

The Israel of God - Part 3

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a desire for God, God's things, and God's people in order to inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Duration: 48:45

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 22:14, Luke 14:15-24, Luke 15, Romans 11:25, Colossians 1:16, Revelation 3:17-18

Topics: "Israel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the story of the great supper and the great invitation from the Gospel of Luke. He emphasizes that this story is not unrelated to the topic being discussed in the conference. The speaker explains that there are two interpretations of this story: a dispensational interpretation and a wider interpretation in relation to the kingdom of God. He highlights the importance of having a consciousness of God and hungering for His things, as this will lead us to go a long way in our spiritual journey. The speaker also emphasizes that God has made a great provision for us and invites us to come, as all things are now ready.

Transcript

I'm bringing you back to that part of God's Word which has been read to us this evening. Fourteenth Chapter, The Gospel by Luke. What is called story of the great supper and the great invitation.

It might be thought by those who have been here in this conference that that story has very little relationship to what we have been considering. But I want to correct that idea immediately and say that it is an integral part of this very matter of the kind of people that God has set his heart upon to be the fruit of Christ's travel. It's here.

There are two applications of this story. There is what we may call the dispensational interpretation and there is the wider interpretation and application in relation to the kingdom of God. The dispensational interpretation finds this story closely related to what was happening at the time the Lord Jesus spoke these words.

It was in the time of the great transition from Israel to the church, from the Jews to Christianity. This set of utterances by the Lord Jesus in these chapters including the so well known fifteenth chapter of Luke containing the parables of lost things, the lost coin, the lost sheep and the prodigal son. These utterances were all of a piece and probably gathered into the last week of our Lord's ministry.

You go back to the gospel by Nephew. You know how truly that was when you take it up say chapter 21 and move right on. These are undoubtedly the closing days.

What is being said here has to do with his going and the great crisis which was immediately in view, the crisis of his cross. In chapter 21 he has made that statement to the Jews, to Israel as a nation after the flesh, therefore shall the kingdom of heaven be taken away from you and be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And then straight into chapter 22 and a story very similar to this one about a king who made a marriage supper for his son.

Same kind of invitations went out. Now this in Luke is just all of a piece with that. It circles round the great crisis.

Israel is about to be set aside, rejected. The kingdom of heaven is about to be taken away from them and to be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. The nation to which Peter later referred when he spoke of believers in Christ as a holy nation.

Not another nation on this earth but God's own people out of the nations of this world but people for his name. So you see this story in its historic setting relates to that great crisis and that great transition, that change over, the rejection of one people and the putting in their place of another. You have to read the story in the light of that.

For here we have the death knell of Israel after the flesh. Well that's so much for the Christians and for the Bible students, for those who know something about it. And as I said it is in keeping with what we are considering in this conference in the main, a people secured by God through the travail of his hands on the cross, a kind of people.

I think that is the outstanding thing in this story and these stories, the kind of people that will inherit the kingdom of heaven. But as I have said it is a much larger application and interpretation for it applies to the whole meaning of the kingdom of God and who will enter that kingdom. And that is a matter of supreme, of superlative importance.

Who will be in the kingdom of heaven? Here we have the gospel of the kingdom, no doubt about it. There are certain very clearly defined features to this story of the great supper and the great invitation. Firstly, we find here God in the person and as by the mouth of his son Jesus Christ.

For what he said was what came from God, it was God speaking. God in relation to the gospel of the kingdom, taking up a common social custom, bringing it into you, a feast. Of course Jesus was at the time when he gave this story at a feast.

You notice, you look at the earlier part of the chapter, he went to a feast that was made by a prominent Pharisee, evidently a wealthy man, in good position. He charged certain very important people in their own eyes, at any rate, came in and took the top places and Jesus noted all about them. Something to say about it.

But the point is, it was a feast and Jesus went to it and it says they watched him. They watched him. Now there is a lot of detail we leave untouched.

The point is, Jesus took hold of this and enlarged it in relation to the kingdom of God. What that is, he took up this common social custom of a feast and used it for gospel purposes. To interpret the gospel, to

interpret the kingdom of heaven, to interpret the whole matter of who would not get in and who would get in.

It's a feast. Now there are certain things you see here about this feast which, although not exactly stated, are quite evidently included. We might note three of them.

A certain man made a feast and sent out his servant with invitation. The implication is that that man would be respected and honoured. He would not have done it if he'd known that he was in disrepute and no one would ever accept his invitation.

He was assuming that they would respect him and his invitation and be quite glad to go to his feast and to be with him in his house. Now that's quite simple. You'll see what that means as we go on.

It is the assumption that the invitation would be welcomed and that he would be in good standing with them and they would give him respect and honour and respond suitably to the invitation and go to his feast. A second thing that is assumed is that the invited people would have an appetite for a feast. It's assumed, of course, they would have an appetite for a feast.

A feast might not interest some of you people a little bit. You would turn down any invitation purely on the ground that you have no appetite for such things or there's something wrong with your digestion and you just couldn't face it all. But it is assumed here that they would have an appetite for his feast, for his provision.

Very simple. And then, of course, the third thing that is assumed is that they would be quite happy to meet other people in this house and have good intercourse and fellowship and a good time together. These are things which are parts or constituents of any feast like this.

We are glad to go and meet the host, glad to go and meet the other people and we are glad to have what is provided. You see, that's the atmosphere. These are the elements of this very thing.

Dismiss any of them and you dismiss the whole point in a feast. Feast breaks down at once. Now, Jesus is speaking and he knows.

He is not speaking casually. He has a very deep and comprehensive knowledge. Indeed, he knows God's mind.

Now notice this. Now notice this. God foreknew the refusal that would come to his invitation.

The foreknowledge of God, his omniscience made him know that this would be the reaction they would not accept, they would not come. And Jesus knew that. He wouldn't have said all these things as he did.

Especially perhaps that consummate thing, therefore, is the kingdom of heaven taken away from you and given to a nation bearing to itself. He knew what the issue would be. God knew what the reaction would be.

But God did not act upon his foreknowledge in this matter. He sent out the invitation. In that is one of the great gospel principles.

God, who foreknows all about men's adverse reactions to his invitation and his great provision, does not begin from that point and say, I know they won't accept and I know it will be to their doom, therefore,

therefore, I'll never invite them. I'll doom them right away in my foreknowledge. God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world.

You see, whatever he knows about men's refusal, he leaves the door wide open. He takes always the positive line in grace, never the negative line in judgment. That is one of the great things about the gospel.

He knows, maybe here in this place tonight there's someone who will not accept his invitation, who will refuse or who will like these people make excuses. Nevertheless, God comes right out to you in infinite grace and opens the door wide and makes his appeal to you. He says, come, for all things are now ready.

See, God keeps back that foreknowledge of his while he tries in grace to make away the tremendous thing that the grace of God, holding back the judgment of God until the thing is settled by man himself. He knows the truth and yet he does not in the first instance act according to his knowledge of men's reaction. He acts in grace to give them an opportunity to respond.

But you see, there's something else involved in that. God removes all ground upon which man doomed could be laid to his charge. In the end, it will never be possible for any doomed man or woman to say, you never gave me a chance, you never gave me an opportunity.

The door was never opened to me. Way was never provided. No, God removes all that ground.

You see, in his grace and his mercy, he takes all the ground of his own self-condemnation away and puts the whole issue upon man. If anybody misses all that God has provided and calls them unto, it will be their own fault entirely. God is seeing to that.

God is seeing to that. He puts it back on us. Now, it looks on the face of things as you read a story like this.

It looks as though the man, and thou put God into the place of the man who makes the feast and sends the invitation. It looks as though he assumes that those invited would respect him, honour him, and give him credit for being worthy of their acceptance. It looks as though God assumes that.

God, he knows, he knows, nevertheless, he proceeds upon this. And in his procedure, he is appealing to man, appealing to man to give some expression to and some proof of his respect for God. And if man does not respond to God's appeal and invitation, it means man has no respect for God.

He has not given God his place. He's put him out. He's not worth considering.

You see, the implications are tremendous, aren't they? Further, it means that man has no appetite for the things of God. If only to imagine these people, when they got the invitation, oh, I don't care about this feast, I don't think I want to go and have that. I haven't much of an appetite for that.

Ah, yes, but look, that very desire or absence of desire for the things of God is a thing which means the kingdom or not the kingdom. Jesus had elsewhere said, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Something bound up with this, this appetite or the lack of it.

The same applies with matters of the people of God. Very discriminating. To refuse means not only have I no interest in God and his things, but I don't want to have any association with his people.

All this, you see, is forcing a choice. Now, it's not difficult, is it, to turn that right round to see what kind of people will inherit the kingdom. What kind of a seed this will be that he shall see as of the travel of his soul.

People in the first place, who above all other things desire God. And then desire God's things to feed upon them. And then desire God's people.

It's a remarkable thing, isn't it, how that takes place and becomes the very constitution and make-up and nature of children of the kingdom of heaven. One thing that is pre-eminent with them is their love for God, their desire for God. That he is their joy, not only their cheapest joy, but really their only joy.

It's a wonderful thing that happens in us. Something happens, something takes place, but we do come to that place where we just, just cannot live without God. If there should be an hour in our life when any shadow comes between us and God, that's the darkest hour, the most wretched time.

He has spoiled us for all but himself, made himself indispensable to us. We cannot get on without him, but not only a matter of cannot, we have no desire to. We just long to be in his presence.

Our hearts cry with the psalmist as the hearth panteth after the water-wood. So panteth my soul for thee, O God. It's like that something happens inside.

Now that's a test, whether we are children of the kingdom or not. And a test as to whether we are going to inherit the kingdom. Poor look out for anybody who had not that disposition to have to live in the presence of God for all eternity.

A very miserable thing, but it won't happen of course. And what is true in that connection is true in these other two things. Something happens to us that our company, our people, and I use the word our set, is the people of God.

We have to live with others. We have to. We have to move in this world.

But we are not happy with them. We are not happy with them. No deep, basic, fundamental oneness between them and us.

We long for two different worlds, but with the people of God it is different. We are at home. We are in the family.

Something that happens to us isn't something that we decide upon at all. We go to be Christians and mix with Christians and have meetings. It's simply this.

We long for the fellowship of God's people. And if we are deprived of it, it's depriving us of our very life. I think perhaps those who have a lot of it lose the sense of its value.

But you ask some of those Christians who have to live in isolation and apart and do not get Christian fellowship, you ask them about it. And you'll soon discover that something's happened in them. They long for this fellowship.

These are the children of the kingdom. And as for the faith, God's things, well, why are we here? It's not presumption. Do not misunderstand it.

Whether you're getting the things of God and the table spread or not, you've come for it. That's the explanation of times like these. We've come from the north and the south and the east and the west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whoever they may be.

In the kingdom of God to feed upon what the Lord will provide. A table for us, a feast. Why? Why will a large company of young men and women give up their bank holidays? Let the world go its way, come together in this way and in other directions for meetings and addresses.

Oh, that's not all that there is to it. There's something constitutional about this, isn't there? There's an appetite. These are the children of the kingdom.

And God is working on that principle to discriminate and to select and to give the kingdom. Now, we must go back to the story to the other disappointing aspect. God, in his grace, putting back his foreknowledge of the doom which he knows will most certainly come upon many who will react unfavorably.

Putting that back and saying nothing about it for the moment. Going out in grace, inviting, inviting, inviting in spite of his knowledge of them. It comes out, doesn't it? It comes out.

Who will respond? So, we can see here what is really shown to be the case with many. They are totally indifferent to all these things, to him, to his feast and to his people. Totally indifferent.

They're not touched by it. Makes no appeal to them. In no sense that they are either under obligation or likely to lose something of vital importance.

And that is their judgment. That is their condemnation. That is their doom.

Now, taking this setting as to Israel, the Jewish nation. You remember how the Lord Jesus put this to them another way. Weeping over Jerusalem.

Said, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. Thou killest the prophets. Thou onlyest those which are sent unto you.

How oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her brood under her wing. That you would not. Henceforth, your house is left unto you deathly.

Because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. Now note two things. Thou wouldest not.

Thou knewest not. But that was something in themselves. It wasn't that they could not.

It was that they would not. It was not that they could not know. It was because they would not know.

They would not know. They didn't want to know. They just didn't want to know.

And they had decided that they were not going to know. Now God knows the heart. He knows the heart.

And it is not just that we are like that. Somewhere, somehow, we, we have taken an attitude. We have taken the attitude, I'm not interested in that.

I'm not for that. That's not for me. I'm not going that way.

Thou wouldest not. Thou knewest not. When you might have known.

That is the ground, always, of judgment. When I look at these people, whether they were actual people, it was a real story from life, or what is called a parable, doesn't matter. Nor Jesus knew what he was saying.

They're not only indifferent, but they will, when it comes to it, and this is where you'll find out, you know, when it really comes to it, and someone says, look here, the Lord wants you, the Lord calls you, the Lord has sent his word to invite you to come, then it's found out. Then the real thing is disclosed. And they all, with one consent, began to make excuses.

Excuses. I don't know how far the Lord Jesus had a sense of irony or of humor. One said, I have bought a piece of land and I must go and see it.

Now, may I be quite blunt here, that's a thing that not one of you would do if you did, you would be a fool. Who would buy a piece of land without first of all having seen it? That's very lame. Oh no, that won't pass.

That's not good enough. But you see, when we really run to earth, it's found out that there is not any solid basis. We are just.

We are just evading. We're trying to get around. We're looking for a backdoor way out.

It's an excuse, it's not a reason. That's very lame. Oh no, that won't pass.

That's not good enough. But you see, when we really run to earth, it's found out that there is not any solid basis. We are just.

We are just evading. We're trying to get around. We're looking for a backdoor way out.

It's an excuse, it's not a reason. A man said, I have bought a yoke of oxen and I must go and prove them. Well, there are some farmers here.

Is that your way of going about business? Buying them before you've seen them? See how empty it is? I don't know about the third man, Paul. Married a wife, therefore he couldn't come. But the Lord Jesus said it's an excuse all the same.

How is it an excuse? Something in the realm of natural affections. Natural affections being accounted of greater value than the kingdom of God. And that's a poor excuse.

At best, it's excused. The point is that when it really does come to it, there's no really solid ground for this kind of reaction. It's a don't want.

It's a failure to recognize the infinite seriousness and value of this kingdom of God. This gospel of the grace of God. It discloses a state of heart and mind and will which in itself is the ground of rejection.

Therefore, therefore shall the kingdom be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof. And what are the fruits? Hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Thirsting for the living God.

A sense of real business and not just for verifications and excuses. These are the conditions of inheriting the kingdom. And of course, they are capable of very far-reaching, wide-expanding application.

They touch so many things, don't they? They're principles, you see. It isn't just the connection. It's the thing itself.

The attitude of God. Well, says the Lord, none of those shall come to my feet. None of those shall inherit the kingdom.

None of those shall enter the kingdom. Out, he says to his servant, out, in the streets and the lanes of the city he calls the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame. And the servant does it.

He comes back and says, it's done, it's done. He's got them until yet there is room. Out again into the highway.

The maimed, the hedged, compelled to come in, the poor, the maimed, the blind, the lame, the vagabonds, the wayfarers. Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, publicans and harlots, enter into the kingdom before you. All on this principle.

Who will inherit the kingdom? And not only initially to get into it, who will come into all the fullness that the Lord has provided and what a vast fullness it is. We could dwell upon this feast and what there is in it. Paul speaks so much about it himself, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.

Oh, what a lot there is in this. This inheritance, this kingdom. Who? Those who know their own poverty.

Now you see, these other people didn't know that. They were independent, felt they didn't need this at all. They could get on quite well without it.

Know sense of their own poverty. Pride, not poverty. The maimed, those who had suffered in life, who life had treated cruelly, who on the way had met with hurt, damaged, whose lives were marred and marred.

The blind, the blind, who longed to see, to whom a whole world was shut out, only if only their eyes could see. The lame, poor people found it very difficult and very hard going, limited in their capacity in knowing it. And what do we say about the vagabonds and the wayfarers of the highways and the hedges? You see, they're all people who had a consciousness of need in some way or another.

Consciousness of need. And that is the great contrasting factor here. You go a long way if that is your consciousness.

You go a long way in the things of God. If it's really, really heart hunger, if it's really a heart set upon the Lord, his things and his church, you'll go a long way. Now this is a challenge, a solemn challenge to us all, Christians and those who are not the Lord, a challenge to us.

He calls. He's made a great provision. He's dealing with us in infinite grace and not in judgment.

Placed everything open to us and said, For all things are now ready. Oh, you Christians know that little phrase, don't you? All things. Go to Paul's letters again and collect up all the occurrences of that phrase alone.

All things. All things. All things in Christ.

That's the great theme, isn't it? And what a vast all things that comes to be when we look into it. All things. Come for all things are now ready.

Challenge to those who haven't come at all. But it's a challenge to us who have come. There's a range and a depth for those all things that you and I have never yet fathomed.

It all is so much a matter of where our heart is, whether we really do mean business or whether we can be put off, be like these people, make excuses, challenge. And it's a test of capacity for appreciating things of God. May I say the last word? Blessed be God when you get there, you'll no longer be poor and lame and blind and lame and vagabond.

It's a wonderful healing that goes on as soon as you get into the kingdom. All these things clear up. Now you see, Jesus had taught the kingdom of God in action.

He was teaching the kingdom of God in action as much as in words. His life and his work was a demonstration of the meaning of the kingdom. He healed the maimed and the lame.

He opened the eyes of the blind. He called the poor and the needy, publicans, sinners and harlots, and cleansed them, and cleansed them. He demonstrated in action the kingdom of God, and that's what happens.

We come and we come. We'll find that in that kingdom there's a tree, and the leaves of that tree are for the healing of the nations. He is the tree.

There's a healing that takes place. When we're in, thank God, humbly, we're able to say, yes, my eyes have been opened. My faltering steps have been straightened.

My wounds have been healed. My wanderings in the highways, byways, my vagabond life has been winning. That's what happens.

That's the gospel of the kingdom. You're going to make excuses to avoid all that. It isn't worth it.

It's nonsense, isn't it? It's nonsense. You have mere, empty excuses. There's nothing in it.

May God touch you to see. Men must abide. It's offered to you.

You can miss it. You can lose it. It can be put beyond your reach, and don't forget there stands in this world the greatest object lesson that ever God has given to men of this very thing.

You remember the place that the Jewish nation once had with God in blessing and prospering? Yes, in favor. What a place they had. And then God called them into the kingdom of his Son.

And they began to make excuses. They showed that they were not interested in that. Look at them.

For these two thousand years of vagabonds on the earth without a kingdom and a home. Wounded, blinded, Paul says blindness has happened to us. They're all in those conditions.

They're in rejection. In rejection of what? Of suffering. What they've lost.

They've lost the kingdom of heaven. I say the most terrible demonstration and object lesson of what it means to lose the kingdom of heaven. But mark you, that is only an illustration that is in the temporal realm.

I'm a parallelist of it being in the eternal realm. The eternal realm. One doesn't like speaking like that, it's a tremendous issue.

Well, there was one of their own number who came and responded. His great testimony afterward was I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. And that man went a long, long way.

That was none other than the apostle Paul. May the Lord incline our hearts to respond. He says, Come, for all things are now ready.

May our hearts say, I'm coming, Lord. And I'm coming now.

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