

The Great Banquet

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Jonathan, and thanks to Fiona again also for music this evening. We're continuing in the parables of Jesus and Luke's Gospel, and you might like to turn to Luke chapter 14 and just have your Bible open as we go along.

It's a great parable, and it's a great invitation. And I just want to start by saying that this parable is for us today.

It was spoken, of course, by Jesus all those years ago and written down. But the parable is for us today. The invitation, in fact, still stands, and you're invited to come to the great banquet.

What does that mean? Well, with God's help, I'll try and explain the best I can as we go along. But the main point to say is that you're invited to come. And if I can do anything at all this evening, I just want to make that the main point, invite you to come and to put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus.

So if you're here in the church this evening or you're listening online, and you haven't yet accepted that invitation, then here's an opportunity to do so this evening.

[1 : 19] One day, of course, it will be too late, but now is the day of salvation. Now the invitation still stands. And if you're here this evening and you're already a Christian, you've accepted that invitation and you've trusted in the Lord, well, I hope that also in this passage you'll find a lot of encouragement and by way of challenge too.

And I think there's some really deep theology in this passage as well. And so I think there'll be something for everyone here in this passage this evening.

So let's dive right in. And the first question to ask really is, what are we reading about here? And the first thing to note was that Jesus was at a dinner and he was speaking about a dinner.

And so I think the words of Jesus must have been especially relevant to those who originally heard Jesus. He was speaking to people right where they were at.

He was speaking about a dinner and they were sitting at a meal table. But we also note that all was not well at the table. And you can read about this if you just glance back to the beginning of chapter 14.

[2 : 40] Jesus was in the house of a ruler of the Pharisees. And all the guests present were Pharisees and lawyers. And you can see that there was some unrest at the table, particularly about who would get the most important seats at the dinner.

And you can just imagine the sort of thing that was going on here. One guy is maybe just a bit annoyed that someone else got the most important seat.

Why should he get the important seat? That should be me that's sitting there next to Jesus. And so you can imagine the sort of thing that was going on in that occasion. People were trying to get the most important seat.

And the whole thing was pretty sad. And so Jesus deals with the problem directly. And he reminds them that God's way is so different from the ways of the world.

Now the way of the world is me first. But Jesus reminded them it's totally different in God's kingdom. Remember how Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death.

[4 : 04] Even such a death as the death of the cross. And what humility that was. And as followers of Jesus, this is to be our way as well.

Not me first. But rather we're to be others first. And how important is that in church life as well? And how sad when that humility is lacking.

Jesus is our example. But Jesus is far more than just our example. And when we think of his atoning death on the cross, we remember that what he did was not just an example for us to follow, although certainly we are to take up our cross and follow him.

But Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins, to take the punishment that we deserve, to pay the price that we could never pay. He was buried and rose again from the dead on the third day. And he's risen, ascended to the Father's right hand. And one day he will return in glory and in judgment. But for now the call goes out to all to come to him and to accept the invitation by faith. [5 : 18] For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

And those who accept the invitation will not perish, but will have eternal life. And Jesus reminds the people at the meal about the kind of people who are on God's guest list. It's not our rich neighbours or our own friends and relatives, but the poor and the crippled and the lame and the blind. And those who have no way of returning the favour. And what a difference that is. How different is God's kingdom to the way of the world? The world says meek is weak, but God says the meek shall inherit the earth. We're going to look at the parable of the banquet itself now, but you can see what I'm getting at with these words of introduction. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. [6 : 28] And this parable about an earthly banquet speaks of a heavenly banquet. An entrance to it is by faith in God, the one who has issued the invitation.

So let's just take a minute to identify the main characters in the parable. Who do they refer to? Well, first of all, there's the master of the house.

And the master of the house is God. The gospel invitation is sent out by the servant. And he goes out to invite people to come in.

Now, who is the servant? Well, I think when it comes to this question, there are quite a range of opinions. There are those who refer to the servant as the prophets, or perhaps John the Baptist, or the evangelists, or the apostles.

And maybe the servant refers to us as believers, or to Jesus himself. In the Bible, especially in the book of Isaiah, Jesus is spoken of as the great servant of the Lord.

[7 : 40] And you might like to turn to Isaiah 42. And we'll just read a few verses from there where Jesus is spoken of as the servant. Isaiah in chapter 42.

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him, and he will bring forth justice to the nations.

He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.

He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged, till he has established justice in the earth, and the coastlands wait for his law.

And then if we turn over to the New Testament as well, in Philippians chapter 2, and some really well-known verses there. Philippians chapter 2, and starting at verse 5.

[8 : 46] Philippians 2 verse 5. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So you see how the interpretation fits here. On the one hand, we as believers in the Lord Jesus are called to go out into all the world and to preach the gospel.

We are ambassadors for Christ. So I think it's fair to say that all of the views I just mentioned about the identity of the servant in this parable are correct.

Ultimately, the Lord Jesus is the great servant of the Lord, the one who is fully God and fully man. The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and who during his earthly ministry pursued his goal of calling people out of darkness and into his glorious light.

[10 : 25] But right down through the Bible history, we can see that the Old Testament prophets, people like John the Baptist and the apostles, all were in a very special way called to speak God's word and to invite people to come to him.

But what about us today? I mean, none of us here are apostles or prophets, as Elijah was a prophet and Peter was an apostle.

Peter and John were among the 12 apostles. But those of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus are sent ones. We are sent out with the gospel.

That's what the word apostle means in the original. We are not apostles with a capital A as the 12 apostles of the Lord, but certainly with a small a.

And we have a great commission and we are called to go into all the world. We are servants and we are called to go out and to invite.

[11 : 31] We may be unworthy servants, but we can do what we can. We can serve the Lord and preach the gospel and invite people to come in and as our text says, to compel people to come in.

And so there's the master of the house, there's the servant who goes out with the invitation to all, to the streets and lanes and to the highways and hedges.

And finally, there are two groups of people. The first group are those who accept the invitation and come to the great banquet. And then there's a second group are those who reject the invitation.

And we'll see that they make excuses and they turn down the invitation. They reject it and they rubbish it. And they are ultimately excluded from the banquet. And ultimately, of course, in the teaching of the parable, remembering that there's a heavenly meaning in the story, those who reject the invitation will not be in heaven.

They will not take part in God's heavenly banquet. But just as in Jesus' day, there were those who accepted the invitation and those who rejected the invitation.

[12 : 46] Even so, when the invitation is given nowadays, amongst those who hear it, some will accept it and others will reject it. But we're reminded the invitation is very great and it's an invitation to eternal life.

And how wise it is to take it and to accept it right now, well, there is time. And to enter into God's banquet and to his kingdom and ultimately to have that hope and assurance of a place at God's banquet in heaven.

And so with these things in mind, let's look at verse 15 of our text. And this is a really key verse to our understanding of what follows.

We read that one of those who reclined at table with Jesus made a comment. And the comment he made was in response to Jesus' teaching about the sort of people who are on God's guest list.

And this man made a comment at the dinner and he said, blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. I guess we all make all kinds of comments at dinner tables and we talk about all sorts of things at home or families and we're out with friends for a meal.

[14 : 10] Sometimes there's silence at the table as is in the case when Jesus healed the ill man over in chapter 14 and verses 4 and 6.

But on this occasion at the meal, this particular Pharisee who also must have been an expert in the law, he made a serious comment to be sure we don't really know what the man's thoughts were but we can only guess if his words were truly genuine or whether there was a hint of hypocrisy in what he said.

And so we're left with many questions. And when he said, blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God, was he somehow presuming that one day he would make it to heaven when in fact he had no right to expect this?

Was it just a sort of a pious comment by a Pharisee seeking to impress the other Pharisees and lawyers at the meal? Or was this man really genuinely longing to be present with the Lord in heaven and to partake of the heavenly banquet?

We just don't know for sure. But what we do know is that Jesus told this parable in response to the man's comment. Jesus said in verses 16 and 17, the man once gave a great banquet and invited many.

[15 : 44] And at the time for the banquet he sent to his servant to say to those who had been invited, come for everything is now ready. The banquet described here would have been a formal dinner, a great feast and the invitation went out.

In fact, I don't know if you spotted this but there's a double invitation here, a two-part invitation.

Firstly, in verse 16 we read that many were invited and then in verse 17 there's a command, come for all things are now ready.

And when you think of this it makes perfect sense. In Jesus' day there was no such thing, certainly we're talking about a formal banquet, there's no such thing as fast food.

Animals would have had to be slaughtered and roasted and so this would have taken quite a bit of time. And also it's such an obvious thing to say but people didn't have watches.

So their sense of time would have been quite elastic and of course they didn't have the sort of communications networks that we have today. But can you see the two parts of the invitation here?

[16:58] Firstly, in verse 16 the many are invited and secondly the call went out, come for all things are now ready. It was a two-part invitation.

There's another really great example of this in the Old Testament. If you know your Bible well you'll remember in the book of Esther Queen Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet and remember the banquet was announced and that was the first part of the invitation in chapter 5 verse 8 but it wasn't until later chapter 6 verse 14 when the king's servant brought Haman to the banquet. So it's the exact same thing is happening there. There's the initial call that goes out and then the second part has basically come where all things are now ready. So the master of the house gave the invitation to the servant and the servant went out to bring the people in.

But the astounding thing is that despite the kindness of the master and his generosity and gracious invitation to come to such a lavish banquet there are many who declined the offer.

And not only so but they did it in such an ungrateful manner. We read that they all alike with one accord made excuses and three excuses are mentioned in verses 18 to 20 and we'll look at those just now.

[18:26] If you're taking notes the heading here is silly excuses verses 18 to 20. the first two excuses have a sort of formality attached to them request to be excused whereas the third excuse while seemingly quite plausible is just downright blunt and no hint of politeness in it at all.

All three excuses are lame excuses and quite ridiculous to the point of being absurd. When you think about it no wonder that the master of the house was angry as we read in verse 21.

I guess in everyday life we all have excuses for various things that we don't want to do. Maybe like me you could write a book on excuses that you've used in the past but as we look at the excuses in the parable the amazing thing is although the lifestyle and culture of the time the parable is written is vastly different from our own day.

The excuses given for not taking seriously the call to faith in God are much the same. And in our text here in Luke 14 clearly those mentioned considered other things more important than coming to the banquet.

Now here are the excuses. Excuse number one I've bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it. And so we wonder why the man didn't go and see the land first before he bought it.

[20:07] Would you really buy some land without first viewing it? I think that's certainly possible but it's certainly not a wise thing to do. Excuse number two I've bought five yoke of oxen and I'm going to test them.

and he was actually on his way to test the oxen and again beggars belief why the man would not have tested the oxen first for their usefulness before he brought the animals.

How foolish or maybe just how ridiculous. And so you get the impression that the man was speaking as he was walking. I don't know if he would even have stopped for a moment to speak to the servant out of courtesy.

He made his excuse and he was off. He was going. And then excuse number three I've married a wife and therefore I cannot come. And this excuse is really the most blunt of the three.

It's abrupt and the man doesn't even say please can you have me excused. He just rejects the invitation outright. That said at first glance this excuse might seem to be plausible at least on the basis of the Old Testament.

[21:26] If you know your Bible well you remember in Deuteronomy 24 verse 5 a man who just got married was exempt from military service for a year and also from other certain responsibilities in business.

But even so the excuse is quite ridiculous and the banquet has nothing to do with military service and in any case the man's wife would have been most welcome to come to the banquet as well. And so there are three silly excuses here. But what about here and now today? I preached on this passage in Peebles a few months ago and in such a rural and farming community I guess there may have been some people in the church who would be in the business of buying land and buying animals but I expect for us here today in the big city as none of us will be I think anyway going out to buy land or five yoke of oxen tomorrow morning.

But in fact regardless of our culture or location people have many many excuses for not accepting God's invitation and the excuses are essentially the same as the ones we just read about although the culture of the day was very different from ours and none of those excuses that were made or can ever be made are valid.

There are many things that are important in life our families our friends our employment our homes our families are very dear to us in fact and other things are necessary our work and a home to live in but there's nothing more important in all the world than how we respond to God's invitation and you can accept it or you can reject it but by putting it off till another time because you're too busy or now's not a convenient time it's just the same as rejecting it and rejecting the invitation comes with consequences as we'll see in a moment in the following verses but my first point was to draw your attention to the silly excuses of the parable and now in verses 22 and 23 we're looking at surprises and we see that the master of the house is angry because the excuse is given by those who rejected his kind invitation and no wonder and so he sends the servant out again this time in great haste and you can almost imagine the servant being driven out by his master into the city and after all the banquet was ready and there was no time to lose time was short and there was a certain urgency about the matter and he says go out quickly but here the surprising thing is that he didn't say go out quickly to the rich and to the important people to the people of high standing and the wealthy influential but he says bring in the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind and how interesting that is those who in effect had nothing at all to give in return were invited but we need to be careful here as well not misunderstand what's being said remember there's a heavenly meaning in the parable and so the poverty and the blindness spoken of here doesn't refer to physical disability but rather to spiritual condition in other words those who are spiritually blind those who are poor in spirit those who are crippled spiritually and unable to straighten themselves up again and so the servant goes out at the master's command into the streets and lanes of the city and yet there was still room and so the master sends them out again this time to the highways and hedges with the command compel them to come in the streets and lanes probably refer to cities and towns whereas the highways and hedges the rural areas the countryside areas and we can see here clearly

[26 : 05] I think that the gospel is to go out to all people in every place the gospel is to be preached everywhere to all nations in fact in the cities and in the streets and lanes in the countryside everywhere and people are to be compelled to come in how are we going to compel people to come in we're not going to use force and certainly we're not going to use the sword or persecution but a genuine concern and courtesy and love were to compel them to come in but that's not the end of the story point number one was that there were silly excuses point number two there were surprises and my final point number three there is still room verse 22 says master it is done as you commanded and still there is room there is still room there is a great banquet and you are invited to come and there are still spaces at the table and that's the good news the Lord says come for all things are now ready there is so much more that could be said about this parable but for now it's time to draw things to a close and just very brief thoughts by way of conclusion three brief thoughts there is an invitation to be accepted and there is a warning here as well to be heeded and there is a mission to be accomplished first of all there is an invitation to be accepted and that's very clear

I think from this passage this evening wouldn't it be great if someone here or if you listen to a recording of this wouldn't it be great if someone accepted God's invitation to come maybe you don't feel very good or worthy to come maybe you don't feel very religious all I can say is the invitation is addressed to you personally and maybe the concerns of life have taken first place in your life and maybe over many years in fact your career and your job your professional development your home and family and a hundred other things have got in the way your business of life and all the things that you need to do or you want to do you're so busy that you don't have time for God maybe the Lord is saying to you this evening now is the time to put first things first and no excuses there are other things of course that are really important in life but this takes a priority this is the first thing and this is the most important thing maybe you don't feel worthy enough to come to the Lord well all I can say is that this parable is for you who did the master of the house invite those who are spiritually poor and maimed and blind those are the ones who are welcomed with open arms to come to the banquet there's a kindness and a graciousness in this invitation that he would invite people like us to come to the great banquet to come into his kingdom and that's the good news you see secondly here there's a warning to be heeded a warning to the religious and that might seem

like a quite a strange thing to say but remember when Jesus spoke the words of this parable who was he speaking to he was speaking to people who were very very very religious there were people who were known to be very religious and outstandingly so in fact they were Pharisees the people looked up to them as religious people but we have the benefit of hindsight today and we have the whole

Bible in our hands and we know that on the part of the Jews there was a rejection of the gospel they were the ones who first were invited and they rejected the invitation and then what happened next they were cut off for a season and you can read all about that in the book of Romans particularly from 9 onwards chapter 11 as well and so the invitation has gone out to the Gentiles first the invitation has gone out to the prophets now in Jesus the second invitation is given the religious elite the Jews rejected the invitation now the gospel has gone out to the Gentiles there's some deep theology in these things and it's good for us to think about it and to ponder God's plan and his amazing ways what does this mean for us here today here and now of course it's not a bad thing per se to be religious but the fact is it's possible to be very very religious and yet not to be on the road to heaven and that's just a plain fact and read about that through the Bible and through the history of the church there's so many examples of that the Pharisee who was sitting at the table with Jesus of all people could have sung the words of that really old hymn that we very occasionally rarely sing these days when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound when the roll is called up beyonder I'll be there but did he really make it to heaven we don't know that and you can see he can be very very religious and yet not on the road to heaven what can we do about this or what can be done about this well I believe the first thing is this to take heed to the warning here in this parable and secondly to pray and to ask for God's help that we may be assured that we are really trusting in Jesus not in anything else not in our good works not in who we are the good things that we have done we are trusting in Jesus alone for salvation and how important this is to take such great care if we find ourselves drifting or wavering in our faith I was thinking of an illustration of this and a few months ago

I remember there was that story in the news and there was a P&O; ferry that had gone adrift it was I think going from Cairn Ryan over to Larn and it lost all power in the engines and here's this ferry sort of drifting drifting along I thought how good an illustration is that is that anyway like us as Christians at the time we're sort of drifting an action needs to be taken just supposing the captain of that vessel had said to the first mate on the boat you know we've lost all power in the engines but not to worry we'll just we'll drift along and a few hours we'll drift into Larn everything will be okay well I think you know if the first mate was in any way good at his job he wouldn't be too happy with that he'd be saying no no we need we need to put the maide signal out we need to get the we need help and of course there was a good outcome to that story and you remember that after about an hour adrift in the Irish sea ferry got in tow tugboats were sent out from

[34 : 24] Belfast and so there was a good ending and the boat got safely into the dock but if we're in our Christian faith if we're drifting if we're wavering if we're not the Christians we used to be we're going back instead of going forward take heed to the warning is what this parable says don't go on drifting at the end you know just like the boat you could be dashed on the rocks to use the illustration but take action take the warning and pray to God for help there's an invitation to be accepted there's a warning to be heeded and thirdly and finally there's a mission to be accomplished the man at the table with Jesus said blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God let's just suppose for a minute that this man spoke these words and he spoke them really genuinely and let's just suppose for a moment and this actually may have been the case that the man was genuine and like so many other of the Pharisees and his expression was a real expression of faith in the

Lord and he had every right to say this because he was trusting in the Lord and he was actually on the road to heaven and he would eat bread in the kingdom of God and this evening I'm speaking of every reason to believe to genuine Christians and those of you here this evening who I know and as a matter of fact some of the most sincere and outstanding Christians I've ever known have been members of this church some are now with the Lord but I just want to encourage you this evening if you're on the road if you're trusting in the Lord and going on with him that there's a lot of encouragement here in this parable for you as a reminder that there's a mission to be accomplished those who have never heard the invitation might hear it and the great commission of course still stands and people need to hear the life changing message of the gospel and we're facing a task

unfinished the great commission still stands go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you and behold I am with you always to the end of the age what does that mean for us well I quoted an old hymn a few moments ago and here's another verse from that hymn when the trumpet of the lord shall sound the words are archaic I know but the sentiment of this hymn is absolutely spot on let me labor for the master from the dawn till setting sun let me talk of all his wondrous love and care then when all of life is over and my work on earth is done and the role is called up yonder I'll be there do you get it it's old language but it's absolutely right let us labor for the master let's go on trusting in the lord and doing what we can in his service there may be only so much that we can do in our own life situations or our sphere of influence but we can pray and we can do what we can and surely the lord will bless it

I'd like to finish just with a very short prayer maybe you've heard a sermon like this and it's such a clear gospel sermon such a clear invitation I don't know if anyone here this evening may want to respond to the teaching of this parable the bible that we have read respond to the lord and trust in him I'm going to just pray this short prayer and if you can use some of the words in this prayer that's great it's not a sort of a magic formula if you pray this prayer then you're a Christian certainly not saying that in any way at all but if you can take the sentiment of the words expressed here then our heart's desire in prayer is that you would come to know the lord and put your faith and trust in him so let's pray together

I'll just pray this very very short prayer and if you can use it then please do take it and use it lord jesus christ i admit that i'm weaker and more sinful than i ever before believed but through you i'm more loved and accepted than i ever dare to hope i thank you for paying my debt for bearing my punishment for offering me forgiveness for inviting me to your feast and i turn from my sin and receive you as my savior amen