

The Great Banquet

Luke 14:15-24

How would you answer someone who says, “I hear what you say about Jesus, who he is and all that he has done on the cross to make forgiveness and fellowship with God possible, but I’m going to wait until just before I die to become a Christian?”

There are two main ways of responding.

The **first way** is to communicate the truth that none of us knows when we will meet our Maker.

We may plan and plot. We may survey and scheme. But none of us knows when the final whistle will blow for our time on earth.

It is good to point out the fragility of our existence and the stark reality that even though we aspire to be in control, the truth is that we are in control of very little, and definitely not the day of our departure.

However, we must also be aware of the danger of merely speaking about the uncertainty of our divine encounter.

It’s the mistaken belief that knowing God now isn’t that great, and so the longer we can put off surrender to Jesus the better. It’s the view that says we certainly don’t want to experience God’s judgement forever in hell but let’s maximise our pleasure first before we abandon the prospect of joy.

We should not buy into that false narrative about knowing God. Indeed, we should fight against it and expose the truth.

Just imagine what would happen **if a soldier who was being held prisoner by the enemy in disgusting and inhumane conditions** was suddenly faced with a group of special forces from his own country. Can you imagine him asking them to come back a few months later because he'd like to stay in captivity for longer?

Anyone who delays becoming a Christian would be like such a prisoner of war. God is not the cosmic kill-joy in the sky. No, he is the God of infinite joy and he wants the best for us.

The culture around us so often portrays a pleasure filled life to be as far away from God as possible, when we are in charge and doing what we like. However, the truth is very different. We have been made to need God and when Jesus is at the centre of our existence, life works as it was intended.

Here's the **second way** to answer someone who wants to delay commitment to Jesus until the last minute: we seek to persuade them of the goodness of God and everything that flows from that reality.

The parable before us today in **Luke chapter 14** is a great help as we seek an accurate picture of what it's like to follow Jesus.

At first glance this parable seems to be exclusively about a future experience of life in heaven. **Luke chapter 14** certainly includes heaven, however, it is **first** about a relationship with God that can be enjoyed now and which will last forever.

This way of living won't be the most **comfortable** or **convenient** or least **criticised**, however, following Jesus is what we were made for!

I want to highlight two points from **Luke chapter 14**.

- Following Jesus is something not to be missed (Vs 15-17)
- Following Jesus is something that can be missed (Vs 18-24)

First, following Jesus is something not to be missed (Vs 15-17)

The occasion for Jesus' story is a very **awkward dinner party**.

We're told in **verse 1** that on a particular Sabbath day, Jesus is invited to feast at the house of a prominent Pharisee. But not because they like him or because they are keen to listen to his wisdom. No, he is there to be trapped by his words and actions.

It soon becomes apparent that Jesus hasn't read any books on **polite dinner party etiquette** because he begins to say a number of things that upset pretty much everyone in the room.

Normally in these situations of awkward silences one brave soul decides to end the miserable quietness.

Look at verse 15. Read verses 15

Jesus has just mentioned the resurrection of the righteous at the end of his latest rebuke at the dinner party. He is referring to the ultimate end of the age when he will return and usher in a new phase of human existence.

This is when a pious dinner guest responds, "Absolutely Jesus what a day that will be. That's the feast you really want to be part of."

In response, Jesus tells his dramatic story.

Look at verse 16. **Read verses 16 and 17.**

The Old Testament gave the people of God hope that one day their Messiah would arrive. When he did, life would change for the better.

The Old Testament is full of **anticipation** and **waiting**.

In Jesus' parable there is a key piece of information that is easily missed but is a complete game changer.

He says the banquet is now ready!

It's not still being prepared or it will be ready in a few years but right now, **everything is ready**. This means it's time for the guests to come and enjoy the party!

This is hugely significant!

First, it reminds us of the importance of Jesus.

His arrival means the wait is over.

He really is the one **predicted, promised** and **pictured** in the first half of the Bible.

This makes sense because:

- Jesus is the eternal Son of God. He is the final and full revelation of who God is.
- Jesus' death and resurrection is the key salvation moment in human history.

Given who Jesus is and what he has done, no wonder the feast is now ready!

Second, this parable teaches us about the nature of salvation.

Salvation is presented as someone throwing a great party for many guests.

It's about **relationship** and **joy**.

It's available now. Yes heaven will be better but eternal life begins now!

Knowing God is more like **a feast than a funeral**

Two implications of that truth.

Let's not wait until the end until we decide to follow Jesus. The feast is here.

As we follow Jesus, let's remember the character of God when his ways are out of sync with your preferences or the cultural mood.

The party is not just for you and God.

Other people are invited. It's a corporate experience.

We are plagued by individualism in the West.

It's not just about you and Jesus. It's about us and Jesus.

Let's not miss out on the joy of our corporate experience as we gather to worship Jesus.

FOMO - the fear of missing out. Let FOMO drive us to church!

There are many things in life that we'd prefer to miss but following Jesus isn't one of them.

We were made to know God. We can know him through Jesus. That is available now.

Let's make sure we come to the party!

Second, following Jesus is something that can be missed (Vs 18-24)

This brings us to the responses to the generous invitation.

Look at verse 18. **Read verses 18-20.**

In Jesus' story these are not legitimate reasons not to go to the party, they are feeble excuses. They are different ways of politely saying no.

Of course there are many people who do value **property, career** and **human relationships** as much more important than finding out the truth about Jesus.

However, in Jesus' story these are just the presenting excuses. The real reason is that they just didn't want to go.

Let's pay careful attention to the reaction of the host when he is told the news..

Verse 21. **Read verses 21 to 24.**

First, the host gets **angry**. No wonder. This is deeply offensive!

We need to recover the double offence we cause to God. One for our original rejection. Then our second rejection of his gospel rescue!

Second, people miss out on the banquet.

To be invited is not good enough. We need to accept.

Whatever reason or excuse is made, whether the person focuses instead on property, work or relationships – we're told that everyone who refuses to come to Jesus will miss out on a relationship with God forever.

This life is the opportunity we have to respond. No second chances after death.

There is no guarantee that you'll be able to in the years to come.

Third, the master wants lots of people to experience the feast so he sends his servants out to keep on inviting people.

As Christians we are both the guests at the feast and those sent to invite others.

Notice that we are told to go.

Not wait and see who comes but go and find as many people as we can. Lord help us to do this.

As we go, let's get our expectations right. It will be **an emotional rollercoaster**. Not everyone will say yes. Let's not give up.

Notice who is to be invited to the feast. The poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. All types.

Messy Church. Every church is messy.

People have messy lives. The gospel will save people. Don't be downcast or despondent.

People will bring their messy lives with them. This will mean that our church will be **less comfortable** and **more challenging**. However it will be beautifully diverse and Jesus will get more honour.

Did you notice that the servants sometimes needs to **compel** people to come to the feast?

This doesn't mean we are to drag people kicking and screaming to somewhere they don't want to go. But to persuade people that the feast really is for them and they are welcome.

- Am I too bad?
- Am I too good?

We all need Jesus. The good news is that Jesus offers himself to everyone.

The only question is, will we accept the invitation?

When we have, let's pray for God's help to share the invitation with as many people as we can.

Let's pray.

