

Living Your Faith
A Marketplace Ministry
Luke 14:23

Introduction

It's no secret. The ministry of the Church is a genuine concern for others. We need to stop talking about it and start doing it. Rise and shine, friend. Everyone you meet today is on heaven's "Most Wanted" list. – Charles R. Swindoll, "Rise & Shine: A Wake-up Call"

Have you noticed that Planet Earth seems to be getting smaller? - Not in size or geographical area, but in how people around the globe relate to one another. Not long ago, it took months and even years for voyages to be made across the oceans and just as much time to receive communications about new discoveries back home. Today, a person can travel halfway around the world in one day! But one thing that has not changed and never will is our need for relationship. The desire for relationship is something God placed within the heart of every person. It's inescapable. Relationship is a basic human need. It is a need that can only be met fully by God.

In Luke 14, there is an excellent illustration of how Jesus builds relationships with his followers through discipleship. Even today, the Master of Relationship still builds relationships with his servants committed to what I call "marketplace ministry."

The Parable of the Great Banquet

Luke writes, " So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

(Luke 14:7-11 NKJV)

In verse 12, "Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

(Luke 14:12-14 NKJV)

Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Then He said to

him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one *accord* began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here *the* poor and *the* maimed and *the* lame and *the* blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'" (Luke 14:15-24 NKJV)

This is a very insightful parable. Let's examine it to see how God has committed to us the task of going into the marketplaces of life to reach out with the news that Jesus Christ can make a person's life better than they ever dreamed possible.

Have you ever felt unqualified or inadequate to share Christ with your friends or family? Are you reluctant or unsure about sharing your faith with others? All God asks of us is to tell our own story; how we met Jesus and His impact on our faith journey.

Each of us has a story to tell. It is our own personal testimony. It's our legacy of faith. No one else can tell your story like you can. It belongs to you. It's a story that needs to be told. It's a story that must be told. As you experience Jesus's profound impact on your life, you are compelled to introduce your circle of friends to Him. That is God's plan for reaching our world. It is personal, profound, and persuasive. It is personal because God chooses YOU to make Him known to others. It is profound because God only needs you to introduce others to Him. He takes it from there. It is persuasive because those around us see us as an example and examine our faith in real-time.

I. Every Person Is Important To God

Everyone is important to God and His plan for reaching the world with the Gospel's good news. "But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?" (Romans 10:14 TLB)

You can make a difference by realizing:

- Every person is important to God and His plan for reaching the world with the good news of the Gospel.
- It's not only our ability but our availability God chooses to use.
- God always expects us to be obedient.

He tells the Corinthians believers, "You are our epistle written in our hearts,

known and read by all men; clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart." (2 Corinthians 3:2-3 NKJV)

In verse 17 of the parable of the Great Banquet, when it was time for the banquet, the Master sent his servant to say to those invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' These words also have a powerful application for us today. God prepares everything needed for a person to come and feast at His table. He invites everyone. He invites anyone. He says very plainly, "Come."

Why must you come? "For everything is now ready!" God plans and prepares everything very carefully. His timing is always perfect. All the planning and preparation has been done in advance. All that is needed are the guests. When they arrive, they will find that everything is in perfect order. Our God is a God of order.

The task of the servant is to make sure the guests arrive. A simple announcement or casual invitation will not do. Even a formal written request is not sufficient. The servants are implored to be intentional in their efforts to fill the banquet hall. Once the invitation has gone out, the servant must conscientiously follow up on the guest list to ensure the guest will be at the banquet.

Just because the Master is hosting a banquet does not guarantee all the invited guests will attend. How often have you invited someone to come and meet the Master only to receive excuses? Verse 18 says, "But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'

(Luke 14:18-20 NKJV)

Are we to believe a person would buy a field before they inspect it? - Or would a person buy oxen without checking their condition? Or say Yes, I'll be there when they know they're getting married that weekend? You can't really blame the Master for being angry with those kinds of excuses.

The servants have already anticipated the Master's response and have invited others to replace those who can't attend. But there are still many available tables. So the master says to the servants, "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled."

Here is a very crucial lesson. Some think they have done enough if they just text out an invite or ask someone to come. Then they wonder why their guests don't show up. Others give a good effort right up to the moment they meet with resistance or excuses. Then they give up. Still, others are willing to go the extra mile and reach out to those burdened by life's struggles. But even then, they become frustrated with the results. However, it is the servant that, having tried

everything, is willing to go into the marketplace, the highways, and byways of life and compel people to come in and fill the banquet hall.

How often have you reached out with Christ's invitation to someone you've never even met because you sense their need? The first lesson of the parable is that every Christian disciple is important to God and His plan for reaching the world with the good news of the Gospel. When have we done enough? When the banquet hall is filled with guests!

II. Availability Is Crucial To Fulfilling God's Plan

It's not only our ability but also our availability that God wants. God will always empower us to do whatever needs to be done. In the parable of the Great Banquet, the task of the servants was to fulfill the wishes of the Master. They were the ones available and called upon to distribute the invitations. They were the ones who heard the responses from the intended guests. And they were the ones who reported their progress back to the Master. They understood the desire of the Master. They knew his goal was to fill the banquet hall with guests. And they were committed to achieving this goal. They also anticipated the steps the Master would take to ensure the goal was achieved.

They knew how important it was to the Master to have a house full of guests at the banquet. They quickly responded with new invitations when they recognized that some guests might boycott the feast. The servants went out quickly to the streets of the city and invited the poor and handicapped and blind and lame to come.

But unfortunately, there were still many empty seats. The servants now realize they need direction from the Master himself. The moment always comes when we exhaust all available avenues and need help accomplishing the goal. The servants had done what Peter says in 1 Peter 4:10-11, "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:10-11 NKJV)

But now they know they must involve the Master. It is His plan, and He must have the final word. When called upon, the Master reviews the steps that should be taken, to which the servants respond that they have already noted and implemented these procedures. The Master reminds them of the goal and says, "Go out to the highways and hedges compel people to come in, that my house may be filled."

The hour's urgency and the goal's importance now require the servants to take a very basic approach. Forget the formalities and protocols. Forget about status and social standing. The critical matter is finding enough people to say "Yes" to fill the banquet hall.

The success of the master's plan requires not only ability but availability. Sadly, many capable people just aren't available. For whatever reason, they choose not to get involved.

God wants people who want to be involved. He wants servants who will serve. He wants guests who will say "Yes" to His invitation to the feast. So, how do you know when you're involved enough? - When you're available to do what needs to be done!

III. Obedience Is Essential To Fulfilling God's Command

The final point is that the Master expects and relies on us to complete the job. If the parable illustrates God's plan of salvation, then Christ's invitation must be given to people from all walks of life. Anyone and everyone should be invited to come to faith in Christ.

Jesus told the disciples in Mathew 10 to start with the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Your first invitation should be given to those you know who are aware of God and the message of God's love. This was Jesus' approach. In Matthew 23:37-38 Jesus says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate;" (Matthew 23:37-39 NKJV)

Israel refused to accept Christ as God's Messiah. So God expanded His invitation to include the Gentiles. And the church began to flourish with Gentile converts. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Romans 1:16 NKJV)

Sadly, in these last days, some empty seats remain in the banquet hall. And the master calls out, "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled." God expects us to obey his command. Christ is counting on you!

In the Great Banquet tradition, at the close of the three-day spiritual retreat, there comes a moment when the Lay Director says these parting words to the pilgrim, "Christ is counting on you!" And the pilgrim responds back, "And I am counting on Christ!" That exchange so capably expresses the intricate balance in the relationship between servants of God and the Master.

The success of God's plan of redemption rests upon the Master's provision. He says, "Come, for everything is now ready." The penalty for sin has been paid. The invitation for Eternal Life has been issued.

Recruitment for the Feast has now been placed in our hands. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 10:14, " But how shall they ask him to save them unless they

believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?"

Obedience is essential to God's command. Paul tells the Corinthians believers, "For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men," (2 Corinthians 9:12-13 NKJV)

How will you know when your task is done? When you hear the Master say, "Well done! Thou good and faithful servant!"

Conclusion

The Master's final words are, "Go out to the highways and hedges compel people to come in, that my house may be filled." Christ expects us to go out into the "marketplace" of life and, with a sense of urgency, tell people about God's love and plan to save.

The marketplace is your sphere of influence. It can be from your family to the workplace and everywhere in between. People need more than words. They need to see Christ working in your life. They need an example to follow. People need to see how obeying Christ makes us a better person. Christ is counting on us to take the message of His everlasting life outside the four walls of the church.

We must become a church without walls. As Christians, we know what people in the marketplace of life need spiritually, even though they don't know. The more committed we become to Christ, the better our lives become.

The local church, by design, is supposed to be the place of training and equipping. Jesus never intended the church to be simply a place of entertainment. The ultimate goal of the church is to train and equip believers for ministry outside the church's walls. We come together for worship, instruction, and fellowship and then scatter throughout the community marketplaces to share Christ's message and meet people's spiritual needs – that's authentic evangelism.

The ultimate goal of Crossroads Chapel is to mentor believers to go to the places where they have influence – into the marketplace – to invite people to meet and know Jesus. We want to be a church that isn't confined to a facility or a specific location with a set of self-glorifying programs. Our goal is to reach out into the community's highways and byways and show people by example a better way to live by meeting Jesus. This facility should exist primarily as a hub of equipping, teaching, and training believers to be effective witnesses for Christ in their world – in their marketplace – in their mission field.

So, as we begin a whole new year, the question is, will you heed the call? And how will you make a difference? And who will you invite to come to meet Christ?