

Luke 14:15-24

Welcome 2011! We're beginning not only a new year, but a new decade. Can you believe it was 10 years ago now that we were also celebrating overcoming the greatest threat to world civilization? It wasn't war, famine, disease, or even terrorism, but the invasion of the imperceptible "Y2K Bug!" We survived that, but I still have to keep buying new programs for my PC to keep my computer compliant and safe. Few really understood until recent years the control computers would have over our lives and the whole world.

I read in a magazine these "wise" words from the past:

In 1943 IBM chairman Thomas Watson said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

In 1968 an IBM engineer commented on the microchip, "But what is it good for?"

And as late as 1977 Ken Olson, Digital Equipment founder and chairman, said, "There is no reason anyone would want a computer in their home."

Maybe some of us still feel that way! But like it or not, those little microchips are EVERYWHERE, just like little bugs!

So, how shall we celebrate this new decade and the anniversary of our victory over the "Bugs?" I don't know about you, but food has always worked for me! Of course, holiday gatherings put me WAY over my calorie limit, but they were fun.

Believe it or not, "the banquet" happens to be a favorite biblical metaphor for celebrating God's Kingdom. Notice how many times the gospel writers picture Jesus as eating. Jesus was a "diner out." He was visiting and eating nearly all the time. No wonder they called him a "winebibber and a glutton." The gospels have so many stories of eating because it was believed when the Kingdom came, the Messiah would throw a banquet and all the members of the Messiah's Kingdom would be there celebrating the new beginning.

Our scripture today from Luke is Jesus' parable that begins: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests." "A great banquet"—that's the clue. This is a Kingdom parable. We need to know in biblical times two invitations were sent to banquet guests. One came announcing a party would be held on such a day in the future. On the day of the banquet the host sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready."

However, the guests in this parable began making excuses after originally saying they would come. That made the man angry because he expected they would be happy to come and celebrate with him. So the man sent his servant out to invite anyone he found, "out to the streets and alleys; the roads and country lanes," which means to the four corners of the world. Everyone is to know, not only that they are invited, but NOW is the time to come.

So, what's the point of the parable? The ancient prophets gave the first invitation to the Jews saying the Messiah would come. Then finally, the time of waiting was over. The baby whose birth we celebrated a week ago was indeed Emanuel, God with us. Jesus himself brought the second invitation and said, "Come, now, it is time to bring light into your dark world." He didn't mean the

darkness of the world was past. He meant now, in the midst of our darkness, we have Jesus, the Light of the world, to see our way through. People could now get to know and love God better through Jesus. The Jews rejected this 2nd invitation, so it was offered to the Gentiles—you and me.

But, some of us aren't sure we seriously want to accept it, either. Why? In Jesus' time they said they had bought a field, some oxen, or just got married. In our time, we would say, "My business is too demanding; some new possession or hobby is now my focus." Or, "My family consumes my time." The excuses themselves are not important. They are all legitimate needs. Whatever the reason, God is not the priority. We're worried about our computers being compliant and God is wondering why we're not compliant to our Christian commitment to put God first in our lives.

Jesus is cute as a baby in the manger, but He expects too much of us as an adult. The Kingdom of God may be here in Jesus, but we don't have time to be part of it right now. Busy people who feel this way know what they want out of life and they've made plans to get it. They—or maybe their computers—are in control of their lives. They don't need God out of a manger, messing up their schedules, making some claim on their lives and time. So, don't invite busy people to a Kingdom banquet. They don't have time.

And don't tell somebody whose life has been shattered by death or divorce or severe illness, "Here's an invitation to a banquet—a party. It's happening right now. You're invited. Don't worry about preparations just come as you are." You shouldn't say that to them. When your life is shattered you don't want to go to a party. Pain is a good excuse not to think about the Kingdom. Besides, you need someone to blame, and God is a good candidate. It's hard to party with someone you're mad at.

And certainly don't go to someone who is depressed because life isn't the way they want it to be. If you tell them there's a special banquet going on right now and they're invited, and then tell them to stop worrying and just come, think what they might say. "You're crazy. I don't see anything new. All I see are the problems I must live with day after day—problems that weigh me down and never go away." Problems are another good excuse not to bother with God.

So when Jesus came preaching the presence of God's Kingdom is with us right now, people didn't believe it then, and, I think that's our reaction now. Perhaps it's because we don't understand what God's Kingdom is. God's Kingdom is not a place or a time. It's not perfection or heaven or nirvana. God's Kingdom is having the living Christ in our lives each day. Our hearts become his home. It's the presence of His Spirit leading us through our busy lives, through the pain, the depression, and the problems. We want all that, but we often forget the most important part. It looks like this:

Sam was walking through La Guardia Airport struggling with two very heavy suitcases. A man asked if he knew the time. Sam set the giant suitcases down, looked at his watch and said, "5:45." "Hey, that's a nice watch," the man said to Sam. "Yes, it is," Sam replied. "Check this out." Sam pressed buttons revealing time for every time zone in the world. "Not only that, this watch will talk to you." He

pushed buttons that said “5:45” in every major language of the world. Then Sam hit another button and a map of New York City appeared on the display. “The flashing dot shows our location by satellite positioning. Not only that, listen.” Sam pressed another button and the watch became an FM radio receiver, a sonar device, a pager, and a message recorder.

“I’ve got to have that watch,” the man said to Sam. “I’ll give you \$15,000 for it.” Sam thought a moment and exclaimed, “Sold!” The man wrote a check for the \$15,000 and gave it to Sam. The man walked away quite pleased with his new purchase when Sam shouted after him. “Hey, wait a minute.” “Yes?” Sam, pointed at the giant suitcases he’d been struggling with through the airport and said, “Don’t forget the batteries!”

I know, that’s a “groaner!” However, the point is, Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) Jesus is what makes this fascinating, frustrating, miraculous life of ours keep working in the right way. It doesn’t make sense not to make time for Him and take Him with us everywhere, not just to church.

January is a new beginning. None of us knows how much time we have left to live and for life’s priorities. It’s a great opportunity for us to get life and God in proper perspective; to contemplate the true value of the gift of time.

We each get 86,400 seconds a day to invest. We each choose what to do with it.

To realize the value of ONE YEAR, ask a student who failed a grade.

To realize the value of ONE MONTH, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.

To realize the value of ONE WEEK, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realize the value of ONE HOUR, ask two lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realize the value of ONE MINUTE, ask a person who missed a train.

To realize the value of ONE SECOND, ask a person who just avoided an accident.

To realize the value of ONE MILLISECOND, ask the person who won an Olympic Silver medal but lost the Gold.

To realize the value of ETERNITY, ask a person who is dying and unafraid because Jesus is their source of life and hope.

How we use our time is important to God. I watched the movie “Tron - Legacy” this past week. One of the thoughts I got from it was this: We spend so much time focused on what we’ve lost, what we don’t have, what we failed to achieve, we lose the perspective of what we’ve gained, what we do have, what is ours forever – eternity with God. Let’s make sure our relationship with God is a time priority. From the very beginning God made covenants with God’s people. A covenant is an invitation from God to enter into a new relationship with God. Paul says it well in his letter to the Philippians: “Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.” (Phil 3:13)

So look at this banquet parable as a reminder of the covenant invitation we’ve all received to Life in Christ. The messenger is Jesus. The message is, “All is ready.” Now is the time to decide to believe God is really with us in the Christ of

Christmas who brings us hope; the same Christ who is resurrected at Easter and brings us forgiveness and eternal life; the same Christ who offers His Spirit within us for guidance and purpose each day of this life on earth until we are in His presence in the world to come.

Let's start this New Year with a renewed commitment to growing a personal relationship with God in Christ and making it a priority. We CAN make time for worship, study, prayer and putting our beliefs about forgiveness and love into action. Let's not make excuses. NOW is a good time to comply—to begin again. And, communion is a good way to confirm our commitment.

“All is ready. Come to the banquet!”