

Luke 14:15-24: The Great Banquet: God has done everything necessary

¹⁵ 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.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

¹⁸ “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.’

¹⁹ “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

²⁰ “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

²¹ “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.’

²² “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

²³ “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. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

Big Idea

God has done everything necessary for you to be accepted into his wonderful kingdom.

Call Now

Accept the invitation – for the alternative is exclusion.

Introduction

If you've ever come into a room where people are having a conversation you'll know that it can be difficult to catch the flow of what's being said. So, if we start our reading our passage at verse 15, we're midway through this conversation. It says, ‘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.’ Well, what did that man hear? We must go back a little to verse 12 when Jesus says to the host of this meal to which he'd been invited, ‘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 and the blind and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’

So, the others who were at this meal with him are starting to probe Jesus about this idea of a banquet or a feast. In fact, we are coming into the middle of a centuries-long conversation: this idea of a banquet or a feast of the Kingdom of God is an idea that goes back at least to Isaiah, about 700 or so years before Jesus. Arguably we could trace it back all the way through the Bible, particularly perhaps to Exodus where Moses and elders of Israel ate and drank and they saw God. It's mysterious language that is used in that part of the Old Testament but nevertheless there is this idea of eating with God. Isaiah takes it up where he uses this metaphor in chapter 25 and even later on in Isaiah chapter 55 invites people to come and drink and delight in the richest of fare, and be satisfied.

So those who are with Jesus at the table are questioning him, asking him, 'What do *you* make of this idea? Who will be in the Kingdom of God at this glorious banquet? Who *are* those blessed people? What do you think?'

And Jesus replies with this parable, the parable of the great banquet.

The kingdom of God is incomparably great (v. 16-17)

The first thing I want to emphasise about the kingdom of God is that it is incomparably great. Look at verses 16 and 17: '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."'

It is a **great** banquet. We can use the word *great* in a variety of ways: we perhaps use it to refer to the *size* of something: large, it's abundant, extensive...

You can also use it in terms of the idea of *quality*: it's superlative, it's precious, it's exquisite...

Or the word *great* can give a connotation of *detail* and *care*; *great preparation* has gone into this.

We also might think of how *open* the invitation is. It says that this certain man invited *many* guests, so there is a *generosity* to this banquet.

And, of course, what we need to remember is that these aspects of greatness all trace back to the certain **man** who is preparing this banquet: this man who has the resources, the heart, the attention to detail; this man is ready to welcome all.

It really shouldn't be too hard to see what Jesus is saying here: this certain man surely represents God himself, who made ancient and precious promises back in Bible times to people like Abraham, to whom he said he would have a very great reward. What would that reward be? *God himself*: to know him and to be in community and relationship with him. So, there is a closeness and friendship that this certain man wanted to offer. It was known in part in Israel's past: it says of Moses that he talked to God as a man talks with his friend.

God still wants that. Just as Abraham and Moses lived by faith in God's promises of redemption and fulfilment, so we too can live by faith in the same God. When we are told that the man in the parable sent his servant to tell those invited that everything was ready, surely this is God sending his Son to say, as we hear Jesus at the outset of his ministry say, 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'

Forgiveness; joy; assurance; wonder: we can see it, we can love it, we can enjoy it. Whatever we have or don't have in this life, we can know something of what it is to be part of the kingdom of God. So, every time we enjoy things (food, nature, relationships), we can remember that they are a pointer towards the greater greatness that God has prepared for those who love him. And if we don't have

those things; if we know pain, loss, trouble, dullness...we can know that God will not forget us, and that there is a day when all the sad things about life will become untrue, if we are part of the kingdom that he will bring in.

The rejection of the invitation is deeply insulting (v. 18-20)

Not only do we see that the Kingdom of God is incomparably great we see that the rejection of the invitation is insulting and reckless. Look at verses 18 to 20: after having been invited, these many guests, having seemingly initially accepted the invitation, now all begin to make excuses.

We need to read this carefully because on first look it appears as though these are quite reasonable reasons: one is concerned with his property, another with his work, another with his marriage... these do seem to be like markers of respectability. Of course people are concerned about their relationships or their responsibilities; but hold on, and let's look closer.

For example, the first man says he has just bought a field and must go and see it. He says that I *have bought* a field, and only now he's going to see it. Would you buy land, or a house, or other property, without seeing it? This fellow insists that he's bought it without seeing it, and whilst that may seem incredulous to our ears today, it would have been even more so in a society where land was considered almost sacred.

After all they're in the Promised Land. The Old Testament shows how intensely people thought of the land: allotted to tribes, an inheritance to be passed down. Transactions over land may well have gone on for months and years, so keenly was the linkage that people felt to the land.

There's an example in the Old Testament a man called Naboth who would not sell his vineyard to king because he had this sense of family inheritance; he was to hold it in trust, God-given as it was.

The point I mean to make is that no respectable person would have said that they bought a field without even seeing it. The fact is, this man clearly simply does not want to go to the banquet that has been prepared; he considers it not worth his time, or beneath him, even.

The second is similar: he says he's just *bought* five yoke of oxen and is only now going to try them out. No one would buy the five yoke of oxen without first having a test run with them, seeing if they were strong enough for the labours of an agricultural society, seeing that they were equally strong so that they would pull together effectively.

In days where people lived from hand to mouth, where the fruit of the soil was life or death, would be so ridiculous to make a huge investment this blindly. Once again, this man is considering the invitation unworthy; he would rather spend his time elsewhere, perhaps on his business, but certainly not at this man's banquet.

Similarly, the third man says he's just got married so can't come. Now, in Jesus' day, those men who respected their wives would not really make mention of their marriages out of politeness and modesty; but this guy is fairly brazenly saying that he would rather be busy with his woman at home, yes, maybe even effectively saying that, 'I'd rather have sex with her than be with you.'

Sex is a beautiful gift of God; but it feels as though this man is looking to simply gratify *his* wants and desires. It doesn't seem like there's any kind of atmosphere of selflessness in what he says, abrupt as it is.

In any case, in the parable, there would have been time enough to both come to this man's banquet, which probably would have been held in the afternoon, *and* spend time with his wife.

Now, what is going on here? What is Jesus saying?

God has done everything necessary for people to enter his kingdom feast. But those invited guests – the recipients of his privilege and favour, his blessings and benefits – have suddenly all found better things to do with their time. They give their rejection to the servant, and in so doing reject the one who sent him.

How many people were looking for the Messiah in Jesus' day? And then Jesus comes...and how many looked upon him with contempt, even after he revealed his glory – turning water into wine in Cana, feeding thousands beside Galilee, teaching with his own authority unlike any previous scribe or prophet. But whether it was because they knew him as a lad in Nazareth, or he threatened their religious comfort, or he came not to revolutionise politics but to speak of the kingdom of God *within* – for these and whatever other reasons, those around him, those with the heritage of God's word and God's presence, turned their backs on him.

I wonder what the excuses would be today for refusing the invitation to the kingdom of God, if Jesus had placed his parable in 21st-century Northstowe. What are the priorities **people** deem more important, or things that they would rather be doing? What are **you** tempted to relegate God behind?

Property, career, approval, self-expression, causes, sport, health, entertainment, family

In reality, whether it's the pursuit of money (cf. the rich fool, Luke 12:15-21), the achievement of domestic bliss, status and satisfaction in work, pleasure and hedonism, comfort and a quiet life – whatever the obstacle or enticement might be, it is fatally our nature to love created things rather than our Creator; to love darkness when light is here; to have treasure on earth rather than in heaven. All of us have rejected Jesus; let no one here today think that they are the exception that rises above such sinfulness. We, each of us, has turned to his own way; we have drunk from broken cisterns that will never fill us. All life is repentance, and if we are wise we will take the time to confess that before God and ask him to pardon our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let's get back to our parable...

What I want to see, thirdly, is:

The grace of God is astonishingly persistent (v. 21-23)

Of course, the master is angry: those whom the master has invited reply to him that they want fulfilment and they don't think that he can give it.

But note that this does not cause the master to cancel the banquet! He will not be dissuaded, and while his passion is aroused, it does not cause him to lose his character traits of generosity, openness, care and provision. His invitation – at this late stage – goes out to 'the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.'

The very people who would have been considered unfit for God, outcast, decidedly not blessed by God, are to come into this banquet – and while not the original invitees, the ones whom the servant goes out to seek and bring in.

And further than that: there are more people still in country roads and lanes, or 'highways and hedges' as an old translation has it, that the servant is sent out to go and get.

None of these people themselves would have expected it; but here they are, invited, welcomed, wanted, even compelled to come in, not by force against their will, but by sincere exhortation: the master *is* serious, and deeply desires to have you at his banquet!

So, the offer of the kingdom goes out beyond the religious elite and the spiritually presumptive; for in rejecting Jesus, they have not kept the kingdom for themselves but have rather excluded themselves when others are finding their way in. God goes out looking for people, and what greater zeal could he have shown than in coming himself, in the person of Jesus, to bring in all those who are his?

His grace is that determined. He will not lose interest in you if you fall short in your exams; he will not look askance at you if you lose your job; he will not deny you if you get ill, suffer loss, if life doesn't work out for you in the way that you had hoped. His astonishing grace invites you to come not on the basis of your achievements, but of his kindness. The hard knocks that you have had do not disqualify you. Neither do the high achievements! Let's humbly remember that it is his grace that makes the difference, not our seasons of joy or sorrow.

He who said 'Father, forgive them' on the cross is willing to receive and welcome even you and I who have insulted his grace, if only we will now accept his invitation to repent and believe the good news. For there is a sting in the tail.

The consequence we face (v. 24)

This is not a decision without consequences. You can enjoy his lavish generosity, but Jesus says at the end of the parable, 'not one of those invited will get a taste of my banquet.' Those who turned him down are not forgotten, but they are outside. And just as Andrew Thompson talked about last week, those who may have once felt privilege only feel the dreadful exclusion of being unreconciled to the master; there is the regret of never having come.

It stands in stark contrast to those who enjoy the fullness, company, safety and richness of being part of the banquet. To have communion with God, come and accept his offer of forgiveness from sin and put aside that which would keep you apart from him. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation, Peter said on the Day of Pentecost, and I urge you to do so now also. Jesus calls us to come and enjoy not only what he provides, but him himself, sharing one with another in this marvellous community of God's saved people, living with the God who will one day wipe away every tear from our eyes. To know God and to be known by him; this is the communion we celebrate.

Credits

Some material from Ken Bailey and Stuart Olyott (1993)