

“Everything is Ready” //Luke 14:15–26// *Come to the Table # 1*

How awesome is that! That never gets old... at our Sat services we saw 28 people baptized and **by God’s grace we’re going to see a lot more this morning**, because that is what today is about...

Luke 14 if you have your Bibles. We’re going to spend a couple of weeks in **Luke 14 in a series called “Come to the Table.”** Jesus tells a number of parables around this theme in Luke 14 and we’re going to explore them.

Come to the table... Don’t you just love invitations to eat? I think “Let’s eat” might be my two favorite words in the English language... The only time those 2 words did not bring joy to my heart was when I was still trying to get adjusted to food in SE Asia after I had gone to serve as a missionary there, and mealtimes felt more like a foray into the unknown than they a time to enjoy food.

- (I had been taught going over there that it was impolite ever to turn down food—like it was some big insult—and so I determined I was going to eat everything they put in front of me for Jesus and just trust God with the results.
- Well, the result was that in the 1st week I was there, I lost 14lbs in 3 days. You say, “Well, that sounds like a great weight loss

¹ “Much Depends on Dinner,” by Cameron Stracher, *Opinion Journal, Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2005.

Works consulted:

“Come to the Table,” Clayton King

“Getting Evangelism Right,” Erwin Lutzer

“Hospitality and Grace,” Tim Keller

“After the Heart,” Matt Chandler

“The Great Banquet—On Humbling,” Tim Keller

“An Invitation to God’s Great Banquet,” John MacArthur

program...” Yes, but it’s not the most enjoyable. I call it the ‘**rapid expulsion method.**’

But eventually I got adjusted and learned to love to **hear the words “let’s eat”** over there, too. Coming to the table is not usually only about meeting hunger needs, either; it’s also about connection, relationship.

- Eating with someone is one of the most intimate connections you can make with them.
- A meal together is fellowship; it’s engagement; it’s acceptance.

I saw some **incredible statistics in the WSJ** not long ago about the social importance of family mealtimes for children.

- One **Harvard Medical study** showed that kids who ate regularly with their parents were considerably healthier and 72% less likely to experience depression, struggle with self-esteem, have suicidal thoughts, develop eating disorders or use illegal drugs than those who did not.¹

Meals are important. So, it’s good news when Jesus tells us to “come to the table.” **It’s an invitation to you!**

- It’s an invitation for those of you who don’t know Christ, or for whatever reason don’t feel like you fit in.
- It’s an invitation for people who feel far from God because of their past or because of sins and mistakes they’ve made—not just to get forgiven of sins, but to have your souls renewed, and to meet Jesus in a real and tangible way.

- It's an invitation for those of you who know Jesus but have left him for some reason to come back.
- I have the privilege to say to you today, on his behalf, "*Come back to the table!*" Not just come back to church but come back into fellowship with Jesus Christ and community with believers.
 - I talked to a **girl in a store the other day** who told me, "*Yeah, I used to be in church but I've really wandered from God; I think I need to go back...*" I said, "Ah, well, you are in luck! At our church next week is **amnesty weekend**, where you can come back to church no questions asked." She said, "Really?" I said, "Yes." (Now, truth be told every week is amnesty week, of course... but it sounded better to make it seem like this was a special week.)

Come to the Table... Today we are going to look at how Jesus **extends that invitation to us, and what** keeps a lot of people from it.

And **here's what we're going to offer** to you at the end of this message:

- First, and most important, I'm going to offer you a chance to **receive Jesus' offer to be your Savior** if you never have done so—to come to the table and begin or maybe renew a personal relationship with him.
- Second, I'm going to give you a **chance to be baptized, today, on the spot**, if you never have.
 - Baptism is the first thing you are supposed to do after deciding for yourself to follow Jesus—we call it the going public of your commitment to Jesus—and some of you have never done that.
 - Maybe you became a Christian years ago, and you have just never taken the step; or maybe you became a Christian recently.
 - **Baptized as a baby...**

- Either way, baptism is the step you need to take and today is the day many of you are going to take a bold, defining step in your faith.
- **We've got all you'll need**—changes of clothes, etc.

Now, Jesus starts his invitation to the banquet with what appears to be random social advice—though it's not random at all, as I'll show you that at the end. ***But let's start there, because he does...***

The context of Luke 14 is that Jesus is at a party himself: Luke 14:7 Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, [8] "*When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, [9] and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place.*

[10] *But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.'* Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. [11] *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

- Now, at first, this just seems like **good, practical advice....** Right? A little random, but good nonetheless: It's not usually a good idea to thrust yourself into the most important seats, because you are might be setting yourself up for embarrassment.
 - It happened to me this very week: I took a **flight on JetBlue**—and **normally I fly Delta and I'm Platinum** so I get to board the plane early—so, when they announced priority seating I just waltzed on up to the front, because I assumed the airlines had an agreement where once you are important on one airline you got to be important on every airline—and so I get up there and the woman looks at my ticket and says, really loudly...) "You are **NOT** priority seating, sir; your line is over

there.” And she points over to all the mongrel-looking people; hunched-over, mouth-breathers, carrying their clothes in garbage bags. One guy has a live goat under his arm. And so in front of everyone I go back and stand with them. **That’s embarrassing, right?** You thought you belonged up here with the JetBlue priority customers.

- Or, **imagine you get invited to the boss’s daughter’s wedding reception.** But you get there late and are looking for a seat. There are several seats available at various tables, but you notice some chairs open at **table 1**, up on the little platform overlooking the party. So, you go seat yourself there. **It’s going to be embarrassing** when someone comes along and says, *“Sir, this seat is reserved for the boss’s friends. You don’t belong here. There’s a seat way back there for you...”* and he points, not even to a table, but to that row of chairs sitting around the edge of the room. And so, you begin the walk of shame... So, you **want to avoid that.**
- **Just good social advice, right...?** But it seems random.
- But it’s not. *Let’s keep going...*

[15] When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

[16] But he said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.

- BTW, isn’t it **great that Jesus presents the kingdom of God** like a party?
- What’s your **image of Heaven?** Eternal choir practice? Sitting in a colorless, cloudy heaven strumming the harp and being bored?
- **I always thought it was awesome** that John records **Jesus’s first miracle as being** the fixing of a broken tap at a party. John 2... And after he fixed it, it gave out the finest wine anyone had ever tasted...

- **Ask yourself: Why would Jesus make that his FIRST miracle?** It’s an inaugural miracle...
- **Why not raising somebody from the dead,** or casting out a demon? Why make your inaugural miracle **fixing a food and drink problem** at a party?
- That’s because it **summarized** his coming ministry: Jesus had come to restore the eternal party for which God created us—a party filled with joy and laughter and good food and drink and fellowship!
- **Isn’t that awesome?** *Is that how you see the Kingdom of God—* like the ultimate party?
- **That means** the best of all that we experience down here—fellowship, friendship, worship—all of this is just **hors d’oeuvres** for the eternal party!
- **Oh, I can’t wait.**

[17] And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

- You see, in those days, for really big feasts, there were **TWO** invitations. They **couldn’t set an exact time** because there were too many moving pieces.
 - Guests from out of town **weren’t sure exactly** when they would arrive; it was hard to get the food arranged...
- So, they sent out a first “save the date” kind of invitation—“that gave people a week window for when the party would be; and then a 2nd invitation that announced, *“Everything is ready. So, come on!”*”

So, **in this parable you’ve got a bunch of people** who responded ‘yes’ to the 1st invitation; but now, when they get the 2nd one, [18] **But they all alike began to make excuses.** The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’

- Well, that **doesn’t really make any sense.** I mean, **who lays out** a bunch of cash for a **piece of property** they haven’t even seen?

And even if that were true, couldn't it wait until tomorrow? It is dirt. It's not going anywhere. You've already bought it.

[19] And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them.'

- That would have been a **major investment** in those days—buying just 1 yoke would have been a ½ year's income! *Who would put out 2.5 years income without even looking at the oxen first?* You wouldn't even **do that with a car**, would you? "I just bought a car over the internet." "What kind is it?" "I don't know. I have to go see!"

[20] And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' Right... **because the last thing a new wife** wants is to get all dressed up and go to a fancy party.

- Newlyweds are usually poor and looking for any chance at free food that they can get! **When my wife and I got married** she had \$13 to her name and I was working part time at the church—which meant that for our first year we basically only ate food that ended in -itos: Cheetos, tacquitos, Fritos, Doritos... So, yes, we **accepted just about every invitation** for a free meal that came our way!
- So, this is a **pretty lame excuse**.

The point is, all these excuses are **pretty lame**: [21] So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'

- 2 shocking things about this story: 1. The original people didn't come to the feast even after they'd said yes. 2. And far more shocking, is that this rich guy would then fill up his house with the poor, crippled, blind and lame.

[22] And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' [23] And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.'

- Now, we've just taken the gloves off. **In Jewish culture**, saying, "highway people and hedge people" meant the moral outcasts of society. **These are not just poor**; they are so outside of the pail they **aren't even allowed** in the city.
- **Street people—non-priority seating people on the airlines.** Miscreants; misfits; moral reprobates. Ex-cons; sex-offenders. *Those not even allowed in polite society.*
- "Bring **them** to my party," Jesus says.

[24] For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'" (Notice **how Jesus now switches** into the 1st person. Up until this point he's been telling a story, but now he shows it's personal to him. He's the Master in this story, and **those sitting in front of him** are the ones making the excuses.

This parable is his summation of Israel's response to him—God had invited them to his Kingdom, and they had accepted, but now that Jesus was here, they are making excuses as to why they won't surrender to him and receive his offer of salvation.

Religious people are the group that miss Jesus more than any other!)

And so, **Jesus turns to the gathered crowds** ([25] Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned to them and said,) and says, [26] "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

- Jesus's statement here **really confuses some people**. They are like, "Hate your wife and your children and your parents? Doesn't the Bible teach us to love them?" Yes.

- This is a **comparative term**. *Compared to our love and commitment to Jesus, every other commitment in our lives, even the most intimate ones, should feel like hate.*
- **Think of it like this:** If you have a **dog**, you probably love your dog in some sense. But say a **robber came in and pointed a gun** at your dog and your kid and said, “I’m going to shoot one of them; you choose,” it’s no contest! Right? The right answer here is “right.” It’s not that you don’t love your dog; your love for your kid is so great that by comparison your commitment to your dog **seems like** hate.
- Jesus is saying that **compared to his importance in our lives**, every other commitment should *seem* like hate.
- Compared to **how committed you are to him**, it should seem like you **hate your friends**; like you **hate your dreams**; like you hate **even your family or your own life**.
- This **invitation is so weighty and important** it trumps *anything* else going on—even our most intimate and important loyalties.
- **Is that how you feel about Jesus?**

3 things this parable shows us...

3 Reasons ‘Good People’ (respectable people, religious people) Miss the Kingdom of God

1. Some miss the party because they fail to recognize the importance of the invitation

The excuses given in this story are **not evil in themselves** (None of them said, “Sorry, I can’t come... I’ve got a drug deal I’m doing; I’m running a dog-fighting ring”).

No, they are rather **anemic** excuses—but they **become evil** because they are used to justify ignoring something of extreme importance.

I mean, **even if the excuses sound legitimate to you** (If you are like, “Well, come on, dude’s got a new wife—give him some time at home.” Or, “Maybe he really does need to go see those oxen...”) they’re not legitimate when you weigh them against **the importance of the invitation they have received**.

- Sometimes when I’m at my **office I’ll get a phone call**; and I’m meeting with one of our other pastors, so my assistant will say, “I’m sorry; he’s meeting with someone right now...”
- Or, maybe I’m just really in the zone, working on something, and my assistant will say, “He just can’t come right now.” Those are **legitimate excuses**. Now, if it’s my wife on the other end of the line,” and she says, “the house is on fire,” or, “one of our kids is hurt,” or, “I just found out I’m pregnant,” then any of those excuses becomes lame.

The question: How important is an invitation from God? Wouldn’t that trump *everything* else going on, on earth?

Last year, when **Meghan Markle and Prince Harry** got married, a huge error was made when the invitations were sent out; one for which **Buckingham Palace has not yet apologized**—and I am referring to the fact that I never got my invitation. And if any of the royal family are listening to this podcast, I’m still waiting for that apology.

So, I **went online to see what one looked like** so I wouldn’t accidentally throw it away by mistake, and I found one. The **opening line was awesome**, “*The Lord Chamberlain is commanded by the Queen to invite...*” and then it goes on to put whoever’s name.

Now, I **wonder how many people received that invitation** and were like, “Oh, bummer. I’ve got **some oxen I need** to check on,” or “I’ve got some land I’ve got to go take a look at...” *The Lord Chamberlain is commanded by the Queen to invite J.D. Greear to Buckingham Palace...* I’m going, **oxen or no oxen**.

The Lord Jesus Christ has been commanded by the sovereign God to extend to you an invitation to his banquet!

- *It's an invitation for the poor, lame, blind and crippled. For the hedge people and highway people!*
- *It's an invitation for lost people to be found, broken people to be put back together, addicts to be set free, for lonely people to find community, for us to have shame and regret lifted, sins forgiven, and hostility destroyed.*
- Wouldn't that **invitation trump everything** else?

Let me ask: *Even if you're not sure yet whether this is from God*, do you realize how important the question is?

- I knew an **atheist professor** who once asks his **freshman class every year**, "*How many of you believe the Bible is the Word of God?*" Then he asks, "*How many of you have read it through?*" Then he says, by way of comparison, "How many of you have read all the HP books?" About ½ the hands go up. "I'm not so sure you really do believe it's from God. Because, if it were, wouldn't you have read it?"
- **I tend to agree with him.**
- **You say**, "I'm not **even sure it is the Word of God.**" You need to figure it out. Listen, I can understand someone who says, "I don't believe this is the Word of God. I'm 100% sure it is not" and then ignores it.
- The **ones I can't understand** are those who say, "Ahh... maybe it is, maybe it isn't," I'm not really concerned about it. I have heard them called "Apatheists." (Not, "a-theists," "I believe there is no God," but "apa-theists," "*I don't know if there is a God and I don't really care.*"

Ask yourself: What if the things the Bible talks about are true?

- The **Bible teaches that all people will spend eternity** in 1 of 2 places... Heaven, a place of unimaginable pleasure and bliss. The party of all parties where everything you have yearned for comes true.

- **And hell... a place that the Bible describes as real.** *Jesus* describes as being a place of anguish and torment... Jesus, the most loving, tender Being to ever walk the earth. **Jesus told us that.** He wasn't a hateful preacher. He told us that because he loved us; to warn us. **What if what he said is true?**
- **What if Jesus' death really had the meaning he said it did?** What if his crucifixion really was *for your sin*. What if he really was dying In your place. What if he really meant it when he said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes..." and you just treat it lightly or neglect it?
- **Sometimes I fear** when I'm talking about these things people will think I'm too **passionate—maybe a little crazy**. But I honestly just believe this is true—and if I do, how could I do otherwise?
 - **Rhonda**

Well, Jesus is teaching us something else in this story. He shows us a 2nd reason people miss God. Write this down:

2. Some miss the party because they feel unworthy

The **story was scandalous** because rich, important people wouldn't invite the poor, the lame, the blind, and the outcast to their homes for a social gathering.

But **that's WHO Jesus says God invited**, and a lot of people miss the party because they don't believe God would ever really want them there.

Listen: There's **something instinctive in us** that feels like we have to earn whatever we receive.

- Have you ever **gone to one of those potluck dinners** where you are supposed to bring something and you realize you didn't bring anything? How did you feel? Like you felt like you shouldn't eat anything?

- This was one of **biggest changes marriage brought** to my life: When I was a single guy I felt like I was forever showing up at places where people had brought food and I hadn't brought any (at church and they'd have some kind of **potluck dinner and I hadn't brought anything**). It **never** bothered me, I just embraced grace and dove right in.
- Then I got married and my wife, who is still under the law, wouldn't let me do that anymore. With her, **if we don't bring anything**, we have to go home. We can't take part in the blessing if we haven't contributed.

That's **good social manners**, but that's **not true with God** because there is literally nothing we can bring.

- All our **righteousness is like filthy rags...**
 - The **image there** is revealing...
 - **Small pox in Boston**
- This is us. We are **the poor, blind, crippled and lame**. We are the **highway people**, the **hedge people**..

Yet God has invited you to his banquet. And he doesn't expect us to bring anything—he can't. You say, "How could I be in his house?"

This is the gospel: The Bible says, "*God made him who knew no sin...*"

- *Tetelestai*: he literally paid your debt.
- And gave you his righteousness.

That invitation is open for all who will receive! It is FOR YOU.

Listen: **4x Jesus extends an invitation in this passage.** He keeps saying, "**Come!**"

- Let the poor and the broken come!
- Let the wandering and afraid, come!
- Let those who have fallen away come! Let the shamed and rejected come.
- Let those who are discouraged, come!

- Let those who have been abused, come!
- Let those whose lives are filled with regret, come!
- *Whosoever will* may come!

The **invitation is for you no matter what highway or hedge** you find yourself in this weekend!

- The invitation reads: "*The LJC has been commanded on behalf of God Almighty to invite you to his banquet...*"
 - **Behold, everyone who thirsts**, let him come to the waters and drink!
 - **Whosoever will** may come! Let him who is thirsty come!
 - *And as many as received him*, to them he gave the power...
 - *For God so loved the world...*
- It's for you! **Come to the table!**

There's 1 more kind of person who misses the party...

3. Some miss the party because they refuse to acknowledge that they are unworthy

This is **kind of the opposite of #2.**

- In #2, people missed the party because they assumed they were too unworthy to get the invitation;
- but Jesus points out **some people who miss the party** because they refused to acknowledge that they *are* unworthy—which is why they don't take Jesus seriously.

Like I told you, this whole parable is an **indictment of the religious community** in Jesus's day, who neglected Jesus because they didn't see how desperate they were for God's salvation.

Religion is the #1 substitute for genuine faith. Religion convinces you that you are worthy and gives you a list of things to make yourself more worthy!

Religious people would rather have a religion that just teaches us to live a good life; to be a social activist; to be generous; to be a better you; to be better dad and husband... to live strong. ***So, as Christianity has gone mainstream, people have corrupted it to say just that.*** Just look at popular religious and Christian literature...

- **But that's not the gospel.** The gospel is that **we have no worthiness**. All our righteousness is as a filthy rag. We don't need to be a better us, we need a *new us*.
- **We are the poor**, blind, diseased... God created us, yes, and we have precious worth in his sight, but our sin brought the worst kind of disease and corruption on us, and Christ died a bloody death to save us because we are hopeless; and we **need to be saved**, rescued, born again. Those words may sound backward and uneducated, to you, even primitive, but they are the words of eternal life.
- The **religious almost always reject that**, because they like to see themselves as respectable.
- Jesus said in **Matthew 5** that only the poor in spirit would receive his message.
 - You see, there's the **poor in spirit and middle-class in spirit**. The middle-class says *I've got some credit in the spiritual bank. "I've made some bad things but I'm not a terrible person. I was just misunderstood and in a bad situation..."*
 - The poor says, **"Yeah, maybe I've done some good things, but even my good things were done for bad motives.** In my kindness was mixed in self-righteousness or self-seeking. Oh, wretched man that I am. Every part of me is stained by sin.
 - So, the **poor in spirit see Jesus's invitation** for what it is—something they are desperate without—so when they hear it they treat it with the utmost importance—and cling to it with all their might.

George Whitefield, whose preaching spawned the Great Awakening in the United States, preached basically one message with two points. First, he said, we must repent of our sins. That made sense, of course. If we're going to know God, we have to stop our defiant sinning. But second, he said, we must repent of our *righteousness*. **Which caught everyone off guard.** Strengths, he said, are even more dangerous than sins, because our righteousness deludes us with false confidence, thinking that we are sufficient to please God.²

So, some people miss the invitation because they refuse to acknowledge that they are unworthy.

So, now, we're ready to understand why Jesus started this parable with that seemingly random advice about the importance of taking the low place...

- **Only if you are willing to take the lower place** (that is, admitting you are the poor, lame, blind and crippled), will he call you up to the high place at his party.
- But **if you think you deserve the high place**, you'll be humiliated and sent back to the low place.

The **gospel is not that Jesus rewards the righteous** with the best places around the table; the gospel is that **Jesus, the only one who deserved the high place**, voluntarily took the low place for us, and offered us his position at the table as a gift. He traded places with us.

- And that's **the only way the gospel can be received**. It has to be received **in humility... admitting you have nothing about you that deserves it...** so rich, powerful, healthy successful people usually miss it!
- This **parable about taking the low place is not just good social advice**; it's the way of eternal life.

² This is my paraphrase... the (a) and (b) are mine but I think represent what Whitefield was trying to say. One person **saved through Whitefield's preaching, a working-class man named Nathan Cole**, recounted it this way:

"As I heard him preach, it gave me a heart wound. By God's blessing my old foundation was broken up, and I saw that my righteousness would not save me."
Nathan Cole's account of Whitefield's visit to Connecticut on October 23, 1740

MUSIC

But if you are ready to do that, the invitation is extended to you!

One of my favorite hymns was written by a **young woman named Charlotte Elliott**. She was an invalid, and had grown very bitter. She struggled with a **sense of shame** that came from both her own disabilities as well as the depravity of her sinful heart.

In her early 20's she became a Christian, and decided to write a poem that was later put to music. Her **brother who was a Presbyterian minister** said, *"My sister did more good in spreading the Gospel through that poem than all of my sermons combined."* The **poem goes like this**.

*Just as I am without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee,
Oh Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
sight, riches, healing of the mind,
yea, all I need in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

*Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

That means you can come, whoever or wherever you are. **But to come**, it will cost you everything: [26] **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and**

brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. [27] Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

But isn't it worth it?

- What could **possibly equal the importance** of knowing Christ?
- What could possibly **justify ignoring** him?
- **Jesus: What does it profit a man..?**
 - What is there that is keeping you from Christ that **5 minutes into eternity** you will be glad you held on to? **Don't you think** you'll look on whatever kept you from Christ and say, 'How foolish, how stupid!'
 - **Anything that keeps you from Jesus** is a curse to you.

I told you I'd give you 2 invitations for you today:

Salvation: To receive his invitation to save you and to follow him. Stop making excuses. Today's excuses will be tomorrow's regrets.

- **I've still got questions:** Great. Get them answered. Start that conversation *today*.
- **"The church has too many hypocrites."**
 - You know that has NOTHING to do with it. The medical profession has a lot of quacks. Do you ignore all medicine?
 - **And**, you know what, you've probably had your own moments of hypocrisy, too. You should be glad Jesus loves and accepts hypocrites, because it means there is hope for you.
 - As a friend of mine says, **"The church is a house full of misfits and a kingdom full of miracles."**³ We can make room for you.
- You say, **"Yeah, I'll do it when I get older."** Yeah, go **check on your oxen**. But the invitation may be closed when you get back—you might die; or God might allow your heart to harden so you are not even interested anymore. That's what happens to many.

³ Clayton King, "Come to the Table"

My other invitation, I told you, is to be baptized.

- Baptism is like the **wedding ring**.
- *Some of you for years have made a bunch of excuses as to why you won't do this:*
- **You say, "I'm not ready."** If you have trusted Christ, you are ready. Baptism is only the public profession of the inward reality... Baptism says to everyone watching, "I know that I'm a sinner and that I need Jesus. I'm ready to publicly proclaim that He is my Savior." *If you say you've accepted Him but you're not ready to go public with that, then I have to wonder how serious you are about Him.* You just met God! You need to show it.
- **People say, "It's not that important..."** uh, excuse me? Who are you to say God's first command to you is not that important? If you won't obey God in this one small step, why do you think you'll obey God in the other areas of your life? That's a terrible way to start your Christian life. *That's like telling your wife on your wedding night you're going to go out with some old single friends to a club.* Not the way to start your marriage. The way to start your walk with Jesus is not by postponing what he's clearly told you to do.
- **You say, "I was baptized as a baby."** No offense, baptism as a baby was not a profession of your faith, but a profession of your parents' faith. And praise God for that. But you need to profess your own faith, which is why baptism is always presented in the Bible as decision you make. Your parents baptized you as a baby. Now it is time to ratify their decision and declare your own faith in Jesus!
- You say, **"Well, it's really inconvenient."** Look, if you're saying that—please hear me in love—I don't think you get Christianity at all. Jesus said that to follow him was to take up a cross and die. *Inconvenience isn't a category you can bring to this decision.*
- **You say, "But I don't have a change of clothes!"** A-ha. We have them for you... all sizes. Dark colored T-shirts and towels and hairdryers and personal stylists to get your hair back to the exact form you put it in this morning. (Kidding about that last part... but

we have the clothes and towels and hairdryers.) We thought of everything.

- **"But I came with people... they're going to want to go eat after this."** Again, I have to ask you about the importance of this. *They'll wait. I promise. They will. If they don't see the importance, send them to talk to me, because they probably need to repent and be baptized, too.*

Here's what's going to happen: I'm going to pray... and then you'll come.

Bow heads... By show of hands.

- How many of you today need to receive Christ? **(Give prayer)**
- How many of you have **not been baptized** since you received Christ, and you are ready to do it today? (If you raised your hand on the 1st question it should be up for the 2nd)

OUR TEAMS ARE GETTING INTO PLACE

Prayer: *"God, help these to be bold in this 1st step of obedience." Give them courage to take this step which will mark the beginning of a brand-new life for them..."*

STAND AND STEP

