

Luke 14:12-24 // The Parable of the Great Banquet

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Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0:00] Today's first reading is from Luke chapter 14 verses 12 to 14. It can be found on page 1047 of the church bibles.

! So that's Luke chapter 14 beginning at verse 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. 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. So that's Luke chapter 14 beginning at verse 15.

When one of those at table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

[1:23] 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 tell 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 and 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 can't come. 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.

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.

[2:33] I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet. Thank you very much for reading that.

Good morning, St. Silas. If we've not met, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here. We're going to be looking at that portion of God's word together. It would be great help to me if you could keep it open. If you didn't look it up, it's page 1048 of the church Bibles that we're looking at together.

If you can see little party invitations out around you, we had fun at the 9.30 basically acting this out with children running around inviting everyone to God's brilliant banquet.

We're not doing that at this one. I didn't see enough people who'd be up for running around doing that. If you're wondering what's going on there, they're from the 9.30.

Do take one if you like. But it would be great to start by thinking about that idea of invitation, which is a key theme in the parable. What is the best party invitation you've ever had?

[3:43] Maybe you've got a friend who invited you to a birthday party. I've taken our kids to some parties I wish I could have been at myself. An escape room, a donut party at Krispy Kreme, a pizza party, laser tag, bowling, go-karting.

Maybe you, as a grown-up, have been invited to a spa weekend or a golf weekend. Why don't we just turn to our neighbour and share the invitation we were most happy ever to receive.

Let's just talk about that. Please may may may may may may may may may may
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of a time, you were around at a friend's house, and it came the time when it's time to go home, and you're just so upset, and you're appealing, pleading for more time, because you just want it to go on and on.

Or grown-ups, you might remember an occasion with friends, when the laughter goes on long into the night, and you lose track of time, and suddenly you've got to say, oh goodness, is that the time? The babysitter, I'm so sorry, we were meant to go ages ago. But it was a special time. And that's Jesus' picture of heaven. It's going to be the place of friendship, and warmth, and laughter, where people love each other, and they laugh together, and they enjoy being together forever.

And as far as the Bible is concerned, the highlight of heaven is the host. It's being with him. Jesus is the host of this banquet. It's all being laid on by God for him, and it will be wonderful.

[10:15] He's revealed to us, through Luke's gospel, as the one man you'd give anything to be with. A man full of compassion, and kindness, and patience, and incredible courage, and astonishing wisdom.

Always knew what to do. Always knew what to say. And he had this unstoppable power to make everything well, even to smash death itself to pieces.

Jesus. The best thing about being at the party in heaven will be being with him, with Jesus Christ.

And of course, another great thing about being invited to a party is you don't have to pay.

I remember us being invited, my wife and I, to a dinner party to celebrate with friends, and it was somewhere out of our range. We couldn't think of going. I phoned the guy, I said, I'm so sorry, so glad to be invited.

We couldn't afford that. He said, who said anything about you paying? I'm paying. It was all on him.

And so it is for us, with this great banquet, that God knows, we couldn't afford this.

[11:19] We are told just to come empty handed. Not that it was free to put on. It was very costly to put on. Jesus had to come and die on the cross, so that he could invite sinners like us to this great banquet.

But that's what he's done, so that the invitation can go out to us. Come empty handed. I want you to be here with me. So you know how it is with invitations.

You have to RSVP, right? You've got two choices. Are you going to come or not? And when you accept this invitation from God, life in his kingdom starts right away, enjoying life, knowing Jesus, but yearning for that glorious future day and that banquet with him.

Heaven will be like a banquet. But our second surprise in Jesus' story is this. Some people refuse to come to the banquet. So have a look with me at verse 18.

They all alike began to make excuses. But what's going on here? Well, let's have a look at the excuses. If you'll have a look at the first one, the man says, I've just bought a field.

[12:31] I need to go and see it. Well, what's that about? What sort of a person buys a field they've not yet seen? And if you've bought it now, it's still going to be there after the party.

If you look at the second one, he says, I just bought some new oxen and I've got to try them out.

Well, again, why did you buy them without trying them?

And now you've got them. Why the urgency? Why not wait? And the third guy, it's his relationship that's got in the way. He says, I've just got married, so I can't come.

Well, again, this makes no sense. Can't you bring her along? Or, why don't you do something on your own for a change? So the point here is that none of these is a good excuse.

These people, they knew about the banquet well in advance. They got their fancy save the date invitation. But the truth is, when it comes to it, they don't want to go.

[13:34] And the shock here is that this is the scene Jesus is encountering in the world. He's in front of respectable people, good people, religious people.

They're right in front of him. And we saw last week that they're not accepting Jesus because they're distracted by their own ambition.

They're proud of their own achievements. They're puffed up by their own wealth. And they're diverted by other things they love more than God. So they won't come to Jesus for a free place at God's great banquet.

And the hard truth is that today many people are doing the same with Jesus. Like the excuses Jesus tells us about here, when it comes to God, people just keep putting him off.

Often it's, it's not that we think of ourselves as being dead against God. It's just that we'll get around to thinking about him another time. Right now, there's just so much else to live for, so much else to

be doing.

[14 : 42] We think we're preoccupied with the job or the studies or the qualifications or the kids' activities or the house hunting or the sports clubs. Or maybe like that third excuse.

It's that we're in a relationship and it's pulled our heart away from the concerns of God. Well, we're like these men with their excuses if we feel like that.

Maybe you're here today and you think, well, I haven't accepted the invitation because I'm just not sure Jesus is who he said he is. I've got questions. Well, that might be right, but do you actually take the time to look into it?

If that's what's holding you back, Christianity Explored, a week on Wednesday, you'll be there.

Maybe you feel, I'm just too busy.

Well, of course you're busy. We're all busy. We're all busy. But even in the busy life, we still make the time, don't we, for the things that are important to us. That's why we're busy.

[15 : 47] So how does God, the master of the banquet, react in the story? Well, that's our third shock from Jesus. Have a look with me at verse 21. The servant came back and reported this to his master then the owner of the house became angry.

Our third shock is Jesus excludes people from his party. And it's a shock, isn't it? Look at the last verse of the story. Look at verse 24, how Jesus wants to end with a sting in the tail.

He says, I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet. He's talking about the ones who made the excuses. And he's being crystal clear.

Some people who are very good people, by our standards, respectable people, will not be at his banquet. There will be a place where the banquet is not going on.

A place of loneliness, misery, and despair. That's the place Jesus called hell. We heard last week at the start of this section that there will come a day when the door into God's house will be firmly closed.

[17 : 01] And then it will be too late to respond to his invitation. And we need to know that because I think the idea that we'd really miss out on something just doesn't fit with our experience.

It's not how people think about the afterlife. So we think, well, me and God surely will just come to an agreement. I'm sure it will be all right in the end. And that's often how we think in life, isn't it?

We're not used to missing out. I remember at university, where I went to university, there was this incredible end-of-year ball. They cost like a few hundred pounds for a ticket.

And you had to get your tickets very early. And I was a bit of a disorganized person, but I always used to think you're always all right in the end. So I didn't get round to getting my ticket and then it sold out and there were no tickets left.

So instead of thinking, well, oh, that's it, I've missed out, I'll make other plans, I thought, I'll just blag my way in, right? So I put on a dinner suit and I got a friend and we hired a punt.

[18 : 08] That's like a rowing boat, right? Okay, where I was. And my friend punted me and another friend into the ball. We went along the river and when we got near the grassy verge, we just strolled in, in my dinner suit.

And I went and I grabbed some champagne and I just got in the crowd and I was in. And then a security guard came up and said, can I see your wristband?

And I said, I haven't got a wristband. I just came in off the river and he said, I'm sorry, but you're going to have to leave. And I said, oh, come on, mate. I'm in the right clothes.

Isn't it a bit of a fuss to throw me out? And he said, get out. And I was out. That was it. That was the end of my night. And it was an important lesson for me because I was so used to thinking how life works is you just blag your way in.

And I couldn't do it there. And sometimes that's how people think about what will happen after we die. It'll all work out in the end. I'll blag my way in.

[19 : 14] Yet how embarrassing to turn up on God's doorstep after we die expecting that we can strike a deal when Jesus is so clear here, isn't he? You can't do that.

And isn't this parable remarkable for showing us what would exclude us from God's great banquet? Not necessarily that we've done something terrible and gone to prison or been excluded from school for our behavior, but something like this.

God made me a wonderful, gracious invitation and I was too distracted by other things in my life to do anything with it.

I was dearly and thoughtfully loved by God, but I chose to keep him at arm's length in my life. And if that's the case, it will make no difference how respectable a life we have lived, how many marathons we ran for a homeless charity.

Jesus said, not one of those men will get a taste of my banquet. But don't feel sorry for Jesus and think that his party gets ruined because there's a false shock in the story.

[20:28] It's that the party is full of astonishing guests. So have a look with me at verses 21 to 23. 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.

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.

Why does he have to compel them? That's what I was thinking about this week. Because these are people who cannot imagine that they would be asked to be at this party.

Oh no, it must be a mistake. And he has to drag them in. These are the unlikely people. For those original heroes at that dinner with Jesus, these people are the people that never got invited to things because they would have to come empty handed.

[21:37] They could never repay. They've got nothing to offer. Jesus says, to these very respectable people at the dinner, the invitations are going out to them now instead of you.

And perhaps this morning that's great news for some of you here. Because you might be hearing about this banquet and thinking, it sounds fantastic, it's amazing, Christians believe that's for them. But it couldn't be for me. I'm not really a religious person. Jesus says, it doesn't matter. Just come along. Well, I hear that. And I do have Christian friends, but in my life, I've kept Jesus at a distance. I've pushed God out of the way. Jesus says, it doesn't matter. I'm inviting you. Just accept the invitation. Do it today. And a key reason, I take it, that Luke records this story is because for Luke's first readers, they were thrown because they could see that Jesus was compelling.

But why did the religious people reject Jesus? And Jesus needs them to know that the excuses people were making were not good excuses.

[22:55] And you should accept the invitation. Well, isn't that the same for us today? A key thing that I think distracts people from really going all in as Christians in Scotland today is we think, but the people around me aren't doing it.

I know some really good people, people who do really great things, and they haven't accepted Jesus' invitation. So maybe, maybe there's not all that much to what he offers.

Well, don't let it put you off because Jesus is saying the excuses that people make go just because their hearts have wandered. And the bottom line is they don't want to be with him.

And meanwhile, others are streaming into God's great banquet in Africa today, in Latin America, in China. Last year, we had a Ugandan minister here, Simon Peter, visited St. Silas, rescued by God as a young man in Uganda when he heard singing from a church.

And he went in, and he sat there, and he heard the gospel, and he gave his life to Jesus. He's coming back to Glasgow next week. He and his Christian friends in Uganda are exploring whether they can send people from Uganda to the UK because they cannot fathom why so many people in the UK are refusing Jesus' invitation to God's great banquet.

[24:24] They're perplexed because they are full of joy. Why? Because in global terms, they have very little. But when they heard the news that they were being invited by a man as good as Jesus to a future as good as this, they couldn't think of anything better.

Nothing would hold them back. And whether or not you or I are there, God's great banquet is going to be full. Full to bursting. And it will be glorious and thrilling and full of joy.

So Jesus urges us, just come and accept his invitation to God's great banquet. Let's make sure that nothing else in life gets in the way.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we see here at the dinner party how Jesus came to those who were his own and his own did not receive him.

but we thank you for his courage and his clarity and his mercy. And thank you that while those we might have expected to be yours reject his invitation, he came and died so that the invitation to your heavenly banquet could be extended to people like us.

[25 : 42] and so we ask that by your spirit you will deeply impress our hearts with this future hope, this picture of heaven, that we will put our excuses aside and live as those who have received this grace.

People for whom one day the door will finally be opened and we will at last be welcomed into a glorious, undeserved future full of joy in the presence of Jesus our magnanimous host and our magnificent savior for his name's sake.

Amen.