

**Claude Thomas' Convention Message
2002 Southern Baptist Convention
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"When the Kingdom Is on Our Heart"

Luke 14:15-24

Introduction:

Events of the past year have ushered in a new age of insecurity. We are constantly reminded of what has happened and what might happen. Uncertainty and vulnerability are sweeping across the heart of America. We know that kingdoms rise, and kingdoms fall.

"Kingdoms Rise, and Kingdoms Fall."

Business empires flourish, and business kingdoms fail. Financial kingdoms rise, and financial kingdoms fall. Religious kingdoms rise, and religious kingdoms fall. Political kingdoms rise, and political kingdoms fall.

But there is ONE...there is one kingdom...there is one kingdom that is reliable...one kingdom that is unshakable...one kingdom that is invincible...one kingdom that is eternal...there is one kingdom that will NEVER FALL! It is the kingdom of God and His Christ!

As a young man, the kingdom of God seemed like a lofty concept. While a student at SBTS, I sought to come to grips with the concept of the kingdom under the teaching of Dr. George Raymond Beasley-Murray. I grappled with the whole thing because it was so compelling to me. And I came to see the kingdom of God is the righteous rule of God that has been supremely made known through Jesus Christ, God's Son and our Sovereign Savior.

When Jesus came into the world, He came with the kingdom on His heart. Eighty-five times the Gospel writers record the phrase fell from His lips. The reason He came was to introduce the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). His preaching centered on the theme of the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15). The greatest sermon He preached called people to first seek the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). The prayer He taught as the model prayer instructed His followers to pray for the kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus came with the kingdom of God on His heart. And tonight, Southern Baptists, we want to leave this place with the kingdom on our hearts! But what does it look like to have the kingdom on our hearts?

Jesus shows us in a parable found in Luke 14. I begin reading with verse 15...

15 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!" 16 Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, 17 and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' 18 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.' 19 And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' 20 Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' 21 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.' 22 And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you

commanded, and still there is room.' 23 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. 24 For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper' " (NKJV).

From the very words of Jesus, it's clear that people with the kingdom on their hearts...

I. Extend an invitation...from the Master's heart.

All of us know what it is like to either send or receive an invitation. It may be an invitation to a birthday party, a wedding, a baby shower, or a special dinner. Invitations are usually associated with a celebration. It was no different in Jesus' day.

Jesus focused on the invitation. He did personally. C. McCartney said one of Jesus' favorite words was "Come!"

As Jesus taught at the table, He gave emphasis to those "invited" and the one doing the "inviting." In chapter 14:7-14, Jesus used the word "invite" seven times. Then, of course, a prominent feature of the parable Jesus told was the *invitation*.

We don't know what the occasion was in Jesus' parable, but we do know what the motivation was: the Master invited people to join Him in a grand *celebration*. After all, the Scripture reads, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many to come." The people were invited to a *celebration*. It's a great feast.

But notice this: each time the invitation was extended, it was the servant who extended the invitation from the MASTER.

We need to understand, friends, that WE are the servants of the King. And we are not inviting people to a funeral, but to a feast.

Now let's set this invitation to the table of our Lord against the backdrop of the new age of insecurity that has swept across our nation...and the heightened anxiety across our world. People are wondering about life and they are wandering in life. And here is a fact: what people need and want most in life they find ONLY at the table of the Lord.

Unfortunately, most people don't know this truth! So, we are privileged to tell them about the heavenly menu. Be clear. Let them know at the table of the Lord, we find: **Love... forgiveness...peace...joy...security...contentment...hope.** *These are what people want most! And these are served at the table of the Lord.*

And we who've been to the table know it is there! And the feast we've enjoyed, we invite others to share!

Illustration: Madelyn Calvert and Rachel.

M. "Are you saved?"

R. "Yes. Most people get saved when they pray."

M. "No. This is how you get saved. You invite Jesus into your heart."

R. "I haven't done that yet."

M. "I led her to invite Jesus into her heart. And she did it all by herself, and she was saved."

People with the kingdom on their hearts are inviting people, all people, to the table of the Lord!

People with the kingdom of God on their hearts extend an invitation, and they...

II. Share a passion...of the Master's heart.

"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' (v. 23).

The master in the parable was passionate about "filling his house." It is obvious from the repeated invitations. First, he invited the wealthy of the city. Those represent the Jewish people

and their leaders. But when everything was ready, they began with one accord to reject the master's invitation (vv.18-19).

But their rejection didn't stop the master. He was passionate. He told his servant to, "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" (v.21). They were the outcasts of Israel, the publicans and sinners.

The servant did what he was told. Yet, the house wasn't full. There was still room. So, the master, passionate about filling the house, sent his servant to those living along the edges of the highways to "compel" them to come. Of course, these were the Gentiles.

The words describing the invitations reveal the increasing intensity of the Master's passion. First, the servant was to "call" them to come to the feast. To the second group, he was instructed to "lead" them to the feast. And to the third group, he was instructed to "compel" or passionately persuade them to come to the feast. The master was passionate, and the servant was to share in that passion!

People with the kingdom of God on their hearts are passionate about getting others to the table of their King!

I read about a passionate man in the current issue of *Commission* magazine, the magazine published by the International Mission Board of the SBC. This issue features articles about the flourishing Christian faith in China.

There, Christianity is growing rapidly through the house church movement...where believers in Jesus meet in homes for worship, prayer, Bible study, and encouragement. When they send someone out to evangelize a new area, the people of the house church give themselves to prayer.

One elderly man, we will call him Luke, went as an evangelist to a village where no one followed Jesus. When he knocked on one door, the people angrily drove him out of the village.

Luke prayed and returned to the same house. This time they threw water on him and threatened him if he persisted.

Luke prayed again for that family. He believed it wasn't God's will that any should perish...including that family. He returned a third time. This time he was beaten, cursed, and driven from the village.

Bloody, beaten, and bruised, Luke took seven days to recover. What was he to do? He returned to the same house! This time the owner of the house did not oppose him. Amazed that the old man would return another time, the father of the family agreed they should listen to Luke. Luke told them of the good news in Jesus and invited them to receive Jesus. The entire extended family then received Jesus Christ!

Luke was passionate! And that family was saved!

Luke did not go to the door over and over again because someone placed a card in his hand and said, "Go check on this person." He went to that door over and over again because the Lord placed a passion in his heart. He had a passion to invite that family to the Lord's table.

One person with a passion will accomplish more than a hundred with an interest!

I want to be counted among the passionate, don't you?! We will if we...

Look around us!

Shirley Ozuma visited our church about a year ago now. A visitation team went to see her on Tuesday evening, but she wasn't home. The next morning she took her life!

Let's look around and see people as Jesus saw them...like sheep without a shepherd wondering and wandering...needing someone to lead them to the table of the Lord! That look stirs passion within us!

Look within us!

Perhaps we will pain under the scanning of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. But the look within will cause us to cast away unworthy passions! It will challenge us to lay aside personal agendas and personal ambitions and embrace kingdom agendas! Then the fire will fall on our lives!

Look above us!

On our knees we talk to God about our passion. "Lord I have some smoldering embers, but I desire to be a flaming fire. Will You send the fresh winds of Your Spirit across my heart and make me blaze with a passion for Your rule in my life and the lives of those around us? Please, Lord Jesus, do it, I pray."

From our knees, we will rise with a resolve in our hearts! We will be committed to passionately persuade others to come to the table of our Lord!

Conclusion:

In 1940 Sir Winston Churchill visited and spoke at Harrow School. It was a dark day for England. He returned nearly a year later and delivered what has become known as the "NEVER GIVE IN, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER" speech.

October 29, 1941...Harrow School. Churchill was passionately persuasive when he said:

"You cannot tell from appearances how things will go.... But for everyone, surely, what we have gone through in this period - I am addressing myself to the School - surely from this period of ten months this is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never - in nothing, great or small, large or petty - never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."

Circumstances or discouragements or adversities will not deter or defeat us! We have the kingdom on our hearts! Whether culture is with us or against us, we will never give in or give up. We have the kingdom on our hearts! Whether we are in a place where the people are responsive or the most difficult place on earth, a declining population center or an exploding one, we will invite people to Christ. We are committed to extending the gospel invitation to every person on this planet!

In our neighborhoods and in our cities; in our states and in our nation; on our continent and on every continent in the earth, we invite people to the table of our King! With a passionate determination, we extend the invitation until everyone has been invited, and the house of our God is filled! This is kingdom business! And I want you to know that by God's grace, I am committed to it! And by God's grace, my church is committed to it! And by God's grace, we as Southern Baptists must be committed to it! Let's go from here with the kingdom on our hearts!

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