

RISE

MIDDLE SCHOOL SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Session 4

Series: Parables - Part 1

Session Topic: Parable of the Great Banquet

Bottom Line: Jesus invites us to be a part of his kingdom.

Parable of the Great Banquet

- Today we begin a new series called “Parables.” This series is all about the parables of Jesus.
- When Jesus taught, He often taught in stories that had an underlying meaning and truth to them. These stories were called parables. The word “parable” in Greek means to “cast beside.” It’s a comparison of two things for the purpose of teaching.
- When Jesus spoke in this way, it was difficult to see where He was going with the story until the end when He explained its meaning and its purpose for its listeners.
- Jesus told these parables to religious officials to explain what God's will was for them. They sometimes interpreted God's Word incorrectly and did not live a godly life.
- Jesus also told these stories to crowds of people who needed a reminder of how to be humble and faithful and how to care for others. He told parables to His disciples to train them for ministry as well.
- What's amazing about these stories is that they are unique, require a bit of thinking, and display an important truth that applies to everyone – **even to us today!**

- During this series, we are going to step into these stories knowing that there is something we can learn from each one and can apply directly to our own lives.
- Okay... let's jump right into the parable. Have you ever been invited to a party and then didn't show up? Or maybe you were hosting a party and some people you hoped would be there were not able to come? That's a tough feeling.
- We are going to be starting with a parable about a party that... well... didn't go quite as planned. At first. So let's take a look. Jesus is at a dinner party with some church leaders and Pharisees, and He tells this story to them. It's called the **Parable of the Great Banquet**.

Read **Luke 14:16-24**.

- In this parable, we see a party meant for special friends became a party open to all. The banquet was originally made for a party of special coworkers and friends... and all of them canceled!
- It ended up being for people who were not close friends... and for people who were considered *less* than special. It went from people that the man knew to those he didn't. It went from high status to low status. From the popular to the unpopular.
- And when we take a look at this banquet story and see who Jesus is talking to – religious officials of prestige and great pride – we see that Jesus is going after an idea that they needed to understand and one that they were clearly missing by focusing on themselves and their own rules and codes of conduct.
- The religious leaders would not have hosted a party and invited just anyone. In fact, they kept religion in general a pretty exclusive

club. No one outside of the Jews was really permitted in, and certainly not if they were too sinful.

- But Jesus wanted them to understand a different way of thinking about things. Jesus wanted them to understand that **God's kingdom is like this banquet**. God's kingdom is *not only* available to people like the religious leaders Jesus was talking to *but also* to people who are lowly, poor, and in need.
- That's not necessarily what the religious officials would have been expecting when they thought about what God's people and kingdom would look like. This parable shows that God loves *everyone*, no matter their circumstances or background.
- In Jesus' ministry, He healed the crippled, the sick, and the lame. He did miracles, cast out demons, and helped those in need. He showed the poor and the outcast that God SEES them and He wants to know them more personally.
- And yes, Jesus also hung out with the Pharisees and the guys He is directing this parable toward. However, He used this story to remind them that everyone is welcome into God's Kingdom, not just fancy religious leaders and their fancy friends.
- When the man realizes that no one from his VIP list is coming, what does he do next? He invites *everyone* else... literally *everyone*. And that's what Jesus does. He opens the invitation to His Kingdom to more than just the Jews. He opens it to the Gentiles... to the lowly... the outcast... and the sinner.
- God's kingdom is open to all who want to take part in it. And unfortunately, those that are too focused on themselves will not see it. They will miss that big party. Here's the point of this parable: **Jesus invites us all to be a part of God's Kingdom.**

- God invites us to the best party ever... will you accept the invitation and bring others with you too? Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we are invited to be a part of God's kingdom, no matter what kind of status we have. And by knowing, believing, and trusting in Jesus, we get to enter into God's kingdom as one of His own children.
- We've been talking a lot about God's Kingdom... but what actually is God's Kingdom? Watch this video that explains what God's Kingdom means.

Watch "God's Story: Kingdom": www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Nv3sCEw9Rw

Reflect and Discuss: What did you learn from the video? Did anything stick out to you?

- So God's Kingdom isn't only in heaven... we can live in it here on earth! Right now!

Reflect and Discuss: When do we experience God's Kingdom here on earth?

- We get a glimpse of the glory of God's Kingdom and live in His Kingdom when we love and live like Jesus. We will see God's Kingdom in all its glory in heaven someday, but we can expand His Kingdom on earth by following Jesus and shining His light.

Reflect and Discuss:

1. How can you expand God's Kingdom at school?
 2. How can you expand God's Kingdom at home?
- We don't want to act like the religious officials Jesus was talking to or like the man's friends from the parable who were so focused on themselves and their status, their wealth, and their "I'm too busy

for that” mentality. Instead, let's act like the man in the parable who invites *everyone* to take part in his banquet. Jesus wants us to be a part of His Kingdom and asks us to invite others too!

Read the "Who is my Neighbor" section about this passage on page 1,370 in the CYB (Catholic Youth Bible) and spend time reflecting on the questions in that section.

Reflect and Discuss:

1. What are the main lessons in this parable?

Session Challenges

Think of one person you would love to "send an invitation to" – an invitation to be a part of God’s Kingdom (don't worry... you aren't sending a literal invitation). A great way to invite them into God's Kingdom is by inviting them to Disciple Formation! Our challenge for the week is to bring a friend to youth group next session, which is **December 3rd!** (You can also bring them to our December 11th session!)

Theme verse: **Colossians 1:13-14:** "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Read through the "**How to Memorize Scripture**" handout. We'd encourage you to use some of these techniques when memorizing this week's theme verse.

End in prayer.