

## **THE RADICAL KINGDOM BANQUET**

It has been said that if we are not succeeding in what we are doing, we should go back and check the maker's instructions. This thought has motivated me to re-read the gospels and learn anew what Jesus had to say on the subject of evangelism.

Not surprisingly, as I have read the gospels with a renewed awareness of the way Jesus modeled and taught about evangelism, I have been challenged by the radical way He addressed the culture of His day. I sense He would not be any different today.

As an example, let me invite you to read again the parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:1-24), which takes place in the context of a real banquet in the home of a prominent Pharisee.

In the course of conversation, one well meaning person said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast of the kingdom of God." He is referring to the party God will host at the end of time to usher in His Kingdom for all those who have accepted His invitation to attend. In response, Jesus proceeds to tell a story that causes offence to the Pharisees who are present.

He talks about a banquet where the invited guests ultimately decline the invitation to attend (the invitation sent from God by Jesus himself to His own people). Interestingly, the excuses that are offered are no different from the excuses we find people offering in our current day secular materialistic culture – the excuses of work and career, possessions and consumerism, and family and relationships.

Consequently, the host (God) says, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (the people that don't usually get an invitation to banquets).

The people in privileged positions, those on God's original address list, didn't want to come and so Jesus says, "Go to the people who have never been invited to a banquet before, go to the people who are waiting to be asked and who will happily respond."

And as the curtain closes on the scene, we are left with the realization that none of those present would eat at the banquet of God, unless they swallowed their pride and dealt with their excuses.

Now why is this parable so relevant for the church of today and what clues does it provide for us in being good stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us to fulfill the great commission?

Three observations come to mind for your consideration:-

1. Jesus has a larger circle of people for us to contact than we have realized.

Further, the biggest harvest for the church will not come from the (familiar) people we already know, but from the people we have yet to meet. Could it be that we will bless more people “by accident” when we have a more inclusive mindset in our mission travels, than we will when we remain on the familiar territory of the past?

2. There are people (right now) waiting to respond to the invitation to come into God’s Kingdom.

Jesus is saying, “Don’t invite people who won’t come, but follow me and My Father out into your community and watch what We are doing and invite people whose hearts are open to respond.”

3. Kingdom churches are radical churches.

Just recently my wife Sue and I have unexpectedly developed a wonderful friendship with our Vietnamese Buddhist pharmacist and have been able to talk to her freely about God’s love for her. This might not have happened if we had not taken to heart the “maker’s instructions” contained in this parable and were not sensitive to what the Father was already doing in the world in which we live.

Could it be that God has open doors into the community that we have not previously contemplated? Could it be that He has radical strategies for us to follow that could very well change the cultures of our churches as we partner with Him in His banquet purposes? Could it be that Jesus was referring to the age in which we live when He said, “Come, for everything is now ready.”

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