

Lord of the Banquet

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This is a story about a banquet and its guests, three stories, with each plotline revolving around a major theme: seating, invitation, feast.

Seating

In the first parable Jesus has been invited to dine at the home of a ruler of the Pharisees. Pharisees were experts in Jewish law who were devoted to God. This man, the host, has a position above the average pharisee. Everyone has an eye on Jesus, and Jesus has an eye on them. They scurry to find a seat at a U-shaped table. The host would sit at the bottom of the U. The places of honor would be to his right and to his left, with the remaining seats decreasing in significance. Observing seat selection Jesus says, “[When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor](#) (8). We recently won tickets to the U.S. Open. I’ve played tennis since High School, so attending a Grand Slam has been a dream. When we got the tickets in the mail, I excitedly looked them up online, and to my disappointment, the seats were in the nosebleeds at Arthur Ashe. I wanted courtside, up close maybe get on T.V., hang with all my celebrity friends. Jesus says, Don’t assume you belong courtside. Take the nosebleeds. Why do such a radical thing? He gives two reasons. The first is based on **honor/shame**. While you might get the best seat, you also might be asked to relocate. Jesus says it like this, [You’ll begin with shame to take the lowest place](#) (9). What does he mean? He means with each step away from the seat of honor, you’ll bring attention to your vain presumption. It’s like sneaking into the front row and being asked to return to your seat, you’ll look like an idiot. Jesus says, don’t assume the best place, assume the *lowest* place. Pick the worst seat. Sports fans. Why? Not just because you’ll have a bad seat, but because of what everyone else will think of you. Oh, you’re just a chump like the rest of us, not anyone special. There’s a reason Beyonce is on the front row. *There’s a social dimension to our seating in life*. Where do I stand in the room? Jesus shows this when says being asked to move up means being “*honored in the presence of all.*” The way up is the way down. Now getting to that second reason to take low place. It’s not just about social clout, honor/shame, but something *spiritual*, **humility and pride**. When you walk in a room do you think, Who can I notice? What person can I welcome? Who can I honor with my

attention? Or are you the kind of person who watches themselves, Who's here that I like? Who's makes me feel comfortable? Who will honor *me*? Now, an *introvert* may say, I don't want the attention. People exhaust me. Beneath that is *me*. Poor, little, me. It's weak pride, so consumed with what you fear, what you find uncomfortable, that you disregard others. You've given Me the place of honor. The *extravert* moves into the room desperate for attention, bending every conversation to themselves, gathering a crowd around *me*. Strong pride. You also give Me the place of honor. *But the humble person forgets about Me. They not watching themselves because they're too busy looking out for others.* How do we become like that, humble people, people of the lowest place? Truth is, we can't humble ourselves. We need help from the outside. Only in the presence of something great do we become small, like the sense we get looking out across a vast ocean or up a mountain range. And when we find our place before something truly great, it has a way of humbling and lifting us all at once. Only *God* can make that stick—the greatest Being in the universe: the seas fit in the hollow of his hand and the mountains tremble before him. Jesus says, *everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (11)*. The words *will be humbled* and *will be exalted* are in the passive tense, meaning someone else is doing the humbling and exalting. In this parable Jesus is saying pay attention to me, and you'll be simultaneously lowered and lifted. I'm truly great and I became small. I'm here at your table, not on a throne but on a cross, *so I can lift you up into the Father's love*, free you to serve others. *But*, you've got to pay more attention to me than to yourself. Its no so much that extraverts become introverts, or introverts extraverts. It's allowing Christ, not categories, to so define you you embrace the lowest place and lifted up.

Invitation

The next parable is directed toward the host. Jesus tells him, *When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid (12)*. He's expanding upon the previous parable by focusing on whose invited. It was typical to invite people whom you're friends with—and that's not wrong—but if that's only who you invite into your life, then you need to rethink things. Jesus is exposing *self-centered community*. Self-centered community hinges on *reciprocity*. I'll show up, if you show up. If the discussion is good, I'll come back; if



not, I won't. If people pursue me, then I'll come to City Group. If they don't, I won't. If I don't get prayed for, I'm not going to pray for them. Me, me, me. Self-centered, reciprocal community. But Jesus says invite people who can't give you anything back, people poor in social clout, who don't give you a spiritual boost, who don't pursue you. Invite them, not just to your city group but into your life: *But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you* (13–14). Why? *For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just* (14). The repayment is also passive, meaning God will repay you. When? When you're raised from the dead, made fully righteous, and able to stare into his glorious face without being burned to a crisp. *That day, the day you behold beauty incarnate; the day perfect love embraces your soul, you'll have ample repayment for loving people who can't love you back, serving people who don't serve you back.* And listen, Jesus can't say it at this point because he hasn't died and risen from the dead, but now, on the other side his resurrection, *that day* has broken into this *day*. Repayment was rolled back at the empty tomb so we can behold his beauty and enjoy his love now. *In fact, this parable isn't primarily about who you invite to church, or what your city group is like. It's about who God invites to church, who Christ died to get in the door.* And it's not the people with honor, the exalted, the self-centered; it's the humble, the low, the destitute, crippled, blind and lame, *people in touch with their need for God*. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom. The proud are humbled, but humble are exalted. Self-centered community hinges on reciprocity, but Christ-centered community hinges on hospitality.

Banquet

We've tipped over into the final parable. The first parable is about humility; the second parable is about hospitality, and the third is about eternal felicity. Jesus says, *A man once gave a great banquet and invited many* (16). Notice it's not *a* banquet, but a *great* banquet. He's thinking of the banquet described in places like Isaiah 25, Psalm 22, and Revelation 19. Isaiah 25 describes a great, end time feast on the mountain of the Lord, where the rivers run with well-aged wine and there are mountains of rich food. This is no mall foodcourt. At this feast Isaiah says the Lord will: *Wipe every tear, Lift up the poor, be a Refuge for the needy, Open a fountain of joy, and swallow up death.* Try getting that at Costco. The



invitations go out, and one by one, the excuses roll in. I just bought a field, a house, a car, set of clubs, and I *must* try it out, **stuff**. *Temporal consumerism devours eternal felicity*. The second guy buys five yoke of oxen, **work**. There's always more work to do, more projects to complete. *Vocational achievement trounces eternal rest*. The final fellow heart's so hard he doesn't even ask to be excused. I have married a wife, **family**. Men, are you leading your family or is your family leading you? Mothers, are you raising your baby or is your baby raising you? We prioritize what we prize. You prioritize God, you'll be at his feast. You prioritize stuff, work, and family, you will not. NT scholar Darrell Bock points out that *Jesus does not postpone the banquet or withdraw the meal; he gets a new audience.*" Go get the poor, the blind, the lame—the people in touch with their need for God, the humble. Mercy ministry allows you to do this literally, and that's important. There's still room! Go compel people. Seating: Where do I stand? Jesus exalts; Lord of the seating. Invitations: Will I feel connected? Jesus repays; Lord of community. Banquet: Make excuses and none shall taste *my banquet*. Lean in and invite others, and you'll have more than you can imagine—Jesus, Lord of the Banquet!