INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Luke 14:21
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary
Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary
LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

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- Room because John saw a multitude that no one could count in heaven (Rev 7:9)
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Only those who accept will make it to heaven
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- Only those who accept because Jesus is the only way (John 14:6)
- Only those who accept because those that have not accepted Jesus will be outside the heavenly city (Rev 22:14-15)
- Only those who accept because they are the only ones who have the inheritance of heaven (Rev 21:6-8)
- Only those who accept because the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10)
- Only those who accept because everyone who says Lord, Lord will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7:21)
Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews for our understanding that God graciously invites unworthy people into His kingdom as revealed through His Parable of the Great Dinner. The study’s aim is to understand we must answer God’s call in His way. The study’s application is to be prepared to heed the call of God to wherever He leads us. (Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Luke 14:21

So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.'

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

14:1-6. Jesus had been invited to eat on the Sabbath at the house of a prominent Pharisee where there was also a man who was suffering from dropsy. Dropsy is a condition of excess fluid in the tissues of the body, caused perhaps by a type of cancer or possibly liver or kidney problems. The man was probably invited to the Pharisee’s house in order to see what Jesus would do. Jesus immediately took the initiative in the situation and asked the host and other guests whether it would be lawful to heal the man on the Sabbath. Apparently Jesus’ question disarmed the crowd, for all of them remained silent. Jesus went ahead and healed the man. He said that the guests would help a son or an ox in distress on the Sabbath, so it was totally appropriate to heal this poor individual. Jesus was setting the stage for the discussion to follow concerning those who were considered ceremonially unclean and therefore unable to enter the kingdom.

14:7-11. Looking around, Jesus noticed how the guests picked the places of honor. The closer a person was to the host, the greater was that guest’s position of honor. As people entered the room in the Pharisee’s house where the table was spread, they must have scrambled for seats at the head of the table. The parable Jesus then told was designed to get them to think about spiritual realities in relation to the kingdom message He had been preaching. Verse 11 records the point of Jesus’ parable: Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. This recalls Jesus’ earlier statement that those who are last will be first and those who are first will be last (13:30). The Pharisees, assuming they would have important positions in the kingdom, would be humiliated if they were pushed aside for someone else (14:9). However, if they would humble themselves, then they would perhaps be honored (v. 10).

14:12-14. Then Jesus spoke to His host, telling him that if he would invite the outcasts of society (the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind)—people who could never repay him for his generosity—this would show that he was ministering to them for the Lord’s sake and not his own (cf. Matt. 6:1-18; James 1:26-27). He would be laying up for himself treasures in heaven (Matt. 6:20) and would become rich toward God (Luke 12:21). Inviting the outcasts would not make the man righteous; it would testify that he was in a righteous standing before God. This is shown by Jesus’ statement that the repayment would not come at the present time but at the resurrection of the righteous.

14:15-24 (Matt. 22:1-10). Jesus then told a parable about a great banquet. One of the diners expressed a blessing on everyone who would eat... in the kingdom. This person was assuming that he and the other people present would all be present in the kingdom. Jesus took the opportunity to use the feast motif to explain that many of the people there would nor be present in God’s kingdom. In their places would be many outcasts and Gentiles. The host in the parable invited many guests. However all those invited began
to give excuses for not going. The excuses were supposedly valid—the need to see about a recently purchased field, or to try out recently purchased oxen, or to be with one’s recently married bride (Luke 14:18-20). The host became angry and commanded that people in the streets and alleys of the town... the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame—be invited. Jesus was referring to those members of the Jewish community who were considered inferior and ceremonially unclean as was the man with dropsy He had just healed (vv. 2-4). When the host learned that there was still room for more, he commanded that others be invited from the roads and country lanes (v. 23). These people outside the city were probably Gentiles, those outside the covenant community. The host then stated that none of the originally invited guests would get a taste of his banquet.

This parable at a banquet about another banquet reinforced His previous teaching that He would abandon Jerusalem (13:34-35). The people who originally had been offered a share of the kingdom had rejected it, so now the message was going out to others including Gentiles. The excuses seemed good to those who gave them, but they were inadequate for refusing Jesus’ kingdom offer. Nothing was so important as accepting His offer of the kingdom, for one’s entire destiny rests on his response to that offer.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

There are three parables in Luke 14, and the Lord told them all as He ate bread on the Sabbath at the home of one of the chief Pharisees (vs. 1). The stunning miracle of heating in verse 4 evidently silenced the assembled guests long enough for the Lord to make a point to them. The point was forcefully expressed through the parable of the great dinner (vss. 16-24). Although the Lord spoke about dinner invitations, manners, and etiquette, He was actually referencing a much more important and deeper truth. In the parable of the great dinner, God is represented as the inviter, beckoning many to come to his great supper, a supper that represents salvation and the kingdom of heaven. However, when pressed to come, many who received the invitation found all kinds of excuses not to do so. They spoke of land to inspect, oxen to test, and wives to attend to. These, of course, were not valid reasons but only weak excuses they used. There are many worldly excuses that people come up with to avoid responding to the invitation of the gospel. People often do not value God and His offer of salvation. They count it a small thing and look for any excuse to avoid it or dismiss it. Worldly things are much more urgent and important to them. In this parable, Jesus gave a warning about this. Someone who persists in doing this will find himself on the outside looking in and suffer eternal loss (Luke 14:24). That is where our text comes in. Our Heavenly Father is determined to fill up His kingdom. If some do not want to heed the invitation to enter, the Lord will turn to others. That is the meaning of the next development in the Lord’s story. The great Inviter turned to the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind—all those who are usually overlooked. I had a seminary professor who used to say, “I think when I get to heaven I will be surprised by these three things: who is there, who is not there, and that I’m there!” The Lord was speaking about presumption. So many do not view God as the One to whom we all must give an account. God is not seen as someone we must please and before whom we must be humble. We can take Him, leave Him, or ignore Him if we want. It is tempting to presume in this way, but it is a grave miscalculation to do so. God deals justly with all men, and all men must seek Him on His terms. The only wise and safe course is to respond to the invitation and enter into the great dinner. For all of their religion, the Pharisees were a presumptuous group. They believed the Lord was speaking only to them and all others like them. Do not presume. Do not fail to humble yourself and respond to the gospel invitation of the Lord. There is no one who gets into God’s kingdom by a merit badge. All must come through Christ. As we read such a powerful parable, it should reaffirm our own commitment to invite and compel men to come into the kingdom.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Some time ago a study was undertaken to address the question, “What would Jesus eat?” The study investigated common foods of Jesus’ day in order to determine what was most likely a regular part of his diet. The Gospels note that Jesus shared a typical Passover meal with his disciples (Luke 22:15) and ate fish after his resurrection (24:41-43). They also record different times when Jesus ate in homes or ate with his disciples, but no specific menu is mentioned on those occasions. A more important issue involving Jesus’ eating habits, according to the Gospels, is whom he ate with. These include Matthew (also known as Levi) the tax collector, in whose house Jesus ate along with “a large crowd of tax collectors and others” (Luke 5:29). He also ate with unnamed Pharisees (Luke 11:37; 14:1-24, the Scripture from which today’s text is taken), with various “tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 15:1, 2), with Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-3), and with his disciples (as noted
above). In fact Jesus was criticized as being “a glutton” (Luke 7:34). Jesus’ eating habits reveal his desire to reach out to all people—both the sinners who knew they were sinners and sinners such as the Pharisees whose self-righteousness blinded them to the truth about their condition. Those habits highlight Jesus’ purpose for coming into the world. As he told another tax collector, Zacchaeus, “For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

The parable of the great dinner in today’s text comes not long after Jesus’ teaching in last week’s text from Luke 13. Following that section of teaching in 13:22-30, some of the Pharisees informed Jesus that he needed to vacate the territory of Perea because Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great) wanted to kill him (13:31). Jesus was not fazed by this threat (which may have been fabricated by the Pharisees in order to diminish the effectiveness of Jesus’ ministry). He continued to focus his attention on reaching Jerusalem and lamented over its failure throughout the years to accept the words of God’s appointed messengers, some of those even being killed (Luke 13:34, 35). He knew that in just a few months, he would be among that number. Luke 14 begins with Jesus’ entering the house of “a prominent Pharisee” for a meal on a Sabbath Day. We do not know the exact location of this house, but it can be assumed that Jesus was still in the territory of Perea (where the teaching in last week’s text occurred). He was being watched closely, apparently to see if he would violate the Pharisees’ standards of conduct. After healing a man in the house, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocritical behavior (14:2-6). Jesus then told a parable aimed at those in attendance at the meal, in order to correct their behavior of selecting prominent seats (Luke 14:10). He then spoke more directly to the man who had invited him to the dinner (14:12). Jesus challenged him to invite the rejects and the outcasts of society—those unable to return the favor. A reward for such generosity may not come in this life, but it will come in God’s time: “at the resurrection of the righteous” (14:14). The mention of resurrection prompted a comment from one of the guests in the Pharisee’s house, which is where the lesson text begins.

Major Theme Analysis

(.Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

(NOTE: The lesson points and cross-references were copied from previous SS Lesson dated 04/25/2010)

The Invitation is Extended (Luke 14:15-17)

15 Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"
16 Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many,
17 and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.'

Realize coming to God is a blessing not a right (15)

Coming to God is part of our duty (Luke 17:7-10)

7 "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"

It is not about our right to come to God, but about God's generosity (Matt 20:12-16)

12'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' 13 "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' 16 "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Coming to God is all about God's mercy (Rom 9:14-16)

14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." 16 It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.
Coming to God is not about our righteousness (Isa 64:6)
6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

Coming to God is not about repaying God (Ps 116:12-14)
12 How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? 13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. 14 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.

Many are invited, but only a remnant accept (16)

Accepting God means entering through the narrow gate (Matt 7:13-14)
13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Many want to be in heaven, but all will not use the only way (Luke 13:23-24)
23 Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, 24 "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

Only a remnant will come to God (Rom 9:27)
27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

Those who come to God are a part of the remnant who have been chosen by grace (Rom 11:5)
5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.

Be prepared when called (17)

Be prepared to do good works (2 Tim 2:20-21)
20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. 21 If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

Be prepared to give an answer for hope in God (1 Peter 3:15)
15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Be prepared because no one knows when Jesus will return (Matt 24:44)
44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Be prepared because the end time is nearer than we think (Rom 13:11-12)
11 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Be prepared because the day of the Lord is coming (2 Peter 3:11-13)
11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.
The Invitation is Rejected (Luke 14:18-20)

18 But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.'
19 And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.'
20 Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'

Excuses show insincerity and misapplied priorities

Excuses started in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8-12)
8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." 11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" 12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Moses gave the excuse that he couldn't talk (Ex 4:10-12)
10 Moses said to the LORD, "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." 11 The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

Aaron gave the excuse of peer pressure (Ex 32:21-24)
21 He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" 22 "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' 24 So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

Excuses make one unfit for service (Luke 9:59-62)
59 He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

The Invitation is Broadened (Luke 14:21-24)
21 So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.'
22 And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.'
23 Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.
24 For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'

God desires all to come to Him

Come to God because He wants everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)
9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.
Come to God because of His kindness (Rom 2:4)
4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

Come to God because He wants all to be saved (1 Tim 2:2-4)
3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

Come to God because He will give rest (Matt 11:28)
28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

There is always room in heaven

Room because there are many places available (John 14:2)
2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

Room because for everyone who overcomes, God will provide a place in His heavenly temple (Rev 3:12)
12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

Room because Jesus wants His people to be with Him (John 17:24)
24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Room because John saw a multitude that no one could count in heaven (Rev 7:9)
9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Room because Jesus has many sheep folds (John 10:14-16)
15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

Only those who accept will make it to heaven

Only those who accept because anyone who rejects Jesus will be condemned (John 12:48)
48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

Only those who accept because Jesus is the only way (John 14:6)
6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Only those who accept because those that have not accepted Jesus will be outside the heavenly city (Rev 22:14-15)
14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murder, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Only those who accept because they are the only ones who have the inheritance of heaven (Rev 21:6-8)
7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."
Only those who accept because the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10)

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Only those who accept because everyone who says Lord, Lord will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7:21)

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Jesus Turns The Tables (14:15-24)

15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” 16 Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ 18 “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.’ 19 “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ 20 “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ 21 “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.’ 22 “Sir,” the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ 23 “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’"

The Pharisees were concerned with their position at the table, not only the dinner table of their host, but also the table of the kingdom of God. The disciples had also become infected with this preoccupation with position, as we know from the gospel accounts. Jesus’ words must have caused all of those present at the meal great discomfort. Jesus had effectively exposed and rebuked their sinful ambition. Hearing the mention of the “resurrection of the righteous,” a clear reference to the coming kingdom of God, one man saw a way to defuse the situation, and so he called out, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

There was one thing greatly wrong with this man’s statement: he spoke from the vantage point of one who would be sitting at that table. This man, like the other Pharisees, assumed that if anyone were to be at this messianic meal, this banquet of the kingdom of God, it would be him. Here they were, jockeying for position in a kingdom which they were not even going to be a participant in.

Jesus speaks a word of warning to this man and those like him with another parable in verses 16-24. He tells of a certain man who plans a great feast, and who sends out invitations, well in advance, to all those guests He desires to attend. We would conclude that God is the host, that the feast is the kingdom of God, and that the invitation would be the covenant promises of the Old Testament, along with the announcements of the Old Testament prophets, including John the Baptist, the last of these prophets. The invited guests are, we would know, the people of Israel, the Jews.

One would assume that all the invited guests implied by their deeds and words that they were going to be a part of God’s promised kingdom. It is only when the announcement is made that the feast is ready that the invited guests “welch.” They all have their excuses, of course. One man excuses himself to look at land he has just purchased, which apparently he had not inspected before the purchase. Another declines to “try out” his oxen, which he bought untested. A third has to stay at home with his wife, whom he has just married.

These invited guests—Israelites—whom God invited and who appeared to be planning on participation in the kingdom of God, failed to accept the invitation when it actually arrived. They had other, better, more important things, to do. In response, God now offers the blessings of participation in His kingdom to those who would not have been considered acceptable guests, the very ones (the poor, crippled, blind, and lame (verse 21)) whom God has told His host to consider inviting to a feast (verse 13). But not just the rejected, lower, classes of Israel are invited, but even those unsuitable people along the by-ways are compelled to come. God will not take “no” for an answer from them. It is not that they have chosen to be a part of God’s kingdom, but that God has chosen
to make them a part of that kingdom. It is God’s sovereign purpose that has prevailed, not some superior wisdom on the part of Gentiles. Thus, there is no basis for pride.

What a word this is for Luke’s Gentile readers, the audience to and for whom he has written. This explains to Gentiles how it is that the blessings of the Jews can be experienced by the Gentiles, and how the majority of the Jews can fail (at this time) to grasp what God is doing or to accept it.

What a word Jesus has given to His Jewish audience! Let those who would strive to get first place in the kingdom be certain that they are even going to be in it.

Conclusion

What a lesson the words of our Lord in this text conveyed to the Jews of that day. They assumed that they had a place at the “table,” that is in the kingdom of God, and their only concern was which place that would be. They were concerned with their position in the kingdom, while it never occurred to them to be concerned with their possession of the kingdom. These Jews were not atheists, nor great “sinners” in any outward way (such as the tax gatherers and the prostitutes were, in the minds of some), they were very religious people, in fact leaders of their religion. They had no doubt about their salvation, but they were wrong. The last section of our passage is a solemn warning to the Jews that they will miss out of that which they presumed they had.

For the Gentile readers of this gospel, they find an explanation of the reason why the Gentiles have been privileged to enter into the blessings which God promised His chosen people, Israel. It is, however, not a flattering text, one which ridicules the Jews for their unbelief and which praises the Gentiles for their greater discernment, as evidenced by their faith in Israel’s Messiah for salvation. The Gentiles are those who are compelled to come, from the highways and byways. They are, as it were, the “bums” along the roadway.

Note, too, the insight which we gain from this passage on the interplay between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Our text attributes the failure of Israelites to enter into the blessings of the kingdom of God to their rejection of the invitation given to them. Luke does not tell us that the Jews were kept from the kingdom by God’s choice (election—which is, you understand, a biblical truth), but by their own choice. On the other hand, the salvation of the Gentiles is not attributed to their choice, but to divine compulsion. The sovereignty of God is thus emphasized with respect to salvation; the responsibility of man with respect to condemnation. Both doctrines are true, though they must be held in tension. Let us keep the perspective and the emphasis which we find in Luke’s account. Luke does not trade of God’s sovereignty for man’s free will, nor vice-versa. Indeed, he holds both in tension (cf. Acts 2:23).

Let me pause right here for a moment. The reason why the Jews lost out on the kingdom of God was because they rejected God’s clear invitation, in the person of Jesus Christ, the King of Israel. Christ is still the key to man’s salvation, or may I say, more bluntly, your salvation. The only way men go to heaven (get into the kingdom of God—sit at the banquet table, as our text symbolically portrays it) is by receiving Jesus Christ as the Son of God, God’s King, God’s Savior.

In the Gospels, God is declaring to you an invitation to “come to dinner at His house,” as it were, to become a member of His kingdom, to sit as His table forever, forgiven of your sins, righteous in His sight through the work of Christ, and free to enjoy intimate fellowship with Him. If I have failed to make this invitation clear to you elsewhere in my exposition of Luke’s gospel, let me do it now. The “good news” of the gospel (for this is what “gospel” means) is that God wants you to enjoy fellowship with Him, in His kingdom, forever. To accept His Son at His invitation is to obtain the right to enter in. To reject His Son, or even to put off a decision to accept Him, is the cause for being condemned to eternal separation from Him and His kingdom.

A number of years ago, I taught a Bible study in our home. It was a study of the gospel of John. One of the couples that attended came to faith in Christ during the study. When the husband shared his testimony with me, he described his conversion in a way I had not heard before. He said that he could not identify a specific time when he was saved, although he knew it was in the last several weeks. He said that his conversion came “somewhere between chapter 3 and chapter 7 (I confess, I’ve forgotten the specific chapters).

What an interesting way of viewing one’s conversion, and yet a very reasonable one, for the person who has studied through a particular gospel account. The gospel accounts are written to build to a conclusion. They are written to bring us to certain conclusions, foremost among them is the conclusion that we are a sinner and that we can be saved only by trusting in Jesus as the Son of God who died in our place, bearing our penalty. I pray that as you have traveled through the chapters of Luke’s gospel the light has somehow come on, and you now know that you, too, are a child of God, assured of a place at His table.
There is yet another lesson, which is as applicable to men today as it was to the Israelites who listened to these words of Jesus centuries ago. The "external glue" of our text, which gives it a unity, is the dinner table. Everything which is said here is said at or near the dinner table, and about the dinner table. But there is an "internal glue" which should be recognized as well, providing us with an even deeper unity. That "silver thread" is the concept of self-interest. Think about the ways in which self-interest can be found at the heart of every sin which our Lord condemns in these verses.

In verses 1-6, self-interest is at the heart of the sinful actions and attitudes of the Pharisees. Self-interest caused the Pharisees to reject Jesus, angry that He spent great amounts of time and energy with "sinners" and the unsuitable people, rather than with them. Self-interest caused the Pharisees to want Jesus out of the way, lest He overthrow their system, and prevent them from all the "perks" which it afforded them. Self-interest was undoubtedly the motivation for their asking Jesus to dinner, and for "using" a sick man's ailment in an effort to entrap Jesus in some technical legal infraction. So, too, it was self-interest that enabled the hypocritical Pharisees to excuse their acts of labor (pulling their son or ox from the well) on the Sabbath.

It was also self-interest which motivated each person to seek to sit in the places of honor at the dinner table (verses 7-11), which very likely left Jesus at the place of lowest honor, in a way fittingly appropriate, given the teaching of Philippians chapter 2 pertaining to the humiliation of Christ, leading to the cross.

Once again, self-interest is the culprit, a root evil, in verses 12-14. The reason why we are tempted to invite our friends, relatives, and the affluent, to our feasts, is that they can be counted on to return the favor. Self-interest will always invite those who can pay us back, reciprocate, rather than to "waste" a meal on someone too poor or unable to return the favor.

Finally, in verses 15-24, it was self-interest that caused the Israelites of Jesus’ day to reject Him as Messiah. In the parable which Jesus told (vv. 16-24), three individuals are said to have accepted (by inference, at least) the invitation to attend the feast, and yet the excuses for not attending were all matter of self (selfish, if you prefer) interest.

It is self-interest which keeps men from coming to Christ for salvation. Men wish to enter into the kingdom, but do not wish to create any pain, displeasure, or sacrifice for themselves. Thus, self-interest plays a prominent role in keeping men from Christ and thus from His banquet table, the kingdom of God.

Our culture is perhaps more permeated by self-interest than any other people at any other time in history. We have a magazine on the rack at the grocery store entitled “Self.” We may laugh at the antics through which the Pharisees went to get the best places at the dinner table, but we also sign up for classes which teach us how to assert ourselves, so that we can be more successful. Nearly every problem which man experiences today is now linked (in some mysterious way) to a poor self-concept. That which plagues the world is not self-seeking, but rather the lack of self-love and self-assertion. We are truly a self-oriented society, just as Paul described the culture of those in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

But I do not wish to dwell on the self-orientation of the unbelieving world, as evil as this is. I wish to draw your attention to the way self-interest has become a primary motivation in the church, and in the lives of countless Christians (myself included). While we may not fight for the chair of honor at the dinner table (only because there is none), we will find Christians lining up for leadership training classes, for positions of prominence and public visibility. At the same time, those tasks which call for menial service, for little recognition or power or prominence seem to go begging those who would faithfully carry out this non-glamorous ministry. We avoid ministry which has little immediate returns (such as praise, or increased numbers or growth). Ministry to those who are unable to pay us back, even with conscious gratitude, is shunned like the plague. Ministries where people don’t seem to appreciate us and our contribution are quickly left behind, replaced by some ministry which is more “fulfilling.”

I say to you my friend that “self-interest” literally abounds in the church and in our lives. This is one of the reasons for the strife which the New Testament writers describe (cf. Philippians 2). Paul had to look long and hard to find a man like Timothy, who would be “genuinely concerned for your welfare” (Philippians 2:20). The reason for this is also given by Paul in this same text:

For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:21).

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/48-table-talks-luke-141-24)
Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

While last week’s text included the statement that the first will be last, today’s study could be summarized by considering the importance of keeping first things first. There is no contradiction between the two ideas. Last week’s lesson dealt with the way that God sees people and the manner in which they will be treated on the Day of Judgment; today’s study concerns priorities in the lives of God’s people. The excuses offered by the three individuals in Jesus’ parable reveal much about the individuals who offered them. Each excuse clearly shows that attending the dinner was not a priority for any of the three. They had something better to do. They could have made time for the dinner—if they had wanted to. Attendance was not high on their to-do list, if it was on there at all. It is still true that the cares of this world and the obligations associated with it can often take priority over the things of God. This is a warning that is found throughout the Scriptures and one that today’s Christian must take seriously. “Do not love the world or anything in the world,” writes John. “If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them” (1 John 2:15). James is just as direct: “Don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4). In the parable of the sower, Jesus described how some of the seed fell among thorns (Luke 8:7). He later explained that this represents “those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature” (8:14). In his second letter to Timothy, Paul lamented of Demas, who “because he loved this world, has deserted me” (2 Timothy 4:10). Demas may not have been tempted by a field, by oxen, or by a wife, but something in the world had seized control of his heart.

During the change to David’s leadership in ancient Israel, some who “came to David at Hebron to turn Saul’s kingdom over to him” are described as those who “understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:23, 32). We live in a time when spiritual values are not promoted in any significant, meaningful way by culture. The lure of the world is very strong and begs for our attention through the various media outlets of our time. Our youth are especially the targets of these outlets and must be instructed by both the home and the church. The battle for hearts has never been more intense. Do we know the times? Having that knowledge, do we know what to do with it? Those are important questions, and we must answer them to protect our own relationship with God first and foremost. Let’s face it: we won’t be much good for the kingdom of God if we’re so focused on protecting others that we neglect our own spiritual well-being. While multitudes clamored for Jesus’ attention, he still realized the need to be alone with the Father from time to time (Luke 5:15, 16). He realized that his apostles needed rest (Mark 6:30-32).

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Some people who attend church every week will not enter the gates of heaven (Luke 14:15)
2. When the time is right, the Lord will call us to join Him (vss. 16-17)
3. People come up with a variety of excuses for not spending time with the Lord (vss. 18-20)
4. If we reject the Lord’s invitation, He will invite others (vs. 21)
5. As followers of Christ, we should open our hearts and homes to others (vss. 22-23)
6. If we reject Christ today, we might not get another opportunity to make things right (vs. 24)