



Pastor Kyle Mercer
Come to the Table

December 10, 2023
Series: Plot Twist
Luke 14:1-24

**BIG IDEA – EVERY "GO AND TELL" EVENTUALLY BECOMES A
"COME AND SEE"**

Hey, Two Cities family. Pastor Kyle here. I am actually at my home. I'm actually in my basement in my home office. This is where I've written almost every sermon for the last seven years. One of the things I want to say at the beginning is thank you for the privilege, opportunity, and blessing of getting to come down here every morning and spend the first part of my day preparing and studying God's Word to preach and teach it to you. It's a great honor.

Guys, here we are. We are in the middle of the biggest transition in the history of our church so far. While we're filming this and having an online-only week, our staff is busy transitioning everything from our Northwest Campus to our new home on Patterson Avenue. I just want to tell you I am so excited and eager for you to get on this property. Next weekend, come early. Pray over the property.

Make sure you get there to see the lobby, check your kids in, and find a great seat. Bring someone with you. It's going to be an incredible time together. I just need to remind us one more time... You hear me say this all the time. The building is a means to a greater end. Buildings have never reached people for Jesus. People reach people for Jesus. So, we think of this building as an enormous blessing and tool and simply a facility to facilitate ministry.

As I say all that, turn to Luke 14. One of the things I've been doing is trying to figure out what would be the best parable to talk about as we transition. It's really a parable on inviting. In Luke 14 (I'll just give you the background), Jesus is invited to dinner by this religious leader. As you know, Jesus is a dangerous person to invite to dinner.

He's going to disrupt, ask difficult questions, point out things, and make people feel uncomfortable.

I won't read you the first 11 verses of chapter 14, but just know Jesus is at dinner asking a bunch of uncomfortable questions, like basically, "Hey, guys. Why are there only religious people here? Do you care about the hurting, the broken, and the needy?" All of that.

This is the parable of the great banquet. I want to pick up in Luke 14:12. If you'll look here with me, here's what it says. **"He said also to the man who had invited him..."** Imagine saying this to the religious leader of the day who's at the head of the table who invited you to come over for dinner. He says:

"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."

Jesus basically looks around the table and says, "Hey, listen. There are people who are missing who should be here." By the way, I hope every time you come to Two Cities and are part of one of our worship services, while you're singing or worshipping or listening to the preaching or whatever it is...

I know I have this moment oftentimes while I'm saying it. I think about somebody I know and love, maybe someone who's far from God and close to me, who should be there but isn't, and maybe God might use me to invite them to be a part of what God is doing.

Anyway, Jesus says these things. It makes people feel uncomfortable. Look at what happens in verse 15. Look at what this guy says. We don't know who says this. ***"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!'"*** (Obviously, this guy wasn't gluten-free.) This guy is trying to break the ice. He's uncomfortable, so he makes a religious statement.

01 HEAVEN IS DESCRIBED AS A PARTY, FEAST, AND BANQUET

Look at what happens here. ***"But he [Jesus] said to him, 'A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.'"*** I want you to know this, and I want you to see this arise right out of Scripture. Here's what I want you to see. Jesus is going to talk about the

kingdom of God or you might say *heaven* or *salvation*. I'm using those synonymously in this conversation.

He talks about them as a feast, a party, and a banquet. I mean, I don't know how *you* think about heaven. Most people think about heaven as a very long, boring church service, maybe with a lot of singing. Other people have a view of being a baby in a diaper on a cloud playing a harp. I don't know how we got these ideas of heaven.

Heaven and, therefore, salvation is talked about as an enormous party in which God pays for everything. See, every other religion says you have to pay for it. Karma says you'd better do more good than bad or else it's going to come and haunt you. Islam says you have to do the five pillars. Modern secular people say you need to buy an electric car, recycle, ride your bike, and buy organic.

We all have these things we have to do to be a good person so God will pay us back. What makes Christianity different (we see it right here) is God is the owner who throws a massive party and says, "Listen. I'm paying for everything. I paid for it with the blood of my own Son. I'm a generous God. I'm a giver and a forgiver, and I'm going to invite you." This is how it all starts. It starts with an invitation.

By the way, I thought this was a great passage for us to talk about today because Christianity, the kingdom of God, is all about inviting people to take their next step on their spiritual journey. Yes, we go and tell. Of course we do. We live on mission where we live, learn, work, and play. But every "Go and tell" eventually becomes a "Come and see." "Come and see. Do a Bible study with me. Come and see my family. Come to my house. Come and see my church."

02 GOD PAYS FOR EVERYTHING AND THEN INVITES

Anyway, what I want you to see is what happens here. Verse 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.'***" If you look at verse 16 there's an invitation, and then if you look at verse 17 there's an invitation.

See, back then, like we do today sometimes, they'd send out two invites. They'd send out an early... Think of it as a "Save the date." It was written. It was formal. It came in advance. It gave kind of a general idea of when the party would happen, and people would respond to that. That's how you knew, "Okay. I've got to buy *this* many goats or *this* many sheep or *this* many animals or have *this* much food and drink and *this* many tables." You had to prepare.

Once you sent out the formal written invite, later, right before the party, you would send out a personal urgent invite. Do you see how this is the same today? God gives us a formal written invite in the Old and New Testament, and then you and I come alongside that formal invite and say, "Look at what God has done here. I would like to personally invite you." So, so far so good. Right? Who would say no to this party? It's a huge party God throws and he invites many.

03 THE INVITATION EXPOSES OUR EXCUSES

Now look at what it says here. Verse 18: ***"But they all alike began to make excuses."*** Here's what happens. When you invite somebody to take their next spiritual step to follow Christ, most likely what you're going to get is an excuse, and sometimes it's not the real reason; it's the polite reason. It's the nice *no*. It's the domesticated reason. It's the "Maybe later. Maybe at another point in time. That's not for me." It's a very nice *no*.

Look at what happens here. He gets excuses. ***"The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it.'"*** Look how nice he is. ***"Please have me excused."*** Now, we know this is an excuse, because who would buy a field before they ever even looked at it?

Here's what the field represents, and it holds many people back from taking their next step to follow Jesus. The field represents our current responsibilities and our future opportunities. How many people are so overwhelmed with the present, the temporal, and the physical they have no mindset or heart for the eternal and the spiritual?

Well, he says, "I've got a field." Okay. That's the first guy, but we get three excuses. The second excuse... ***"And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them.'"*** Now, who would buy oxen without examining them first? No one would do that. ***"Please have me excused."*** He's so polite. So, for the first person it's their responsibilities. It's how busy their family is. It's their career. It's all of that.

For the second person it's their material possessions. One of the hard things in life that the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament teaches us is that the more you have, the more you have to take care of, and the more you have, surprisingly (or maybe not surprisingly), the more you have to lose. So many people are so consumed with the accumulation of stuff they never think about their soul or their spiritual condition.

So, we have the field and the oxen, and then the last one is a very common excuse we see today. Look here. Verse 20: ***"And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'"*** He doesn't say, "Please have me excused," but he says, "I can't come."

Now come on. Which husband and wife who are newly married...? Usually, most newly married men and women don't have a lot of money. Who doesn't want to get dressed up with their new spouse and head to a massive free party? So, here's the excuse here, and this is very common. People use a romantic relationship as the reason they haven't taken the next step, or they say, "It's the stage of life I'm in."

How many young people say, "I'll follow Christ when I get older" or "I'll follow Christ when I get married" or a very common one, which is "I'll follow Christ once we have kids because I want them to have a walk with God, but right now I won't"? The only problem with that is, over time, our hearts tend to get harder. This is why the Bible says in the Old Testament, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart."

04 GOD INVITES THOSE WHO KNOW THEY ARE SPIRITUALLY NEEDY

Okay. So, here are all of the excuses. You have to see this. Verse 21: ***"So the servant came and reported these things to his master."*** By the way, a party is all about the honor and respect of the person throwing it. So, he throws a huge party, he pays for everything, and then everyone says, "I'm not going to come." So he's dishonored and, therefore, you'll see, angry. Look here.

"Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city...'" That's the busy part of the city. ***"...and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame."*** That would be true physically as well as spiritually. He's saying, "Find people who know they're spiritually needy and spiritually sick."

See, our job is not so much, as Christians, as we're going out there and preaching the gospel, sharing the story of Christ, and inviting people to take their next step with God... Our job is not so much to create spiritual interest. We can't do that. We can't play JV Holy Spirit. Our job is to discover spiritual interest. "Where is God at work, and how can I join him there?"

So, where is he at work? Among the people who know they're spiritually sick. Jesus said, "I didn't come for the healthy but for the sick." Often, someone is caught in an addiction or they're going through a difficult thing in their life or they feel shame and guilt or they're going through a type of suffering, and they know they can't do it on

their own. Often, God sends us to those people in those times, and he sends us with an invitation.

So, here's what happens. Verse 22: **"And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.'"** God wants a full party. He wants heaven to be full. **"And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges...'"** That's the far off, faraway places. This is like saying, "Go to Yadkinville. Go to Davie County." This is "Go way out."

He's saying, "Go to the places where..." This would be where the Greeks, the barbarians, and the Gentiles were. These are the places where people thought, "Oh, no, no, no. *Those* people won't come to Christ. *Those* people aren't invited by God to have a life with God." This, by the way, is the upside-down, inside-out nature of the kingdom.

The people who thought they were in, the religious leaders Jesus is sitting at dinner with, are the ones who have rejected God's invitation with their lame excuses. The people who thought they were out are in. By the way, this is why it says, "Compel them and bring them in." People are not going to feel worthy, and we're *not* worthy. God is a giver and a forgiver. He pays for the party. He invites us. Our call is to respond.

Look at how it ends. This is verse 24. This is Jesus speaking. **"For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet."** Plot twist. The first plot twist is the people who were invited don't want to come anymore. The second plot twist is God goes after the needy. The third plot twist is Jesus inserts himself in the parable at the end.

Oftentimes, Jesus just tells a parable and it's over. Here he says, "Actually, guys, I'm talking about my banquet, and I'm saying I'm the one who's paying for it with my life, my death, and my resurrection, and I'm the one who invites." Remember? Doesn't the gospel of John begin in John, chapter 1, with an invitation, "Come and see"?

See, here's what I want us to know as we head toward our new home and hub. As we invite people to take their next step with God, never apologize and never be embarrassed about inviting people to take their next step. When you invite people to take their next step, whether it's to come to church, to do a Bible study, to have a spiritual conversation, to come to your house, or whatever it is, realize that often your first invitation is going to be met with excuses.

So, what you want to do is... Sometimes you move on to invite some other people. Sometimes you say with a person who's making excuses, "What would be the simplest

and shortest next step they could do that I could be a part of with them?" By the way, this is why in the past we've given you the "Sit with me" cards.

It's basically saying, "Hey, would you take the small next step to come to church? I'll do it with you. I'm not going to ask you to do this alone. Every step of the way I'm going to do it with you. Do you want to read the Bible? Let's read it together. Do you want to come to my house? I would love to have you over, and I would love to cook dinner and provide for you and just have spiritual conversations, and you can ask any questions."

So, don't take it personally. Address their barriers. Reduce the friction, if you can, and see what the next step is they need to take and if you could help them take it, because here's what we know. We know that Christianity, the kingdom of God, comes with both a command and an invitation. This is how Jesus came. Jesus came and said, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and enter the kingdom of God."

Okay. That's obviously a command. Jesus says it other places. "If you do not repent, you will die in your sins." Well, that was clear. Jesus will often command, but I think it's safe to say even more often in the Gospels Jesus comes with an invitation, whether it's "Are you hungry? I'm the Bread of Life" or "Are you thirsty? Come to me. I'm the living waters" or "I'm the way, the truth, and the life" or, famously, "Anyone who is weary and heavy laden, come to me and you will find rest for your souls."

So, guys, as we head into a new season in the life of our church, we're asking what it would look like for everybody, as they've been going and telling... That's what our ONE Initiative was about. What would it look like for people to say, "Come and see"? What would it look like at Two Cities Church for us to have an invitational culture?

I encourage you, as we're going to be in this building next weekend, to think if there is one person who's far from God and close to you who you'd say, "They're missing. I need to invite them." Also, I think I'd be remiss not to end by saying in the midst of inviting other people to do things... As we're heading into a new season in our church, what is God inviting you and your family to do?

So often, God invites us to do something, and if we're honest and we do it...we're very polite...we have a lot of excuses. As we've often said here at Two Cities, you can make excuses or you can make progress. What does it look like for you to repent, address your excuses, and take the next step to what God is inviting you to do and be a part of?

Guys, it's an exciting season. I'm excited to be back with you in person next weekend for an incredible "Come and see" experience in our new building. Let's end by praying together for the people in our lives God is calling us to invite. Let's pray.

Lord, I know our job is not to create spiritual interest but to discover it. Lord, you have given so many of us so many different relationships. Would you give us eyes to see the spiritually needy in our city? Would we just, in our homes and in our churches, have a "Come and see" mentality?

It might be an invitation to come to a church service. It might be an invitation to read the Bible together. It might be an invitation to come over to our homes and see our families and see what a Christian marriage and home looks like. Lord, would you help us to keep having an invitational culture?

Lord, would you help us as we are in a season of transition, that each of us, as we prepare for what you have in store for us, would be saying, "What are you inviting us to do, what are the excuses we tend to make, and how can we repent of those to take our next step with you?" We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.