

Good morning! We're currently in our series on parables and parables are where you use a story to try and illustrate a deeper truth (point people to something greater). They're allegorical...parables are a story within a story.

Before we get to the parable that we're looking at today, I want to start by addressing the most important thing when it comes to *any* of the parables in Scripture – not just the one we're reading today – so here it is, it's the most important thing, you ready? The most important thing about the Biblical parables is: **They originated from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.** That's the most important thing.

The biblical parables are important because Jesus Christ spoke them. That might seem simple or like common sense but I think that's the problem, for the majority of humanity (at least in America), what Jesus has said, has become all too common. Most people would probably agree Jesus said it and, yet, it means nothing to them – and that's the problem.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God, if you don't believe that then you can't approach Him with the humility, surrender, reverence and awe that is needed for Him to communicate His truths to your heart in way you will actually understand.

My goal by the end of this message/sermon isn't to have explained the parable perfectly (or to have delivered an entertaining, socially acceptable performance), my goal is – by God's grace – to help every soul in this room be confronted with the truth, that Jesus Christ is the Fully Divine Son of God. If you came in here this morning and the fact that Jesus Christ spoke the parables isn't the most important thing to you, then my hope is – by the end – you realize why it should be. **PRAY.**

Alright, here is the actual parable, it's from Luke chapter 14:7-11, and here's a little context (so you know what's happening): in the previous passage (verses 1-6) we're told that it's Sabbath and, for dinner that evening, Jesus has gone to the house of one of the Pharisee's (a religious leader). At some point in the midst of this dinner, in front of these religious leaders and other guests, Jesus makes an observation (and shares a parable in response). That's where we pick up in verse 7:

“When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit in the seats of honor near the head of the table, he gave them this advice: “When you are invited to a wedding feast, don't sit in the seat of honor. What if someone who is more distinguished than you has also been invited? The host will come and say, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then you will be embarrassed, and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table! “Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, ‘Friend, we have a better place for you!’ Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 14:7-11

So there's Jesus' parable, once again, a parable is a story meant to illustrate deeper truths about real life. For the sake of time, I'm going to jump right in and identify some of the spiritual truths I believe God wants to illustrate/reveal to us through this parable. First things first, the wedding feast, in verse 8 Jesus said, **“When you are invited to a wedding feast”** and – by this – I believe, the deeper illustration Jesus is referring to, is simply life.

Wedding Feast = Life

Now, we need to expand on that...here's a question I want you to wrestle with: **Is there a difference**

between existing and genuine life?

Think on that for a second but let's go back to the wedding feast real quick – a wedding feast is a meal, correct? Did you notice that there are actually 2 meals referenced within the overall context of this story? There's the wedding feast, in verse 8, which we've already mentioned (it's meant to illustrate life), what's the other meal?

It's the dinner at the Pharisee's house that Jesus is physically present at, right? It's mentioned in verse 7 ... so Jesus is literally at a dinner and, I think, it's that dinner that gives Him the inspiration for this parable about a different dinner (a feast!). I told you to wrestle with it, let's come back to it: **Is there is a difference between existing and genuine life?** Absolutely there is! I say that confidently because Jesus said that (multiple times) and it's a huge portion of what this parable is about. Believing and understanding that distinction adds a lot of clarity to this parable. So let's make this addition to the previous thought:

Dinner = Existence

Wedding Feast = Kingdom of Heaven (aka genuine life)

I know I said the Wedding Feast represents life (which it does) but we have to take it a step beyond that...the wedding feast – more specifically – represents the Kingdom of Heaven. Because the Kingdom of heaven is the only place where genuine life can actually be found. I guarantee you the people gathered around the dinner table – that night at the Pharisee's house – thought they were living. But Jesus (the Creator of Life) is sitting there watching them grovel with each other over puny, delusional, little man-made societal positions and He's thinking, "Wow...this is not life, this is not what I created, let me give you a second chance, let me tell you about what life truly is. It's like a wedding Feast.

It's important to understand that, culturally, during Jesus' time social gatherings where you came around a meal together were a big, big deal (our autonomous, entertainment driven culture has so desensitized us that I don't know if we could comprehend it, even if we tried) but social gatherings (dinner's, meals) were a big deal to the people Jesus is talking to (specifically, in that moment) and Wedding feasts were the granddaddy of them all, the pinnacle of all things important. So Jesus is sitting at this lifeless dinner (full of pride, insecurity, fear and selfish ambition) and He says, "Let me take your dinner...and I'm going to raise you a wedding Feast." **It's important to note that Jesus uses the idea of a Wedding feast/banquet multiple times throughout Scripture to describe the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 22, Luke 12, Revelation 19). So:

Dinner = Existence

Wedding Feast = Kingdom of Heaven (aka genuine life)

What is the Kingdom of Heaven? Well...you have to ask yourself...what is a kingdom? I think one of the simplest definitions is, "A kingdom is anything that falls under the rule of a king or queen." I know it's usually called the Roman empire but – let's call it a kingdom for a second – the Kingdom of Rome would have been anything that falls under the rule and authority of whoever was in charge of Rome. So, what is the Kingdom of Heaven? It is everything that falls under the rule, authority and reign of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Creator, Author and Source of all genuine life, outside of surrendering to Him and entering His Kingdom, you will not experience life for what it truly is. You can't, it's impossible. You can continue existing, observing and even experiencing the effects of His Kingdom, but you cannot have the genuine life for yourself, unless you surrender to Jesus.

So Jesus is at this dinner where He's watching His creation (His people) exist, but not live, and so He tells them this parable about this Wedding Feast, in hopes that some – ideally all - will see and understand the Wedding Feast for what it actually represents. So that's the first illustration I think we should derive from this parable:

Dinner = Existence

Wedding Feast = Kingdom of Heaven (aka genuine life)

The next thing we need to look at in this parable, is the table. I don't know if you noticed but at both of these dinners (Jesus references it multiple times), there is a table. In verse 7 he says the people – at the actual dinner – the people were trying to sit as close to the head of the table as possible and He specifically references the table twice more within the parable itself (saying you'll either move up or down it). So, a table, is referenced multiple times in this passage.

But just like the wedding feast isn't meant to represent an actual wedding feast, I don't think the table is meant to illustrate an actual table. I believe the table is meant to illustrate order.

Table = Order

What is order? Order is the proper way in which something works. It is the sequence or pattern that is required to play out in order for something to be experienced for what it actually is. Table = Order. OR...the potential for disorder. Just because order exists, doesn't mean we'll actually adhere to it, right? And when you don't adhere to the actual order of things, what happens? You get the opposite, you get disorder, which is chaos. You get chaos.

So at the dinner (at the Pharisee's house that night) Jesus is witnessing a complete disregard for the actual order of things. There's a table but they're using their table to try and create their own order. Jesus is witnessing all this and so He says, "I'm going to tell you about life, I'm going to tell you what it truly is...but when it comes to genuine life, there is an order to things. If you want to disregard that order, you will be allowed to continue existing, but you will not truly live.

In the Kingdom of Heaven – at the Wedding Feast – there is table (order to things). And the difference between that table – in the Kingdom of Heaven – and the table at the Pharisee's house, is that the table – in the Kingdom of Heaven – and the order that it represents, cannot be disregarded. But here's the thing...**the Kingdom of Heaven will only have people in it who don't want to disregard the true order of things.** So...what is the order of things within the Kingdom of Heaven? To hopefully help us understand all this a little better, we're going to look at a third illustration from this parable that I believe God wants to reveal to us. And this is the most important:

Head of the Table = Highest priority in your Life (Point of Reference off which you base all things)

In verse 7, we're told Jesus notices/observes how everyone at the Pharisee's house, most likely in prideful ignorance, are groveling with each other over being as close to the "head of the table" as possible. Now we just talked about how the table represents order, but you can't have order without a starting point and I think the "head of the table" represents the starting point for whatever order of things you are pursuing. So...what is the highest priority of your soul?

By soul I'm referring to a term that's meant to encapsulate everything regarding who you truly are (mind, spirit, body). At the core of who you truly are – what is your highest priority? Because it is what sits at the head your of your table. It is the point of reference by which you are ordering everything else in your life (whether you realize it or not). It's the difference between whether you're sitting at the Pharisee's table or genuinely partaking in the wedding feast. For those of you who are more literal...the highest priority in your life (whatever it is) it will determine whether or not you simply exist or genuinely live.

So, what...OR Who...is supposed to be sitting at the head of the table? What...or Who...is supposed to be the point of reference off which all other things are supposed to find their order? I have one last point that will hopefully help bring everything together:

If you think about it, there are actually two components to each place at a table? Whether it's the Pharisee's house or the Wedding Feast – there are two components to each place at the table. When it comes to the order of things within our life there are always two components (whether we realize it or not). To try and help illustrate, I've drawn a diagram: **DIAGRAM OF TABLE**.

So this rectangle is the table, and around the table are several circles, which are the seats (where people would obviously sit). On the far left side we have the head of the table, which is obviously represented by the number 1. So number 1 represents the head of the table (this is the place of most importance), the seat immediately next to that is number 2 and it represents, the next highest place of honor, followed by 3 and so on and so forth (I went to 6 on this diagram but you could potentially go on and on beyond that). 1 is the place of highest honor, it's higher than 2 but 2 is a place of higher honor than 3, 3's better than 4 and so on.

Each position at the table, whether it's 1, 3, 7 or whatever – each position at the table has 2 components (which is why I put a number in both the circle and it's corresponding place on the table). What are these 2 components? First of all, there's the location, right? Each place (or position) is specifically located somewhere on or at the table BUT the other component is that each position – no matter where it is located – has a corresponding INDIVIDUAL who maintains that position. **So there's the position at the table (or in the order of things) but the other component is the individual who holds that position.**

One of evils greatest tactics is to get you and I to care more about ordering our lives around the idea of a position rather than an individual Who is actually worthy to hold that position. So instead of caring about Who should be sitting at the "head of the table"...we fall in love with the lie that we have some sort of control over *what* should be at the head of the table (which is ultimately a *who* because it's us putting ourselves in the place of God). So the position at the table (or the position within the order of things) becomes more important than whether or not there is an Individual actually worthy to maintain that position. In fact I'd argue, in a lot of people's souls, this is what it actually looks like:

DIAGRAM 2.0 (TABLE WITH NO CHAIRS)

That's why, if we're not careful, things like our sexuality become our highest priority. Not just our sexuality, but social status, how we appear to those around us, our safety, health, comfort, sports, self-preservation, addiction, money, power, control, family, marriage, children, relationships/community, intellect, academic pedigree, our grades, social media platforms, politics, fashion, pleasure, career, our opinions, selfish ambition (whatever that might entail), controlling our identity.

All these lifeless idea's become the point of reference off which we order everything else in our life. I

know I mentioned things like marriage and relationships and you might argue those things aren't lifeless but – they can be – as sad as it is, I've seen lifeless marriages, I've seen lifeless relationships. And the irony is – it's usually because those things were idolized – those things were put at the head of the table and, yet, that's the very reason they cannot be experienced for what they truly are.

You know, as I reread this parable over and over, I found it very intriguing that as Jesus was observing all the chaos that was unfolding at the Pharisee's house – those people who were getting life completely out of order – He only references the "head of the table". But in the actual parable – when Jesus starts telling them about the Kingdom of Heaven – He doesn't mention the "head of the table" at all, instead, He directs them towards a whole new reference point by which all things are ordered. Did you catch what that new point of reference is? It's the host. He tells us, through the parable, that the Kingdom of Heaven is all about the host.

Who is the host? He Is. Jesus Christ is the host and He's using this parable to try and point people to Himself. On earth we bicker and grovel with each other over trying to maintain or create the order which we think should dictate our lives (which in reality has turned into a puny existence). But Jesus is warning us, we can't even know the order of things, unless we know the starting point. Jesus is that starting point. If we want to continue lifelessly existing in this chaotic world then all we'll care about are the positions and ideas that we selfishly want to attain for ourselves. But if we're serious about genuine life then we'll hear what Jesus is saying about the Kingdom of Heaven, how it's not about a place at the table (it's not about a position we maintain), it's all about the host (and whether or not we actually know Who that Is).

That's why we mentioned this at the very beginning; the most important thing about any of the parables in Scripture is that Jesus Christ is the One Who said them. But it won't matter what Jesus says, if Jesus Himself doesn't mean anything to us, right? So this is Jesus testing to see, who recognizes Him for Who He truly Is. All of us sit at the Pharisee's table, all of us try to create, control and maintain the "positions" we selfishly want to depict our lives. All of us fall for the lie that we have some sort of control over the order of things.

But Jesus comes into our existence, He comes to our lifeless dinner party (where we're fighting with each other over delusional ideas of fulfillment) and He comes in and He extends an invitation. Did you notice that – in the parable – He said, "When you are invited to a wedding Feast", He doesn't say "if", He says "when". I believe – because He Is Good – Jesus will give everyone an opportunity to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But, He's also reminding us, that Heaven isn't about whether or not we have control over the priorities of our life, Heaven is a place where people are obsessed and in love with Him as the Host. They won't want control over their life because they're surrendered to the truth that only Jesus Christ knows how their life is meant to be ordered. Their existence becomes a full pursuit of being obedient to everything Jesus says because they trust Him – as the Son of God – to supernaturally infuse them with life if they honor Him as the One True Host. We won't put things like our sexuality at the head of the table because we realize only Jesus knows what sexuality is actually meant to be (He created it, it's His idea). So instead of pursuing that, we pursue Him, and we trust and are obedient to whatever He says about our sexuality, no matter how counterintuitive it might be to the disordered ways of this chaotic world that we're so used to. And the same applies to power and relationships and all the other things we put at the head of the table. Only Jesus knows the true version of those things, only Jesus deserves to be the head of the table.

So, in closing, what is the highest priority of your soul? It's not enough to just know (or recognize) that

Jesus deserves the head of the table, you have to actually give Him that position. I think a lot of times we tell ourselves that Jesus is at our table, which might be true in a sense, but in – all reality – we’re making him sit down at seat 6, or 10, or 30 or 50 or whatever. But Jesus says, “No, no...I don’t sit at your table, I invite you to mine.”

Which is crazy – because Jesus is the God of the universe – yet, He gives us the freedom (the power) – to determine what...or Who...is the highest priority in our lives. Unless it’s Him, you will not truly live, it would be hateful of me to believe that and not share it with you. He would love to come into your soul and introduce you to real life by being your “head of the table”. There are people in this room and you have never had Jesus as the head of the table in your life but you see Him for Who He Truly Is, you know that only He is worthy of that position and you’re ready to give it to Him. It’s called surrender and Jesus said for anyone that wants to surrender to Him, they must repent and be baptized. Repentance is where we ask for Jesus to forgive us for the fact that we haven’t allowed Him to lead us (that we’ve ignored the fact that we know He’s Holy, we know He’s Good), we ask Him to forgive us for all the consequences that have occurred because we’ve tried to control the priorities of life according to our own self-absorbed perspective. Then baptism is a public declaration that the Person of Jesus Christ is the new point of reference by which you order everything else in your life. It also represents your faith in the fact that you trust Him to supernaturally change you into the version of yourself that He intended all along, as you commit to be obedient to Him and His way of life from this day on. If you’re ready to surrender to Jesus as the One, True Host and you want Him to be the head of your table, I’m going to be right down front and I would love to meet you. It would be an honor if God would use me to help you genuinely start your relationship with Him.

For those of us in here who have already surrendered to Jesus, those of us who say Jesus is the highest priority in our life, let’s use this time to examine that- to make sure it’s true (let’s reorient our lives to the fact that Jesus Christ is the Point of Reference off which we base all things). Is that evident in your life? Is obvious to those around you that Jesus Christ is your highest priority?

I’m going to pray for these things.