

# Who is coming to God's Party

**Transition to Sarah** - "ok, we are already having so much fun. Sarah is going to share about even more fun and talk about a special birthday party.

**Once upon a time, I turned 18 years old. And I decided to throw a big birthday party.**

It was a grown up party, a classy party on my parents' neatly manicured patio

Invited people from my class at school, and they said they would come

I ordered all the food and drinks and got everything ready.

I got all dressed up.

**But the day of the party, people started dropping out.**

They had excuses. There were other parties they were going to, family obligations.

My super long guest list dwindled to just a few.

**Has this ever happened to you?**

Maybe some of you can relate to being the outsider.

Maybe you throw a party and no one comes

Or maybe someone else throws a party and you just don't get an invitation.

Maybe this has become part of your identity, that you are not welcome, that you're on the outside.

That you're not important, or you're not well-connected or maybe even that you don't matter.

And maybe you feel like you are constantly trying to overcome this internal narrative, this reputation you feel you have.

**Our world is status-obsessed.**

And it seems like It's the cool people who get things done, who get amazing opportunities, who have all the friends and have all the stuff we all want.

We all feel like we need to be the people with power, or close to the people with power.

We are all trying to accumulate accomplishments, possessions, connections and reputations so we can prove we have a right to be here, to verify our legitimacy,

get more stuff.

**But when we run into Jesus out in the world, we are in for a surprise.**

**Because the kingdom of heaven is an upside down kingdom.**

It turns out, Jesus relates to the outsider.

So much so, that the Proverbs tells us that those who give to the poor, lend to the Lord.

In the kingdom of heaven, being really accomplished and well to do is actually a barrier to accessing God.

And not only that, having people ditch your party was something Jesus could relate to.

**The fixation on wealth and power as a way to prove our worth is nothing new.**

Jesus' world was all about status too.

Everyone around Jesus was always vying for proximity to power, wealth, influence, even within the contexts of religious leadership.

They thought he was just like them, but time after time, he would surprise by disrupting their values and offending their expectations.

**In Luke 14, we hear the story of when Jesus got an invitation to dinner with a person with a lot of status.**

In the Jewish culture, the people with the most influence were actually religious leaders.

His dinner host was a leader of the Pharisees, one of the main religious groups. Undoubtedly he could tell Jesus was popular with people, and his move to invite Jesus to a dinner party was either to try to bust him and diminish Jesus' power Or he was trying to get close to Jesus and get the benefits of being seen with him.

**Either way, Jesus was about to ruin the party by calling everyone out.**

In true Jesus fashion, he \*out loud\* made two offensive observations about the people in attendance.

So in case this is you, Jesus also relates to the people who say awkward things and kill the party vibe.

**First, he made an observation about the guests. We see this in Luke 14: 7**

**SLIDE:**

"When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable:

**8**“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited.

**9**If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

**10**But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests.

**11**For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

**Then he made an observation about his host.**

**SLIDE:**

**12**Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors;  
**if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.**

**13**But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,

**14**and you will be blessed.

**Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”**

**Thinking he was totally getting Jesus’ vibe**, one guest says to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

**Jesus knew he didn’t quite get it so he told them a story.**

**SLIDE:**

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- 16** Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.  
**17** At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’  
**18** “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’  
**19** “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’  
**20** “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

**SLIDE:**

- 21** “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’  
**22** “ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’  
**23** “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’  
**24** I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’ ”

**Jesus was cleverly telling two stories here.**

**The first one was a call out of the Hebrew people** who had been invited into the kingdom of God and told about a savior.

They had set up their tabernacle, attended synagogue and learned from an early age about the Messiah who was going to come for them.

The Messiah was going to throw an overthrow the government party. That's what they were looking for.

So when Jesus showed up and started inviting people into the true kingdom of God, the upside down kingdom, they weren't ready.

They turned down the invitation and made excuses.

And because of this, Jesus, his disciples and eventually the movement of Christ followers would move far beyond Jerusalem in a massive effort to include the entire world.

All the people who had not originally been invited - they were invited to the party the original guests turned down.

**But the second story Jesus was simultaneously telling was a story about who matters in the kingdom of God.**

A story about who is getting an invitation to the feast and who will actually show up.

It is a story about a generous man who has so much room and so much food, he wants to fill his house with joy and food and laughter.

He plans a party, invites his guests, they commit to come, but when the date of the party shows up, they ghost.

This generous host is not about to waste his party venue and his food.

So he says, let's pack this place out.

Let's invite the people who would normally not get an invitation.

Let's include the people who are usually overlooked.

**And here's the crazy thing: he doesn't first background check the guest list.**

He doesn't ask if they are going to be on drugs or if they are caught up on their rent.

He's not staffing the back door of the party to make sure people don't take more than their share and sell it.

He is sending an open invitation.

Anyone is invited?

Wait, anyone? Not anyone, right Jesus?

No, anyone.

What does this mean for us as Jesus followers,

Or those of us who are curious about Jesus but not ready to follow him?

**TRANSITION**

**What does this tell us about who Jesus was? Who God is?**

Elisha is going to talk about how we can know what God is like and even how he feels about us.

Teacher to Kids: ***Have you ever felt like you just didn't fit in?*** I have a story to share that is about a time where I felt like I didn't belong and then someone did something to include me.

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When I was young, there was an amusement park in Wichita Ks called Joyland. It's pretty infamous now, because it's been closed for some time and is a just such a creepy ghost park. You should look it up.

Anyway as a kid, i went there often because there were lots of school functions held here.

Joy Land in Wichita KS circa 2001. Standing in line for the log ride, which is actually pictured here.

## **SLIDE**

 43auxdSeL6BYNBRHc6wdFeOcqPnE... ^ 357 kB

I overheard a school mate say “uh, why are you here?” insinuating that I was not at all welcome to get into the ride with that group of kids. Instantly shame hits me and my face flushes. “I’m unwanted, I don’t belong,” flashes in my brain. At the same moment an older girl who is a year or so ahead of me throws her arm around me. She says, “oh, she’s with me,” with style and confidence. Everyone else turns around without another word. I stand there with her for a bit as she smiles at me, and she invites me to sit with her on the ride. I remember feeling truly surprised, and honestly a little confused. But i was oh so relieved. I think i stuck by her side the rest of the evening because of that. In this story, I had an advocate, an invitation to the table, I belonged.

But I couldn't have done all that by myself in this scene. It took someone from the inside of this situation reaching out to me, to draw me in. She built a bigger table, she invited me, and she advocated for my belonging. Initially that didn't take much effort on her

part here. But she did have to be present and aware of her surroundings. Had she been distracted or absorbed in something else, she would not have jumped in. That's a significant piece to being someone who builds tables. They are aware and willing to engage.

That is what God is constantly inviting us to the table for his purpose, and he is always rewriting our story for belonging.

This is a huge point on God's heart.

***The verse in Zephaniah 3, shares a part of God's heart for us. Adults and children. The people who are in and those who always feel like they are out.***

## **SLIDE**

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord your God is with you,  
the Mighty Warrior who saves.  
He will take great delight in you;  
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,  
but will rejoice over you with singing."

## **What are some of God's attributes here?**

God is with you  
A Mighty Warrior who Saves  
Great delight in you  
Rejoice over you with singing

Is there a qualifier here anywhere? Do you have to do anything special for him to see you this way? I do not see that here.

I see a promise of who he is.

***I want us to take a 15 second pause to reflect on this verse.***

***If you're online, please do this with us.***

## **SLIDE**

If you close your eyes and imagine the God that's depicted here in Zephaniah, what does his face look like when he sees you? How are you feeling as you look at him? What does he whisper to you?

--Let's pause here for 15 seconds to do this.

- Kids, I need you to answer this question: how do you know someone loves to be with you? Can you think of two things? When you have those two things, put your hand on your head.
- Grownups: who did you enjoy spending time with as a child? How did you know they enjoyed spending time with you also? ( whisper: you don't have to put your hands on your head)
- Alright, kids, I see some hands-on heads. You get to tell your grown-up those two things, and then write them down on your portrait paper. Grown-up, help your kiddo if needed.

## **SLIDE**

“When a child walks in the room, your child or anybody else’s child, do your eyes light up? That’s what they’re looking for.”

— Toni Morrison

In the story of Jesus and the Children, we see Jesus here engage these kids in this really accessible and invitational way.

## **SLIDE**



**Mark 10:13-16**

**13** People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. **14** When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. **15** Truly I tell you, anyone, who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” **16** And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them, and blessed them.

- Jesus is actively building a bigger table here, in this scene. He rebukes his disciples for preventing these children from approaching him. He is the one who insists on their belonging.
- Jesus is a master teacher. He is taking charge of a teachable moment and is crafting a beautiful mini lesson here.
- He is doing a live deconstruction of religion and what they believe to be the correct order of the world.
  - Do not rule anyone out based on your social norms. They belong TO ME. It is not up to you to decide who does not belong to me. If you keep them from coming to me, I will rebuke you.YOUR JOB IS TO LOVE THEM.
- This is also how others can experience Jesus through us.
  - “Do people feel seen when they are around me?”
  - Our kids are really great evaluators of this, if you happen to have a child in your life. They will tell you. Listen to them.

There is a special place in God’s heart for children, and all those who need an advocate. Jesus reflects this through his interactions in this story..

- I have a huge part to play in this. People get to know Jesus, and the heart of God through how they experience me.
  - I can prevent someone, including children from getting to know Jesus because I've made them feel shamed and less than. That's a lot of power. Jesus is always at work despite my failings, but He does not tolerate that kind of behavior. He is absent from me in those moments because I am not extending his heart to others. I have to repent, and work towards change. I have to do the hard work of repair.
    - But here's the thing, in order to hear that correction from him, I have to be willing to listen. I have to be open to his kind voice. I have to be aware of my need for growth. Because he is always waiting for me to come to him, just like these children.
  - I need to know the voice of my Jesus.

Just as Jesus did in Mark 10, I have the responsibility of building the table for others to join.

I have to ask myself, if I build one, will anyone want to be there with me?

It is my responsibility, it is OUR responsibility to do the work towards wholeness and health so that we can truly extend life and light to everyone and anyone who is ready to be there.

Jesus is a model for us.

Jesus is an advocate, he brings people in, he delights, he saves and protects, he redeems and restores. But we have to come to him. We have to do as these children are doing in this story and be open to his leadership. This is how we begin to live a life where we are able to practice what we preach. This is how we work towards wholeheartedness.

In this coming week, we want to offer a few next steps for you as we consider what it means to include everyone in God's kingdom and how you yourself are included.

So here are some questions for you to consider:

**SLIDE: NEXT STEPS:**

- When can you make space to hear God whispering to you about how he sees you?
- If you have children, what is one thing they would tell you that you could work on?
- What would it look like for you to “build a bigger table?”

**Transition Back to Sarah to end Message and pray**

**Worship team, come on back up.**

**Sarah: prays**