

Bible reading [Luke 14:1-24](#)

Jesus loved to tell stories which we know as parables. And very often they were about aspects of everyday life that people were familiar with.

And many of the parables seem rather innocuous and even occasionally entertaining but they virtually always ended with a sting in the tail – with a punchline that you never saw coming.

This parable and all other parables told by Jesus are to do with the Kingdom of God. God's Kingdom is often described as an upside-down Kingdom – and the parables prepare us for life in that Kingdom – a kingdom that is strange, wonderful, and threatening.

Today's story or parable will be quite familiar to many of you.

(1) Luke sets the scene in verse 1. It's the Sabbath and Jesus has once again been invited to dinner by a Pharisee. I say once again, because this is not the first time Jesus has sat round the dinner table with the Pharisees. We saw him at the home of Simon the Pharisee in Chapter 9 and there is another reference to Jesus having dinner with a Pharisee in Luke 11v37. And now he is at the home of a prominent Pharisee, and we are told that Jesus was being carefully watched.

So, there are people there who are strangely fascinated by Jesus but also quite cynical. I suspect they are hoping Jesus would say something or do something that they can exploit – their poised to catch him out. They are just waiting for him to slip up.

Luke is alerting us at the outset to the fact that this meal is not going to be an evening where the host and guests exchange pleasantries – there is going to be a lot of tension at this meal.

We are also told there was a man suffering from dropsy who was there – well, how did he get there? Commentators think he was probably planted there by the Pharisees knowing Jesus would touch him or heal him which would be highly controversial on the Sabbath.

But Jesus heals him anyway and this leads to Jesus, teaching on humility.

And in verse 12 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 neighbours; 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.'*

The Pharisees would have known he was talking about eternal life and they would have felt very confident that they were included in what Jesus calls, *'the resurrection of the righteous.'*

That had to mean them, surely. After all, they were renowned for their high standards of morality and for keeping God's law. The Pharisees were at the front of the que when it came to the resurrection of the righteous – weren't they?

But Jesus had already begun to expose the pride of the dinner guests which made this dinner party feel rather awkward and uncomfortable.

It's a bit like having friends' round for dinner and someone mentions the starving millions in the world as your tucking into your second helping of Black Forest Gateau.

Occasionally you get those dinner party moments that are just embarrassing and you're racking your brains for a way to smooth this over.

Well, that's what one of the dinner guests does in verse 15, when he blurts out, *'Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.'*

This was a bit like one of those religious clichés people trot out when they are not quite sure what to say.

Here is someone who thinks they are spiritually okay, someone who seems confident about heaven and confident that he is going there.

And I expect he is waiting for Jesus to affirm that – *'my good chap, how right you are, of course you're going to heaven.'*

Instead, Jesus tells a story which has a sting in the tail – and it's a story that is designed to shatter false hope and misplaced security....and dare I say, religious complacency.

In the story, we have a wealthy person who holds an amazing party. If you got an invitation to this party, it would be a huge honour.

Preparations for this lavish dinner party would take weeks if not months and then the invitations would go out. But those who receive the invitation refuse to come – they have better things to do or more important things to do. The wealthy host is upset but he invites other people to take their place – people with less on their minds and less in their bank accounts. People who are more aware of their own inadequacies and needs. People on the edges of society.

And those who were initially invited find that the opportunity to attend has been lost – it's gone forever.

So, this is a story all about invitation and excuses as well as inclusion and exclusion.

And that is our flightpath for this morning.

(2) Invitation

Verses 16 – 17

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.'

This is a gala dinner. This is an event not to miss. We are told in verse 16 that this was a great banquet and many guests had been invited.

You might imagine a huge stately home with butlers and servants, being offered champagne on arrival. Crystal chandelier's sparkling overhead. A long oak table with goblets and cutlery and napkins all laid out and the smell of delicious food wafting through from the kitchen, on top of that you have the guests all in a happy and relaxed mood in anticipation of a wonderful evening.

To receive an invitation would be truly special and unforgettable, Nobody turns down this invitation.

The invitations would be a two-stage process.

You would receive the initial special guest invitation and then once all the preparation was completed (remember, they didn't have fridges and freezers in those days) the invitation would go out again, saying, 'come, everything is ready.'

Let's not forget that Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God.

We know that and they also knew that.

In the Old Testament the resurrection of the righteous was described as being like a lavish banquet.....Isaiah 25

The Lord Almighty will prepare

*a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—*

the best of meats and the finest of wines.

And a place where death will be swallowed up forever.

What a wonderful picture of the kingdom of God.

And those who were sat around the dinner table at the home of this prominent Pharisee would have been confident that their names were on this heavenly guest list.

And they are no doubt waiting for Jesus to tell them how wonderful it would all be for them. And how privileged they were to be invited – to be insiders and not outsiders as far as God was concerned.

But, instead of that, things take a very different turn.

In the Old Testament, the prophets were looking forward to the day with God's kingdom would come but Jesus is saying the kingdom of God is here, right now, in their midst, sitting at their table.

He is the 'servant' in verse 17 who sends out the invitations – that is why he says, '*Come, for everything is now ready.*'

I love that word of invitation, 'Come'. If there is one word that sums up God's attitude towards humanity it is the word 'come'.

The God that we disobey and neglect and snub and ignore invites us to come to a lavish banquet.

This one word, 'come' gives us an incredible window into God's true nature.

So many people think of God as a cold-hearted judge who is more inclined to punish us than bless us.

For them, God doesn't say 'come', he says, '*go away, you're not good enough.*'

The message of the whole Bible is God saying come to me. Life is not about our search for God, it's about God inviting us to come to him so we can share our lives with him, and he can share his life with us for all eternity.

That little word 'come' tells us more about God's feelings for us than any other word I can think of.

As Jesus tells this parable about the kingdom of God, he gives us a breathtaking picture of a party or celebration.

One of the most effective pieces of Satan's propaganda is the perception that Christianity is dull and boring. Nothing could be further from the truth.

God invites us to a life of joy and peace and hope – life in all its fulness.

Not necessarily a life free of suffering and disappointments but it is a life with a new dimension, a life full of purpose and satisfaction.

Jesus invites us to come and enjoy the banquet – come to the party of a lifetime.

Who could say no to that?

Well, we find there is a staggering response.

(3) Excuses

Verse 18 says they all began to make excuses.

Human beings have an amazing ability to come up with some of the most pathetic excuses.

Here, the excuses are checking a field, trying out some new oxen and I just got married.

Of course, none of these things are bad, they are just feeble or even fabricated.

An equivalent today might be, “I can’t come because I have to cut the grass.” Or “I have to feed the cat.” Or “I have to wash my hair,” That’s the situation of the parable. These excuses are ridiculous and laughable, yet offensive and rude.

And those listening to Jesus would have seen that right away – they would have known that they were pathetic excuses.

Who turns down a banquet to go and look at a dusty field?

Whose new oxen couldn’t wait for another 24 hours?

Whose wife would want to miss a gala event like this?

It would be a bit like getting a personal, hand-written invitation from Her Majesty the Queen through your door inviting you to a garden party at Buckingham Palace where other notable Royals will be there along with a few celebrities and you reply by saying, Thank you very much your Majesty but unfortunately I have to cut the grass that day or I would love to come but I need to feed the cat or wash my hair.

Any sensible or reasonable person would jump at this invitation, yet, just as in this story told by Jesus, they make excuses that are silly and laughable.

As the Pharisees are no doubt laughing at these ridiculous excuses, little do they know that Jesus is talking about them.

The point is, they care more about possessions and relationships than they do about God’s friendship and invitation.

This is the most uncomfortable part of the story because we can fail to attend God’s banquet, we can refuse his invitation because we consider something else to be more important than friendship with God.

If you thought this story was starting to get a bit ridiculous with these pathetic excuses, then it gets even more ridiculous.

(4) Inclusion

Let’s read from verse 21, *‘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.’

The owner of the house became angry – no wonder. Think of all the preparation and energy and expense and generosity that has gone into this banquet – only for it to be met with indifference and lame excuses.

And so rather than waste all this food, the owner of the house sends his servant out into the streets, and he is told to invite the poor, the cripple, the blind and the lame.

He does that but there is still room, so he is sent out again and the net is thrown even wider.

Find me the riff-raff, the untouchables, the outcasts, the spiritually destitute.

The Pharisees must be thinking this story’s getting very silly.

Surely those who received the invitation first wouldn’t turn it down – would they? Surely, they wouldn’t come up with such pathetic excuses.

And surely nobody in their right mind would ever invite the second group of people to a lavish banquet. They didn’t even know the party existed. On top of that they didn’t have the clothes to wear for such an occasion. They didn’t have the right etiquette.

And they certainly wouldn’t be able to reciprocate the host by inviting him round for dinner. Surely this party wasn’t for them – or so they thought – until they heard Jesus say they were included.

(5) Exclusion

Then we have verse 24 which is the killer punch or the sting in the tail.

‘I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet, said Jesus.’

All of a sudden, we move from the story to the application and what an unsettling application it is. This is a very strong word to the Pharisees and to anyone who is religiously complacent and who are convinced beyond doubt that they have rock solid invitation in their hands and that they will be alright.

I imagine at this moment you could have cut the air with a knife – there would be a stunned silence.

What Jesus is saying is that being religious is not enough. Coming to church isn’t enough, being respectable isn’t enough, living a good life isn’t enough. You can tick all these boxes and even consider yourself as a friend of God but if you’re not able to recognize and receive Jesus, whose banquet this is, as the only door into the banqueting hall, you won’t be at the party. However confident you feel otherwise.

So, here we have a solemn word for the religiously complacent. If you refuse to accept the invitation to come to this banquet through Christ by putting up some pathetic excuse because other things are more important then you will miss out on the greatest thing there is – eternal friendship with God.

(6) Hope for all

But there is also an encouraging word here for those who see themselves as outsiders, those who would say, *‘you don’t know the half of how hopeless and useless I feel. If only you*

could see the trail of bad decisions I've made and the regrets I have. If only you could see the pain that I've suffered. Quite frankly, I'm a bit of a mess if only you knew it.'

If that's you, then Jesus says, *'come, come because everything is now ready.*

Everything that needed to be done to get you and me to the party has been done as Jesus hung on the cross. Our debt has been paid, our sin has been dealt with. Come, for everything is now ready.

Come to me and receive my forgiveness and cleansing and healing. Come and enjoy friendship with God, come and experience life in all its fullness.'

That's what this banquet represents – it's a picture of all the blessings that God has for us, so why not pull up a chair.

In the very next chapter of Luke's gospel, we have another parable with another party – the parable of the prodigal son.

His life was a mess. There was a trail of bad decisions in his life, and he had hit rock bottom. And this son wonders if his father would have anything to do with him and he rehearses what he will say to his father as he makes his way home;

Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your servants.' So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So, they began to celebrate.

Life truly begins when we put our faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord.