

*Text of a message delivered by Mikayla Claasen at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 26th April 2026.
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A Tale of Many Tables

Luke 14:7-24

The greatest barrier to entering God's Kingdom isn't lack, but the illusion that we already have enough. Jesus invites us to humility and dependence, trusting Him enough to open our lives to others.

Kia Ora Windsor whanau, it is excellent to be here with you this morning as we continue to follow the footsteps of Jesus in Luke as He makes His way towards Jerusalem. Last week Grant took us through one of the probably least liked passages in scripture - where we are told the door to enter the Kingdom is narrow, and that many who were just familiar with Jesus would not make it through the door. We are instead invited to true intimacy with Jesus, and it is this that lets us enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And these are some key themes we've found throughout Luke's gospel so far - a wide open, generous invitation that all can receive fully, if we are willing to walk an often costly path.

Today as we move into Luke 14 what we find is no different - but it is a little more specific. Jesus is not moving us away from these ideas and themes but rather taking a deeper look at what some of the things that can stop us taking up that invitation, and stepping through the narrow door, are. Let's get straight into it this morning and open to Luke 14:7 together - where we find Jesus in a rather familiar place for this Gospel - eating dinner with a group of people, and today He is eating with a group of Pharisees...

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TABLE ONE – DON'T ELEVATE YOURSELF

When He noticed how the guests picked the places of honour at the table, He told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honoured in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 14:7-11)

So as Jesus comes into this dinner party it is not the food, or the decor that catches his attention, but instead Jesus notices something about the guests - all the Pharisees are climbing over one another to get the best seats at the table, to take the seats of honour. And this isn't because only those with the best seats will get to eat, or get the first pick of the meal, this isn't a game of musical chairs with limited seating - this is a power move for the Pharisees. Not only do they want to be in the room where all the other powerful people are - they are willing to climb over each other, so they can get the best seat in the house and show everyone else in the room that they matter more. They have come to this meal to show off what they already have and try everything in their power to get more.

And when I hear this description I can't help but morph the Pharisees into mean girls in any coming of age movie - aware of their coolness, their popularity, and their influence - but desperate to continue to get more, to claw their way to the top, to the coolest seat in the cafeteria - even at the expense of those around them.

Jesus has something to say to them when he sees it... Jesus tells the Pharisees that at a wedding feast they are to take the worst seat, so then they will be elevated - rather than taking the best seat and being embarrassed when someone else walks in who has a higher position

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than them later. And Jesus isn't giving them a lesson on manners or wedding etiquette here - Jesus is mainly concerned with their understanding of the ethics of God's kingdom.

And this isn't a message we've seen a lot in the recent weeks of Luke - we've heard a lot about people being invited to banquets, staying awake for your master coming back from the wedding feast - but not a lot about the seating arrangements when you get there. Jesus brings this up at this point because He is talking to a very particular group of people. The Pharisees are powerful, educated, have money, status and they have influence. The Pharisees aren't people who question whether they will get through the narrow door, they are instead confident enough to fight over the best seats in the room. They don't stop to question whether the same things that let them into the best banquets in their towns, that let them sit in the most powerful places in their society, that let their voices be heard in all the important conversations - will carry through to entry into Gods Kingdom as well.

And this is where we must take a moment to be honest with ourselves - because I think we might often find we are a lot more like the Pharisees than we like to think. We might not feel powerful everywhere—but there are rooms we walk into without question. And we rarely stop to ask why those doors are open to us. We might not have plenty in all spheres of our life, but there are some where we have more than we need. We might not have influence over everything, but there are places where our voices are heard and valued over others. Many of us spend our weeks sitting in board meetings, classrooms of higher education, participating in political conversations, having our voices heard in executive meetings - and we don't bat an eyelid about being there.

When we look at what Jesus says to the Pharisees in moments like this and we only think about how this does not apply to us in the parts of our lives where we don't have power, or wealth, or influence - rather than how this challenges us in the places we do - we miss a lot of Jesus' call. Because here Jesus is telling the Pharisees they are taking that power, that influence, taking those seats at the table - and they are using it all wrong.

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They are using this automatic entry to try and increase themselves - increase their importance, increase their influence, network and market their way to the top, so they can have more. This is not just bad manners, this doesn't just risk social embarrassment, this risks their place at the most important table.

So Jesus calls the Pharisees to **humble themselves** - and this word humility is probably one of the most misunderstood - this word doesn't mean he calls them to be less, or to have less necessarily - but rather Jesus calls them to **an awareness of their total dependence on God**. All they have, that makes them think they should get through the door and claim that the best seat is theirs, it is all from God.

Jesus doesn't start by demanding they abandon everything—but He does demand they stop treating it as theirs alone - that it is not given to exalt themselves, but rather to make room for others. In God's Kingdom power is not given so we can create more power, but so we can give it away for the sake of others. That we are not given influence so we can network ourselves to gain more, but so we lay it down and choose to sit with the lowly anyway.

This is a hard message for us in our world where we are told more is better, to utilise what we have for the good of ourselves is seen as wisdom or self-care, where success is measured by how far you can climb that corporate ladder, by how many people you can get to listen to your opinions and take them seriously. Every billboard we drive past, every ad we try skip over, every motivational podcaster tries to tell us that we should take what we have and use it to get more for ourselves - they frame it as a right, something we are entitled to, the best way to live.

But Jesus tells us if we embrace this mentality of exalting ourselves in the world's eyes, of using what we have been given for our own gain, we risk losing the Kingdom. That we will not be exalted in His coming order.

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TABLE TWO – DON'T CLING TO WHAT YOU HAVE

And just in case that is not enough for one morning, later in the dinner, Jesus tells a story of another banquet, suggesting if the Pharisees, and us, are not careful we might not just lose what is valuable in Jesus' kingdom, but we might miss entry entirely.

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.' "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. 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.' "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.'" (Luke 14:16-24)

So we now have two stories of banquets - and this one again starts with a very open invitation, a gracious invitation - to receive a feast of plenty from the host. But those who have received this invitation have a lot of excuses about why they cannot possibly make it to this feast. One has land, another has livestock, the third a new wife.

And while we live in a world where cancelling plans might be considered self-care, or just part of our busy lives - in ancient Palestine this was not the case. Putting on a banquet wasn't just a social occasion but a way to make connections. To accept gave the person honour, to decline was to show disrespect, to suggest they were not worthwhile of your time, that they were beneath your consideration. Essentially these three invitees are saying they'd prefer to spend

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time with dirt, oxen, or their wife - than their host. And we might forgive the spending time with their wife today - I'd probably be quite chuffed if my husband decided he wanted to stay with me when we was supposed to have dinner with his friends - but at this time in the Greco-Roman world the company of woman was considered far lesser quality than the company of men, a new wife was much like all these other new things - a new property, a new thing to own, a new status symbol.

These guests are so full of the goods of the world they are no longer hungry enough to accept the offer to come to God's feast. These guests have received so much of the blessings and good things God can give us in this world; they've decided to snub His invitation to join Him at the Heavenly table. Much like the Pharisees these three guests think they have enough wealth, a good enough position in society, enough honour and respectability - that they don't need to accept this invitation. They think they will make it on their own.

But Jesus makes it very clear - these people, no matter what they have here on earth, can expect no special wooing into the banquet hall. If or when they decide to taste the dinner that has been prepared, the kitchen will be closed. Their absence will only make more room for those who truly strive for God's kingdom and trust God for their sustenance and salvation. Jesus is trying to tell the Pharisees - those with plenty - of the unique challenges they face trying to get through the narrow door.

This isn't a new danger - from way back in Deuteronomy God has warned of the same thing

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.... Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ... You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But

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***remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...
(Deuteronomy 8:10-14, 17-18)***

All the way back when God was making His covenant with Moses, leading His people into the promised land - a good thing he was delighted to give them - he knew that this offer of plenty, that God giving them good gifts from his hands, might make them turn away from His face. Might make them prideful, more caught up in the plenty they have become accustomed to, forgetting to pay any heed to the one who gave it to them, and eventually thinking all they have was only what they deserved, what they themselves had created. What Jesus warns the Pharisees, and us of, is not a new story, it is not a new danger - it is as old as time.

We are eager to come and sit at the table of God when we think it's the only way we can get food, but as soon as we delude ourselves into thinking we can make it on our own, we leave the table, we leave the company of God, and we turn down the invitation to feast with our King.

I remember as a teenager reading through the bible and finding passages about how hard it was for the rich to get into the Kingdom of heaven, reading of rich young rulers asked to give up everything, and warnings upon warnings for those with plenty. I remember that image of the camel getting through the needle particularly stuck with me - I felt like just because I had been born into a place of plenty, where I did get seats at tables just by asking, where I was born into a certain amount of power and influence - that somehow this all might exclude me from the Kingdom of Jesus. It was a hard idea that seemed easier to ignore than wrestle with.

But as I have read more, and especially in passages like these - it is not power, or influence, or wealth in and of themselves that are stopping us from coming to sit at the banquet table with Jesus. It is our desperate clinging to them, our tight grip over them, that causes us to miss God and all He has for us. It is our desperate hope that we can keep the good things God offers us, without having to embrace the ethos of His kingdom, that keeps us at arm's length.

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Jesus does not want us to just **be amazed** at his counter-culturalism - He wants us **to join Him in it!** And Jesus knows this is particularly difficult for those of us who actually benefit from the status quo - these passages are not a condemnation - but an extended hand from Jesus asking us to join Him in this Kingdom way too, these are invitations for us to remember the better things in life.

We are called to give up what the world tells us to cling to, to stop trying to accumulate, we are called to associate and welcome those the culture says to leave aside, we are told to put ourselves in places that culture calls low.

THE THIRD TABLE – USE WHAT YOU HAVE TO INCLUDE OTHERS

And I know for myself I often hear these sorts of messages and I feel convicted, and I want to do better, to throw what I have down - to leave the paddock and the oxen, to throw away the best seat and come running to Jesus - but the practicality of that seems a bit harder. Do I literally throw it all away? How does that work?

And if you're reading along, you'll notice we skipped a section between these two parables and we're going to head back there now as we land today.

Then Jesus said to His host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Luke 14:12-14)

So I recently got married which also meant moving into a house where just myself and my husband live - which was a first for both of us who had spent a lot of time flatting before getting married. One of the first things we bought for the house was a dining room table and I was so excited to have people over, as we set the table up I imagined all the meals we'd share with others, the stories that would be told, the many people who would be able to come and join us.

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And choosing who we would invite over first felt hard - our parents seemed like obvious choices - to honour them for all they'd done for us, although friends would be fun too, and then of course our siblings would have to come at some point.

In this parable Jesus asks me not to think about how I can gain from my new dining room table in my new house, but how I can use it to look outwardly, make space, and live out the values of the Kingdom. And I love that Jesus specifically talks about hosting dinner here - because the table is a place where we share what we have, where we make ourselves known, where we take on a position of service for whoever walks in the door - there is a reason the image of a banquet is used in Luke to describe God's Kingdom - it represents something that we would probably struggle to put into words. The table often does become a sacred space.

And Jesus asks us to take that space and make it look like the Kingdom He is building - to think of our dining table, our kitchen counter, our lounge, or living room - as an extension of the kingdom. A place where we do not hoard our blessings, accumulate what God has given to us, letting our pride and our self-reliance swell, exalting and elevating ourselves - but instead a place where we bless others with all we have, where we lay down what we have been given and serve it to others, where there are no best seats but all are welcome.

A place where the walls between Heaven and Earth grow thin not because of the quality of cooking or the cleanliness of the house - but because our tables are also ones where the least are most welcome, where the divisions of the world do not set us apart, where we willing lay what we have down to serve the other.

Jesus does not ask us to give up our lives here; He asks us to start by opening our tables. And I don't want us to over-complicate things today because I think this real, tangible challenge from Jesus. Something as radically ordinary as setting a table can create space for people far from God to experience the Father's warm welcome into His family. And it can help us remember that we live by the values of the Kingdom, that we live to seek Jesus' face which we often find in

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neighbours, not to live by the world's rules of accumulation, but by the Kingdom's way of laying what we have down.

Inviting people to the table does not have to be a performance, or any kind of perfection - if our tables are to be an outpost of God's Kingdom there needs to be love, welcome, and genuine, generous care for the other - and the list of requirements stops there. So right now, I invite you to picture your table - not a metaphorical one - but your physical table - picture it in your head right now - where you sit to eat a meal every day.

Who could you invite to your table?

In the banquet parable the host goes into the streets and alleys of the town to bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame, and then goes even further out to the country lanes - taking everyone who would come. There is no concern for what the neighbours might say, what they can give back, if they'll have good table manners, if they'll have things in common with their host - they're just welcome.

Who could you invite to your table?

Maybe they're not that far away - maybe it's your neighbour you haven't met yet, that new family at your child's school, maybe it's that person at your work who no one seems to have much time for - maybe it is people further afield.

Picture your table - and ask God to fill it. Who does he want around your table?

How does He want to build His kingdom in that simple space of hospitality? How does Jesus want to use all He has given you, not to get more for yourself, but so you can bless others abundantly? And if you want to take this challenge to heart, don't leave here today before sending that message or email.

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Reflecting on Sunday 19th April 2026:

Who were some of the people Jesus challenged you to extend His invitation to over the week?
Could those same people be the ones to invite to your dinner table?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

- Where am I assuming I deserve a “better seat”? In what areas of my life do I expect recognition, influence, or comfort—and how might Jesus be inviting me to choose a lower place?
- What do I have that I tend to treat as “mine” rather than a gift from God? Where in my life have I started to rely on what I have—my resources, abilities, or position—more than on God?
- What might be stopping me from fully responding to God’s invitation? If I’m honest, what “excuses” or distractions are crowding out my hunger for God?
- Who is missing from my table? Who could I intentionally make space for this week—especially someone who couldn’t repay me?

If you’d like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we’re better together** and **no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. If you're looking for something deeper to work through that sits alongside this series, we recommend ***The Gospel of Luke* by N.T. Wright (New Testament for Everyone series, SPCK/Westminster John Knox)**. Written for a non-specialist audience, it's warm, narrative-driven, and culturally engaged.
<https://www.fishpond.co.nz/Books/Luke-for-Everyone-Enlarged-Print-Wright-N-T/9780664268831>
2. If the idea of hospitality as a way to live out Jesus Kingdom interests you – or you're just curious to know more – this is a great sermon specially on practicing hospitality.
<https://practicthewayarchives.org/teaching/practice-hospitality>
3. As we said in the message – humility is a big idea! John Piper explores it more in this video and article.
<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/greatness-humility-servanthood>