate place-settings. Some were found dead in boats with their decorative silverware and teapots—a few guns and some chocolate bars.

John Franklin and his 138 men died in that frozen tundra because they had come prepared for tea but not for reality. They were prepared for a voyage filled with indulgence but not an adventure filled with the need for temperance. They brought their luxury items and forgot the necessities for the harsh realities of that expedition.

And now Jesus wants to assure his followers and those who have great hope in the resurrection and God's family banquet—this lavish and free invitation to whosoever will—there is a high cost for this lowly cross. ***And when God calls you it costs you.*** When God invites you it upends you.

There are two costs Jesus mentions to these Jewish crowds:

- **The love for God's Kingdom in his chosen Messiah should take precedence over family loyalties.** Jesus uses a phrase that jars them awake. Can you imagine if my message today were "How to Hate Your Family in 3 Easy Steps." That would get our attention wouldn't it. But this is a paradox. A paradox, as you know, is an apparent contradiction in the absence of more information. When one obtains all the relevant information—the contradiction disappears. Jesus has repeatedly commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves. But here he seems to advocate the hatred of our most intimate family as well as ourselves. But this is a statement by comparison. He's teaching that compared to our love for God—our love for anything other loyalty must look like hatred. Our love for mother, father, wife, children—is love by any measure—accept when measured to our commitment to the Messiah and his Kingdom. If family loyalties stand in the way of pursuing the Kingdom of God—a relationship with God through Christ—then God takes precedent.
- **The second is like it. Bearing the cross. The cross in this world was a social stigma.** To bear it meant to experience irreparable social injury. No Jewish revolutionary martyr who ever went to a Roman cross for his cause was ever venerated for their great sacrifice by the Jews. Instead they were considered cursed to hang on a Roman tree. The cross was a symbol of public shame. A naked body on a cross represented God's own judgment on that person for their failures and sin.

Yet here is Jesus at the dinner challenging all who hear him to take up their cross and follow him. A jarring statement meant to shake them awake from their spiritual snoozing.

Two Analogies.

- The Tower
- The King at War

The issue in both these analogies is *completion*. Completing what was begun. The challenge to disciples is *finishing the race—going all the way and embracing the stigma of his crucified body on a scandalous instrument of Roman execution*.

Why is the cross of Jesus so offensive? Entire religions are offended by it?