**Lesson Plan – The Great Banquet – Matthew 22:1-14**

**OBJECTIVE – CHILDREN AND PARENTS will understand that there is a place in heaven reserved for every person that ever lived, is living, and will ever live! Also, that everyone is invited! Our job is to say “yes” to God’s invitation!**

**NELI:**

**Opening Prayer -**  Let’s take a minute to quiet our minds and hearts . Let’s all thank God for our favorite food, remembering that we are so fortunate that we can buy our favorite foods and most people around the world cannot! (go around and let everyone thank God for a favorite food – making sure they address God…”Dear God, I thank you for \_\_\_\_)

Introduction – A place for all in heaven:

 **I’m so glad you’re here today! We have an exciting Bible story to explore today, and *you’re* going to help set the stage for a big celebration.** Ask: **What things do *you* do when you’re getting ready to have a party or celebration at home?** Say: **The parable we’re exploring is about a party called a banquet—a big, fancy feast. Let’s make some decorations for a party!** (Give each child a banner to decorate!)

**JUDY:**

Say: **There’s something missing.** Hold up the paper plates. **There’s a place for each person in the world at GOD’s heavenly table! Do you know where God’s heavenly table is? That’s right – HEAVEN! Today we’ll be talking about heaven—an incredible place that *God* is preparing for *us! What do you think is in heaven? (see what they say!)* Heaven is ONLY LOVE!! God wants us in heaven with him – to come to a place where there’s only love! The best part is, heaven starts RIGHT NOW!! Anytime there is LOVE, there is a taste of HEAVEN!** Have each child take a plate and put their name on it.

**Let’s start by thanking God for making a special place for each one of us in heaven. God makes a special place of LOVE for every single person that ever lived and ever will live!! He says, “In my house, there are many mansions! And there is a place at the table in heaven for everyone!** Bring out sheet with a long table going through many mansions. Ask children to set their place at a place at the table. **You’re Invited…and everyone who ever lived is invited!!**

**NELI:**

**Scripture- intro**

* **What are some occasions for having a party**
* **Who do you usually invite to a party?**

Say: **It’s really fun to plan a party—*and* to get a party invitation.** Hold up the invitations. **Take a minute and decorate these party invitations.**

Ask: **• How would you feel if *no one* came to your party?**

Say: **In today’s parable, Jesus used the example of someone who planned a party that no one came to. We’ll discover that God wants us in heaven with him.**

**The Parable of the Great Feast**

Stand near the party table kids prepared earlier.

Say: **A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations.** Walk around the room and hand some helpers or parents the 6 invitations that have a heart in the right hand corner - On the back of the invitation, write the excuses they will give. Then walk back to the table. **When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests,** **‘Come, the banquet is ready.’ But they all began making excuses.**

Go around to each adult who has an invitation and have them read their excuse, then take their invitation and tear in half. Take all the torn invitations and put them in a pile.

Continue: **The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was sad and said, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor,** (hand some children invitations) **the outcasts that nobody liked** (hand a few more children invitations), **the blind** (continue handing out invitations), **and the disabled.’ After the servant had done this, he reported, ‘There is still room for more.’ So this master said, ‘Go out into the country lanes and behind the bushes and invite anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full.** Hand out all of the invitations, **•** then direct kids who have invitations to come and gather around the table. **For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet.’**

Ask: **Why did the man in the story invite the hurt, disabled, and outcasts that nobody likes to his feast?** (God wants EVERYONE at his Great Banquet in Heaven!!)

* **If the man in the story represents God, and the banquet is heaven, why do you think Jesus told this story?**

Say: **God wants us in heaven with him. Like the man in the story, God has planned and created something *incredible* for those who follow and love him! Heaven is so amazing that God wants everyone to be there. The doors are wide open! Let’s bring our friends who said “no” so they can join our celebration.**

Have a few kids gathered near the table go and bring back the adults whose invitations you tore up. Invite all adults to gather around the table.

**JUDY:**

Say: **In the parable, a man prepared a feast. He invited many of his friends.**  **But the people made up excuses for not coming. Suddenly, other things were more important.**

Ask: **• What things can seem more important than spending time with God?**

* **How do you think God feels when he sees so many people make excuses to not spend time with him?**

Say: **God wants us in heaven with him. And God wants to spend time with us right *now*, too! Let’s live lives that show God, “I’ll be there! Count me in!”**