

Luke 14:15-24

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[0 : 00] Let's just take the words of that song into a short prayer together now. Lord, we do ask that you would speak deeply and powerfully and in transformational ways right into our hearts and lives this morning as we are here in your presence, as we open your word.

May it be your voice that we hear and may you help us to respond. Amen. I can't say how relevant Alice's interview was to what we're actually going to be looking at today as we continue in Luke chapter 14 where Jesus is round the table of the Pharisees.

Alice, I have to say there's just one tiny thing you said that I don't quite agree with. You agreed, I agree with everything else apart from this one comment. Did you notice it? Alice started talking about the great foods and said that's not very spiritual, right?

Well, I'm going to try to persuade you today that food is a thoroughly spiritual thing because for some reason what we're going to see is that Jesus in the gospel of Luke talks about food all the time and is constantly at dinner tables.

And, you know, there's three times in the Bible where we hear the phrase, the son of man came, right? Once it's he came to seek and save those who were lost. Once his own words were, the son of man came eating and drinking.

[1 : 23] This is incredible that Jesus has got so much to say about food. And before we read Luke 14, just a little bit of context about food. I like food and I've been enjoying this week delving in a little bit more into why the Bible has got so much to say about food and meals.

And I'm sure a lot of the verses will be familiar to you. Sometimes references to food and meals are a reference to some of what God has to offer us now.

And sometimes they are pictures of what God has in store for us in future. And sometimes, and I think the passage in Luke 14 today is a little bit of a mix of the two.

Ben, my son, and I are trying to read through the book of Revelation at present. It's a bit of a challenge. I have to say, once we got by the bit about the letters to the churches, and we got into the funny horses that are like humans, and the dragons and the beasts and all the rest of it, it gets a bit confusing.

But the one thing in Revelation that is marvellous and is understandable are the references to food and meals, right? So Revelation chapter 3 and verse 20, Jesus speaking to the church at Laodicea says, I'm standing and knocking, and I want to come in.

[2 : 39] And what do I want to do? I want to come in and have a meal with you. Jesus says, I want to come into your lives and into your churches, and I want to eat with you.

And then towards the end of Revelation, as we have a picture of what heaven will be like, what's it going to be like? Again, we're told it's going to be like an incredible feast. We're told it's going to be like a wedding, and it's going to be like the marriage supper of the Lamb.

So food and feasting comes into the book of Revelation. But as for Luke, it's just right through, and we certainly won't go into all of the passages. But again, just two references from the Gospels, one where food is about the here and now, and one where it's more about the future.

In two weeks' time, I hope you're looking forward to it. In two weeks' time, we get on to that passage, Luke chapter 15. The prodigal son, what happens? What happens when the boy finally returns to his father, when the father greets him, and the father says, well, you know, I'm going to punish you now?

No. The father says, now we are going to have the most incredible feast together. And so again, food used to demonstrate what it's like to be in fellowship with God the father, used as a picture of the greatness of being close to God now.

[3 : 53] And then in terms of food as a picture for what's to come, Matthew chapter 22 says this, the kingdom of heaven can be compared to a king who gives a wedding feast for his son.

So food's right through it. And maybe you want to do a bit of a study of that. And as we go through this today, maybe we'll understand a little bit more about the significance and the importance of food in our lives, and maybe also food as part of our witness and part of our mission together.

But let's get stuck into this particular story together. And what we'll do is we'll just break in, if it's okay, at verse 12, even though our main passage for today is 15 through to verse 24.

So if you've got a Bible, either on paper or on an app, then do please look to Luke chapter 14 and verse 12, and let's read it together. Remember the context.

Jesus is having what it must be said is a pretty miserable meal at the Pharisee's house. Pretty miserable because they've been judging him, and they're watching absolutely everything he's doing and saying, and they're waiting to trip him up.

[4 : 58] Okay? Not the sort of meal that Jesus is really into. Certainly not the sort of meal that he has to offer. But nonetheless, that's where he's at. And he says this to his host in verse 12. When you give a lunch or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbours.

If you do, they may invite you back, and so you'll be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

Jesus replied, A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to those who had been invited.

Come, for everything is now ready. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, I have just bought a field.

[6 : 06] I must go and see it. Please excuse me. Another said, I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out.

Please excuse me. Still another said, I have just got married, so I cannot come. The servant came back and reported this to his master.

Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servants, Get out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

Sir, the servant said, What you ordered has been done, but there is still room. 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.

I tell you, not one of those who are invited will get a taste of my banquet. The film and story *Babette's Feast* tells us about an 18th century Christian community in Denmark that had lost its way.

[7 : 19] It had become incredibly dull, joyless, and legalistic. Babette was a refugee from Paris who came to this town to live with two sons.

And for 12 years, she served as the housekeeper of those two sisters, learning how to prepare their humble and very bland food. Then, unexpectedly, out of the blue, after this 12 years, she suddenly was told that she had won the sum of 10,000 francs.

Because unbeknown to her, a friend had renewed her lottery ticket in the Paris lottery every year. Babette asked at that point if she could prepare a banquet for this somewhat miserable community. And what she did after days of preparation was serve up course after course of the most exquisite food. A visiting general exclaimed after a number of courses that he had only ever tasted food like that at the famous *Café Anglais* in Paris.

As the meal unfolded and as they were served by Babette, slowly but surely, the community rediscovers joy. Feuds are ended.

[8 : 42] Sin is confessed. And the evening ends with the community hand in hand around the old village fountain singing the songs of faith.

Meanwhile, the two sisters find Babette in the chaos of the kitchen, surrounded by dishes and the remnants of the meal. And with a distant look in Babette's eyes, she says to them, I was once a cook at the *Café Anglais*.

And they say, well, Babette, we will remember you when you go back to Paris. But as the story unfolds, we realise Babette will never be returning to Paris.

She has spent absolutely everything that she had on this feast. The lavish meal has brought transformation to that joyless community, but cost her absolutely everything she had.

I think that story of Babette's feast may have some parallels for us as we get into this story of the feast in Luke chapter 14.

[10:02] Jesus tells us a story about the most extravagant feast that you might be able to imagine. And as we get into it, there are just three key phrases in Luke 14 that I'd like us to really zone in on, because I think these three key phrases might have something really important to say to each of us and to speak into our hearts and lives this morning.

And the first is the invitation that was given. And the phrase that you'll see in verse 17 is this. So in this parable, it's described by Jesus as a great banquet to which many, many guests are invited.

This is no half-hearted or meagre affair. And you may notice if you look closely, it seems that two invitations were given. Do you see that? So verse 16, a man invited many guests.

Lots of people have invited. And what would happen in this custom is following this initial invitation, the person giving the banquet would have an idea as to how many were going to come. Right? So based on that, he would then know how many animals had to be slaughtered, how many people were going to have to help him serve. And for a number of days, all of the extensive preparation would be done for this magnificent banquet based on those initial acceptances.

[11:36] And then at verse 17, the banquet is ready. And the second invitation goes out at that point. All those who have been invited are then told by the servant, come, for everything is now ready.

The meats have been cooked. They're ready to be carved. And now we'd like you to come to the feast. Come, for everything is now ready.

Jesus wants us to see this story, I think, on so many different levels. And one of the levels that I would want to really emphasize this morning is this invitation that I believe we are given by Jesus, each of us personally today, to the feast that he has in store for us, to the celebration that he wants to offer to us today as he invites us into life with him, as he invites us despite our past, despite our inadequacies and inabilities, despite the fact that we may well, and it's good if we can, identify with the poor, the helpless, the blind, and the lame who he's already spoken about.

And if we can hear him say to us, come, for everything is now ready. Jesus is the one who has done all the preparation that is needed and who is able to invite us into his magnificent feast.

He is the one who can say everything is now ready. He is the one who will invite. He is the one who has done all the preparation. What has he done? Well, as we speak about so much in this church, and rightly so, he is the one who has given of his life.

[13:34] He is the one who has suffered, who has died, who has paid the price for our sin, who has risen again, and now because of him, and because of his grace, and his generosity, and his extravagant love, can say to us, come, for everything is now ready.

And wouldn't you think, given the nature of the feast that Jesus is referring to, that once this invitation goes out, people would be running to it, delighted, that everything is now ready.

But we hear that they didn't. And indeed, it seems that three, they were only given three of the reasons why people didn't come, and there were many excuses and reasons given as to why they didn't come.

I wonder if some of you have found yourself puzzled by some truly awful excuses that you've heard for why people are perhaps rejecting one of your invitations.

And that can be hard, it can be hurtful, can't it, if you feel that the reason you're being given really lacks credibility as to why somebody doesn't want to spend time with you.

[14:48] I was supposed to meet Christian this week for a coffee, and I gave him what I think he thought was a dreadful excuse. It was a text message saying, I'm really sorry, Christian, I've just had a call from my long-lost cousin from Australia.

I've never met him before, but he happens to be in town, and he's asked to see me tomorrow.

Sorry, we can't meet. Didn't sound very credible, but I do have evidence that there really was a call from my long-lost cousin from Australia.

I can absolutely promise you. I wonder if some of us have come up with all sorts of excuses, though. Excuses as to why we might be avoiding doing the things that God would want us to be

doing.

Maybe some of us have found the most remarkable excuses to avoid attending any events in our week of prayer this week. But certainly, let's just drill in for a minute or two to some of these dreadful excuses that Jesus gives in this parable.

This first person, sorry, I need to go and see a field that I've bought. I don't think the field was going to change very much in the course of the banquet, was it?

[15:53] And I think he probably knew that field and what it was like before he'd accepted that first invitation. But he was so caught up with this field that he decided he was going to stare at a field and miss the banquet.

And then the second one, I'm sorry, I've just gone and bought some ox. Ox? Oxen? I'm not sure which it is. And I need to go and oxen, thank you.

And I need to go and try them out. Was that a matter of urgency? And the third one, I've got married and I need to spend some time with my wife. Now when I spoke to my kids about these three reasons, they thought that last one was quite a good one.

They've clearly heard me feeling that I have to decline things on the basis that no, no, no, it's really time that I spend a little bit of time with my wife. So maybe the third one is a slightly better reason than others.

But you know, Jesus wants us to see that all three of these excuses were simply missing the point. They were giving excuses and they were rejecting the invitation to come and they were missing out on so much.

[17:01] They were focused on what was there right in front of their eyes rather than what this, rather than what was really offered to them. And thinking about that, I was reminded of one of the things that C.S. Lewis had to say that I think is very relevant.

He said this, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.

We are like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

The trouble is we are far too easily pleased. Is that some of us? Are we making mud pies in a slum because we cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea?

Are we caught up with what are frankly in the scheme of things trivial, somewhat pathetic excuses rather than giving our wholehearted devotion to the one who says come for everything is now ready.

[18:14] These people whom Jesus has to speak about stand in sharp contrast to the disciples who we have read about earlier in this gospel for example Levi or Matthew in Luke chapter 5 there is his tax booth working away and Jesus comes and says Levi come everything is now ready come follow me and Levi gets up leaves everything follows him and then interestingly immediately what does he do?

Goes on to throw a huge big banquet for the tax collectors and sinners but I'm keen that today we just pause and we reflect on this little phrase come for everything is now ready.

The invitation has gone out Jesus wants us to join him for a feast. Don't get me wrong I'm not suggesting for a minute it'll all be one big long party.

there will be fellowship and celebration there will also be suffering and pain as we will see as we go on to read the rest of Luke chapter 14.

There will be great things for us now and there will be the promise of ultimately participating in that most magnificent of all feasts that we've already mentioned in Revelation.

[19:40] we would have no greater joy in this church today than to hear that this day some of you have taken the decision to turn your eyes away from the mud pies in the slum and to accept the offer of the holiday at the sea.

And the challenge here is that the king does eventually tire of the excuses that the servant is coming back and telling him about. The king does eventually decide that he's had enough of those excuses and what's he going to do is not slam the door and just get on with the feast himself. Absolutely not. What he's going to do is just ensure that the invitation goes out all the more widely to more and more and more and more people so that more people have got an opportunity to attend.

And the second little phrase which I'd invite us to focus on and to speak into our hearts and minds and lives today is this phrase that we see in verse 22 as the servant has gone and told some people about it and as they've responded and as he speaks again to his master and he says to his master I've got some in but there is still room.

There is still room. There is room enough today for those of you who feel that maybe you've had so many invitations maybe you've thrown up so many excuses or maybe you've almost taken steps and you've joined that feast and then you've retreated and you've got back to those mud pies if I can continue to use that analogy.

[21 : 16] I want you to hear this word from verse 22 of Luke chapter 14 and I pray that it might be relevant to your heart and life today which is that there is still room.

You are here and there is still a moment of opportunity for you to say yes to Jesus, to trust him, to rely on him for all that he has done and to experience the banquet that he has to offer.

But I wonder if those of us who are already enjoying something of this feast can also take these words, these four words, as a powerful challenge to the mission that Jesus has for all of his followers today.

Because Jesus wants us to be the ones who will go out and will spread the message of the availability of this feast to those far and wide, those near and those far.

He has not yet returned, the invitation stays open and the message that we have to those around us is come, everything is ready and there is still room for you.

[22 : 27] I wonder how we're getting on going to the streets, the alleys, the roads, the hedges, the country lanes. Are we getting next door to us?

Are we getting into our workplace, to our schools and our colleges and getting across this message? There is still room. I wonder if as we pass people who to the best of our knowledge may not know Jesus, may not maybe even realize that this invitation to this feast exists, I wonder if you could look at them and in your mind you could think there is still room.

There is still room. Maybe God wants me, wants you, wants us to do something by way of encouraging them to accept the invitation.

This chapter is of Luke 14 is spoken about in this book that I've got to recommend for you today. I don't know if some of you have read it, called A Meal with Jesus by a guy called Tim Chester.

If you haven't read it, I thoroughly recommend it. You'll get it on Amazon. food. And he speaks about many of the examples of food in the ministry of Jesus, but he also speaks about the many ways in which his church family have used food to try to reach out to people of all cultures and backgrounds and generations.

[23 : 59] Food as a way in which they can just try to share life and show love and generosity. And he says this, If you routinely share meals and you have a passion for Jesus, then you'll be doing mission.

Meals will create natural opportunities to share the message of Jesus in a context that resonates powerfully with what you're saying. Meals bring mission into the ordinary.

Most people live in the ordinary and will be reached by ordinary people. Alice sees what I mean now about meals and food being thoroughly spiritual. Francis Schaeffer says this, Start personally in your home.

I dare you, I dare you in the name of Jesus, do what I am going to suggest. Begin by opening your home for community. There is no place in God's world where there are no people who will come and share a home as long as it is a real home.

Tim Chester goes on to say this, my final quote from him, we Christians should have a reputation for throwing the best parties. He then lists a lot of helpful reasons as to why we might want to find an excuse for a party and says this, Parties of course are not enough.

[25 : 24] They create a great platform for gospel opportunities, but must be accompanied by a passion for people and a passion for Jesus.

You don't have to give a little sermon, just be attentive to people and be open about your faith. Now I realise that not everybody feels that they can invite people into their homes, but many of us can. And I wonder if some of us have bought into the notion that our homes are our little castles, they're for us and their family and they're basically for nobody else. In which case can I suggest that that's a thoroughly unbiblical, unchristian concept and it's not one that Jesus would encourage or that we'll find support for in scripture.

Rather the intention is that we use all that we have, including our homes, as part of our pursuit of Jesus and as part of our desire to be involved in mission for his name.

And so as we seek to say to others there is still room, we ourselves model generosity and grace and kindness in our lives and in what we do and that includes inviting people to share a meal with us in our homes or maybe outside of our homes, in that party that you might have in our mind.

[26 : 38] What would happen folks today if all of us went away and thought I'm going to throw a party? Can you imagine the impact that we could have collectively for Jesus and we prayerfully think this party is going to be some way of just demonstrating to others that Jesus loves them, that he is the one who is inviting them to come and know his feast, that there is still room and I know that I need to model some of that joyful generosity in order to reflect more fully the Lord whom I serve.

Maybe some of us find that a little bit scary, well maybe join up with somebody else, maybe make a plan, can I encourage you, let's take this seriously, let's take seriously the way in which Jesus did so much around the dinner table and let's think whether we can do something, of course that should include fellowship with one another but it needs to go beyond that as we seek to reach out to others as well.

There is so much room and the heart of Jesus is that those whom we come into contact with might be those who are next to join this feast.

My final phrase and with this I close, it's there in verse 23 and it's the phrase, my house will be full. Come for all things are now ready, there is still room but ultimately the reassurance, the promise, maybe the challenge at the end of this passage that the master sets out is to go to the roads and country lanes, compel them to come in so that my house will be full.

I wouldn't want us to finish today thinking that our work for Jesus is totally dependent on us. It's not. It's all about Jesus.

[28 : 30] It's all about what he has done. It's all about his grace and goodness and we can finish today with absolute confidence that he knows what he's doing, that this is the moment when the invitation still goes out but that ultimately the day will come when his house will be full.

The day will come and it's described throughout Revelation, it's there in Revelation 7 as a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language worshipping before the throne and before the Lamb crying out salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

The party will be amazing. It will put Babette's feast thoroughly into the shade. Jesus will be at the centre of it. He is the one who gave everything so that it could happen in the first place.

For us, let's ensure that we have responded to Jesus' invitation. Let's seek to invite as many as we can to be part of this feast and let's seek in as many ways possible to reflect the attitude of the host Christ in our own lives.

Let's pray together. Just as we close, let's ask God to speak to us and think about whether one of these phrases is of particular importance for us.

[30 : 08] Come for everything is now ready. There is still room. my house will be full.

Lord Jesus, thank you for your grace. Thank you for giving your life for us. Help us to follow you. Help us to be engaged in mission with you. For your glory we pray. Amen.