



Hey CPC Kids! How many of you came to church last week? Last week, if you were here, you celebrated someone's birthday with a party. Whose birthday did you celebrate? Jesus! That's right! You celebrated Jesus' birthday last Sunday because Christmas is the day we celebrate Jesus' birth, that amazing miracle of "Emmanuel" or "God with us."

As I was praying and thinking about what to share with you today, God led me to look at something Jesus said and taught. If we really believe that Christmas is true and Jesus is real, then we should listen to what He said and do something about it.

How many of you ate a special meal for Christmas lunch or dinner? What did you eat? Was it a small meal or a Christmas feast? How many of you had ham, turkey, beef, pork, crab or fish? I enjoyed both ham and crab with my family and it was delicious!

Jesus probably didn't celebrate His birthday with a Christmas feast, but He went to many parties and feasts. In fact, Jesus tells a parable about a big feast like our Christmas dinner. It's called the parable of the Great Banquet and I'm excited to share it with you.

Why is this parable important for us today? What can we learn from Jesus' stories from 2,000 years ago? This Great Banquet parable has something for everyone. If you ever host a dinner in your home, or receive an invitation to a party, or are on the outside looking in and longing to be accepted, there is something for you in Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet.

Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready'" (Luke 14:16-17).

Have you ever been invited to a dinner party? What about a birthday party or wedding? Getting an invitation in the mail is exciting and special. Listen to Jesus' parable and try to find which character you relate with most.

» Have you ever invited people to a birthday celebration or wedding? Then maybe you can relate with the man who prepares the Great Banquet.

» Do you receive lots of invitations to parties and social events? Maybe you relate better to this parable as one of the guests.

» Do you enjoy cooking or hosting meals in your home? Do you have a gift for hospitality or service? Maybe you relate best with

the servant in the story, the messenger who coordinates the feast and announces that the banquet is now ready to be enjoyed.

» Do you feel like an outsider, someone who doesn't fit? Maybe you can relate to the second-string guests, the ones who are invited off the streets and from the distant countryside.

Let's paint the scene of how this banquet might look in our context—at your house or mine. You've invited a bunch of people for Christmas dinner or a New Year's Eve Party. You've sent out the invitation a few weeks ahead and people responded yes or no. The time has finally come. Guests arrive and are waiting in your living room as you make final preparations for dinner. Finally, the food is ready. Someone comes from the kitchen and says, "Dinner is served! Enjoy!" That's exactly what happens here. The man and his household have finally prepared the party. The celebration and food are ready to be enjoyed. The master sends his servant to tell the guests who committed to the banquet: "It's time to party! It's time to eat! Everything's ready so come on over and join us!"

Now this is not some ordinary banquet. No. This is a huge banquet. How big? Well, let's talk about some animals and how many people they can feed. In Jesus' day, people didn't have refrigerators or grocery stores or caterers like we do today. They had to eat what they killed and kill only enough for what they could eat. When someone threw a big feast or party, they would figure out how many people were attending and figure out which animals and how many of them to prepare for dinner.

How many people does each animal feed? I'm going to show you an animal and I want you to guess how many people could eat if this animal were to be served for dinner.

Animal	Live weight (lbs.)	# of people it feeds
Chicken	5	5
Turkey	20	16
Goat	70	60
Lamb	90	70
Calf (6 mo)	200	210
Pig	200	220
Cow	1250	1400

This great banquet, this feast, is probably not a chicken-sized dinner. This feast is likely cow-sized or bigger! We're talking about a huge party. Thousands of people have been invited and the servant is now telling people that the food is ready to eat. The

party is starting, so come on over. Make your way to the dining room because food is hot and on the table.

Many people understand this party to represent life in the Kingdom of God, life after accepting Jesus as personal Lord and Savior, and I agree. This feast represents the Kingdom of God and we are like those being invited to the banquet.

“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ The servant came back and reported this to his master...” (verses 18–21a).

Notice that the guests “all alike” gave excuses. Most all of the guests decided to skip this banquet feast. So the servant returns to the master and reports what he has discovered—that all the guests are making excuses and will not be attending his banquet after all.

I wonder how the master feels when he hears this news. Maybe some of you can understand how it feels when all of your guests cancel last minute. You would feel sad or hurt or maybe even angry if people said they would come to the party yet gave last-minute excuses as to why they couldn’t come. In Jesus’ parable, it’s the same way. The master of the house was angry with the guests who made excuses.

“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry” (v. 21).

Why is the master angry? How many of the guests are giving him excuses? Verse 18 says “they all alike” began to make excuses. All of the guests? Something is happening here. The master of the house has prepared an extremely expensive feast. He’s killed a cow that would feed over a thousand people and **all** of the guests are making last minute, useless, and even rude excuses as to why they cannot be at the banquet.

Would you be angry if everyone came to your home for Christmas dinner and just as you say “Dinner’s ready” they decide: “Oh, I’m not staying. I’ve got some business to take care of.” How frustrating! In Jesus’ parable the master has good reason to be angry. Picture it this way: all of the guests are leaving just as dinner is being served. The guests, whether purposefully or not, are insulting and humiliating the host to an extreme. Remember, this is about a thousand guests who decided not to show. Someone wants to humiliate and hurt the host.

Look at the three example excuses with me. They add insult to injury and escalate from the first to the third excuse.

“I have to go and check a field I just purchased.” How many of you would buy a house or a farm field without seeing it? Is it smart

and wise to buy a house without looking at it first? No, of course not! It’s nearly dinner time. The master has been preparing the banquet for days and it’s finally time to eat. One of the guests says he’s got to check out a new farm field he’s bought. Either he’s not smart or he wants to make the host angry by giving a lame excuse.

“I have to try out some new oxen.” Let’s put this in modern context. Would you buy a car without test driving it? No! That’s what this second excuse is like: “I’m at the party but I just bought a few used farm tractors online. I know it’s almost night but I’m so excited about my tractors that I’ve got to try them out.” The man’s oxen (tractors) will be there tomorrow. He will not be able to do much with them in the dark tonight. And he should have test-drove them before he bought them. Again, another lame excuse for leaving the party.

“I’m married, so I can’t come.” This excuse is rude and crude. The host must be furious! I imagine him thinking along these lines: “Are you kidding me? Last week you knew we were having this big celebration and banquet. Now you’re telling me that sleeping with your wife (something you can do often) is more important than keeping your commitment to participate in my banquet feast? That’s it! I’m done with these excuses!”

The host has every right to be angry with the guests. How would you respond to your guests if you were the host in this parable? Would you be angry? What would you do about it?

Here’s how the master of the house responds:

“Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame’” (v. 21b).

This is an unexpected response. Invite the poor, crippled, blind and lame? These people are the untouchables, the outcasts and throwaways of society, both back then and still today. According to the Old Testament law, these people had to stay away from the temple and often outside the city. They could not be a part of the community or even take part in worship. They were rejected by society.

Have you ever interacted with an ex-convict or deathly ill person? What about a severely autistic person or the mentally ill? How about the homeless of our cities and in downtown San Francisco? These are the people the master invites to fill his banquet. Would you invite this crowd to your birthday party or wedding? Probably not. I wouldn’t, though I pray God changes my heart to care more and more for these outcasts of society.

What’s happening here in Jesus’ parable? The original guests didn’t appreciate the banquet, so the host invites those who **will** appreciate it, those who don’t belong. Jesus is teaching us that **all** people are invited to enjoy and participate in His Kingdom. Those guests who gave excuses thought they were too good.

They were above the master and his party. They follow God's rules, live a good life. Yet they don't realize the amazing life they will miss by rejecting Jesus' invitation to participate in the Kingdom of God.

In this parable, Jesus shows us that all people—both the righteous and the outcasts, those average people and the very successful, the put-together and beautiful people and the socially awkward and sick and sinful and broken people—all are invited to participate in the new life Jesus brings. We're all invited! No matter who you are, whether successful or not, whether you're smart or athletic, whether you're young or old, beautiful or not—Jesus invites you to His great banquet feast called the Kingdom of God. Yes, you are invited! Will you accept the invitation and come to the celebration?

“Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet’” (verses 22–24).

The servant brought in all the outcasts from the local city. Unbelievable! No one would do this! Would you invite a ton of strangers, criminals, homeless, social outcasts, or deathly sick people to your wedding? Not likely. Yet the master invites them in. He is showing amazing grace and mercy to all. He wants his feast to be enjoyed; anyone and everyone in town is invited.

But it doesn't stop there. The servant comes back to the master, the host, and reports that there are still plenty of seats around the table. Yes, there is still room at the great feast. How big was this banquet? Maybe it was a 2- or 3-cow feast instead of just 1 cow! So the master sends the servant out even farther to compel people to come in and enjoy the feast.

Compelling people to participate in the banquet does not mean forcing people to come. God is not in the business of forcing people to come to salvation or forcing people to live as Jesus' disciples. That's not gracious and loving. And that's not God's way of working out His plan. On the contrary, the servant must compel people to come and join the banquet because most people would not believe that the invitation was real. It must be a practical joke or a scam.

I often scan through my junk e-mail and read letters from people who have lots of money and are willing to transfer it to me. How great is that! They'll send me all this money if I just send them my bank account information. It's a common scam. People out in the countryside would feel the same way: "Sure, there's a feast! You're inviting me to it just to steal everything I have. How can I trust you and know this is true and real?" And so, the servant must compel people with honesty and enthusiasm to come in and enjoy the Great Banquet.

But Jesus' invitation to participate in God's Kingdom is real, not a cruel practical joke or a scam. The party is real. The celebration is ready to be enjoyed. When Jesus says that those who were invited will not taste the banquet, He's clarifying the parable's outcome. Some people will miss out on the Kingdom because they are focused on the wrong priorities in life. They've missed the value of the invitation or decided it's not worth their time and energy.

You see, God's Kingdom is like a great feast. Jesus invites us to celebrate and participate in it because there is more room. Again, Jesus invites us to celebrate and participate in the Kingdom of God. Don't give excuses. Accept His invitation of amazing grace, and compel others to join in with us because there is still room!

So what lessons does Jesus' parable have for us today? Here are a few as we head into this new year:

Don't give excuses and miss out on God's Kingdom. Let's not be like the original guests who found something better to do than keep their commitment to the banquet. What excuses are you giving the Lord for not attending His banquet? For each of us, Jesus' warning may look different. Kids—maybe you give your parents excuses for not doing your chores or homework. Let's learn to keep our commitments and commit to the things we will honestly be able to do. Teens and students—are you waiting for a different time and place to accept Jesus' invitation? Too busy having fun to accept Jesus' invitation and participate in the Kingdom of God? Don't miss out! Hear Jesus' warning. Accept the invitation. Adults—let's not let our success and achievement consume us at the detriment of our lives with Christ. The King of Kings invites us to join with Him in an adventurous life in the Kingdom of God. Let's put that as our priority over and above all others. Nothing is worth more than following the one who gives life.

We're all invited. Jesus invites us all, regardless of who we are and what we have done, to be part of the great banquet feast called the Kingdom of God. We all constantly need to know and experience God's grace, regardless of who and where we are in life. Let's consider our true state again, and experience grace afresh. Jesus invites each of us to His Christmas dinner. Our success or failure, our place in life, our past mistakes, all of it has no effect on Jesus' invitation. He invites everyone to the table. We get to eat at Jesus' feast and share life with God. We are no longer outcasts, but Jesus draws us close and invites us to celebrate with Him. If you have never accepted Jesus' invitation of grace and salvation, I encourage you to do so today. Talk with God and ask Jesus to come into your heart and life, to save you from sin and death, and give you strength to live as a follower of Him.

For those of us who have accepted Jesus' Kingdom invitation, don't miss the best part of the parable. Jesus gives us a task, one that fits well with CPC's Vision 2020. There's still room. Let's be like

the servant in Jesus' parable. Let's sow seeds this year and see how God uses us to grow in our personal faith and grow as a church as we invite friends and family, neighbors and grocery store clerks, teachers and teammates, co-workers and people who share our common interests. Let's compel people to come in with stories of God's transforming grace in our lives. We are not forcing people to join us and to come into the party of the Kingdom of God. Instead, let's Invite people every opportunity we have.

Again, Jesus invites us to celebrate and participate in the Kingdom of God. Don't give excuses. Accept His invitation of amazing grace and compel others to join in with us because there is still room. There is still room and the master wants His banquet party to be full.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2012 Central Peninsula Church North, San Bruno, CA
Catalog No. 1382-N