

# Luke 14:1-24

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[ 0 : 00 ] And if you have a Bible, can I invite you to turn to that passage that we read earlier, Luke chapter 14. It turns out that in this passage in Luke 14, Jesus Christ has a lot to say about parties and banquets, doesn't he?

Jesus Christ gets to the heart of a great function, of a great get-together, of brilliant hosting and of superb guest etiquette.

The Telegraph have done a list of do's and don'ts, things to not do at a party. They say do bring a bottle, but don't spend less than a tenner.

Do send a postcard to say thank you to the host, don't send an email. Do have a playlist, now this is my favourite, do have a playlist ready for early hours in the morning dancing in the kitchen, but don't turf your neighbours out at midnight.

It's safe to say that I've failed on every single one of the Telegraph's do's and don'ts list. But the question is not as trivial as it sounds. What really is at the heart of a great party?

[ 1 : 41 ] Does your answer match Jesus' answer? This question matters because if you notice where this passage is heading, look at verse 24 of Luke 14.

Jesus breaks off from telling a parable here and he speaks to a group. The U is plural here. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.

This whole section is teaching us something about Jesus Christ who is the host. The host of a banquet. An eternal banquet to be held at the end of time.

And so does your idea of a great banquet match with his idea of a great banquet? You might be invited to his banquet. But actually deep down you might not even want to be there.

What he has for us I think this morning is quite cutting. He exposes our hearts when it comes to service and giving and sharing with one another in banquets.

[ 2 : 56 ] Because there is a way of serving one another that lies in the darkness of the Pharisees' hearts. Where serving and being served at a banquet for them has a distinctly unheavenly agenda.

And to do service like the Pharisees will mean never wanting to enjoy a banquet like Jesus enjoys it. So he asks us in these three parables or stories some searching questions.

So the first thing, at the party, what makes a great party when you're a guest? What makes a great party when you're a guest? Now if you look at the beginning of chapter 14, we're told the setting, aren't we?

One Sabbath he went to dine, Jesus to dine at the house of the ruler of the Pharisees. They were watching him carefully. It's a banquet laid on by a Pharisee, one of the religious elite.

Now guests love different things about parties, don't they? Conversation, some will love that, some will just hate that. Loud music, some will hate that and some will absolutely love that.

[ 4 : 16 ] And in the first parable, Jesus tells the group at this party in verse 7 to 11, Jesus puts his finger on what the Pharisees love about being guests at their party, doesn't he?

What makes a great party for them? Well it's not particularly the food, is it, or the conversation. Really it's the status of it all.

The first parable describes the social conventions of the day, where the banquet was an opportunity to climb the social ladder. Guests finding the seats of honour, the sort of thing you might see on *Pride and Prejudice*.

And the enjoyment of the banquet is purely in the pride of being in the highest seats of honour at the banquet. Now what you'd have at these kind of first century banquets would be ranked seats, couches with different status attached to them.

And where you sat would send a message about who you were. Sitting in the high-ranked couches would say to people, I'm important. I matter.

[ 5 : 33 ] I'm special. Love me. Honour me. That's what they love about the banquet, isn't it? Notice they won't wait, will they? They won't wait for the host to give them honour.

Jesus says there is great honour from God for those who wait for it, in verse 11. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted in the end. But they assume that that honour is theirs already. And they must sit themselves down in the places of honour now.

Or the feast really isn't up to much at all. They won't wait for God to exalt them. The enjoyment for them is in the pride of it.

Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher, describes the heart of a man who cannot enjoy anything in life unless he is esteemed in the enjoyment of it.

[ 6 : 41 ] Blaise Pascal is maybe not the kind of guy you'd want to hang around with.

He's quite a cynical fella, really. I don't know if you agree with what he's saying there. He's saying, in other words, that the enjoyment of anything is in the pride of it. And that pride runs so deeply in us that some people can be joyful even with a hard life provided that people talk about them.

Provided that they are distinguished for that suffering. Paul warns the Colossians about Christians who do that. who insist on something called asceticism.

A kind of brutal self-imposed lifestyle. Denying the body pleasure. Bringing suffering on yourselves. Making yourself look miserable.

Living a hard life. Purely for the admiration of others. The enjoyment was the pride of it for them.

And it's what Jesus says lies at the heart of the scribes and the Pharisees, isn't it?

[ 8 : 08 ] It's just not so subtle with them. Later in Luke, he says that they love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at feasts.

They enjoy their religion because of the pride of it. They enjoy their feasts because of the pride of it. And perhaps we can feel Jesus speaking to us here in the dark places in our own hearts. Where the enjoyment of anything in life is just in the pride of it.

The enjoyment of good grades is in the pride of it. The enjoyment of my car or my house is what other people think of me and say about me. Everything is enjoyed with the proviso that we can get someone else to admire what we're enjoying.

I wonder where that's the whole selfie thing comes from. I don't know. The enjoyment of being at the party is in being admired and we won't wait for God's exaltation at the end of time.

[ 9 : 17 ] We need it now in this life to enjoy this life. And dare we say it, the enjoyment of Christianity itself is in the pride of it too.

The church is a taste of that heavenly banquet that Jesus is preparing for his people, isn't it? It's like the kind of warm-up do.

It's like the hors d'oeuvres, isn't it? On earth before the eternal banquet in heaven. So what makes this party good for you?

Does your enjoyment of church and of the Christian life depend on the pride you get from it? Where my enjoyment of the Christian life is in some honour that I get from others.

When it brings me dishonour and when I have to sit in the lowest seat in society, actually all the value of my faith is suddenly empty and lost.

[ 10 : 20 ] It's not worth being at the party unless I can be honoured. And our earthly expectations of banquets and things like this spill out into our heavenly expectations.

We will come to the gates of heaven in the same way that we come to the church. Coming perhaps with a strange sense of entitlement that God owes me honour.

Where the enjoyment of being a Christian is in the pride of being a Presbyterian church. You owe us honour for this, Lord.

We're a reformed church, doctrinally. Give us the honour, Lord. We're not like those other churches who don't have two services on a Sunday.

Let us sit in the high seats of honour, Lord. We assume, Lord, that the honour is for us. And the enjoyment of it all is simply in the pride of it.

[ 11 : 25 ] The enjoyment maybe of even being elect, of being one of God's chosen people, is actually in the feeling of being elite.

You wonder sometimes with some conservative Christians, that the enjoyment of it is purely in being more conservative than everyone else.

The enjoyment is in the honour we get from others that we confer on ourselves, sitting in the seats of honour. The enjoyment is in winning the argument.

The enjoyment is in being more orthodox. The enjoyment is in having the theological upper hand. And the question is, if we didn't have any of that, when people dishonour us, would we enjoy this party less?

If the enjoyment of it is just in the pride of it. Would we be willing, with Jesus, in our Christianity, to do verse 10?

[12:33] Just look there. When you're invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, friend, move up higher. If the one condition of our Christianity, of this party, was dishonour, being hated by others, sitting in the lowest places in society, associating with the lowest people in society, would we still enjoy the party?

If we had to gather up the crumbs under God's table, would we enjoy it less? To have to wait for God to say to me, friend, move up higher.

A good guest, it turns out, as Jesus says in his banquet, knows how to wait. He knows how to wait for God to say, friend, move up higher. But can we wait for that in this life?

Or is the enjoyment of all of this, just in the pride we get from it? What makes a great party for the guests? Second, what makes a great party for the host?

We've got a copy of Nigella Lawson's domestic goddess. In fact, we've got a whole bookshelf of Nigella Lawson. If you don't know who Nigella Lawson is, she is like the, I don't know, she's like the one who tells you how to run your dinner parties in the best way.

[14:06] And she writes this in her introduction. As the host, we don't want to feel stressed and overstretched, but like a domestic goddess, trailing nutmeggy fumes of baking in our longuous wake.

What does longuous even mean? It's an idealistic vision, isn't it, of the perfect host, the domestic goddess, or the domestic God. But as Mary Berry said, it's easier to impress someone than to please someone.

That's so true. Verses 12 to 14, the second story, the second section of Jesus' speaking, he changes his audience, doesn't he?

Before he was speaking to the guests who chose the places of honour, but now he speaks to the host who chooses the guests of honour. It's the host's turn to answer that question, what makes a great party for you?

And the clue to his enjoyment is there in verses 12 and 13, isn't it? You just flick over the page. He said to the man who'd invited him, when you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

[15:33] But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. Now just realise how shocking what Jesus is saying there at this party. In Greco-Roman culture at this time, banquets were not just the excuse for a bit of fun.

They were a way of getting on in life. The guest list was a sign of your status in society. It was a way of plugging you in to society.

The position that you have is to do with the people that you have in your parties. So to get on in this life, to get on in this world, to get on in this time, you must choose your guests carefully and you must serve selectively.

So to be known as the host of a banquet full of blind people or of people who are lower down on the social scale, it would just be suicide socially.

Jesus' command here to invite the crippled, the blind and the lame, it's just a bad life choice, the host is thinking. Don't you know, Jesus, that if you want to make it in this life, you need to know the good and the great.

[16:56] You need to be respected and regarded. But again, notice the motivation for this outlandish hosting advice from Jesus.

Verse 14. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. Like the wise guest, the wise host also needs to learn to wait.

To wait for the honour that God will confer on him. But when we choose our guests carefully, when we start doing selective serving of one another, when we serve the moneyed or the smart or the low maintenance or the socially able, that actually is a sign that we cannot wait.

that we won't wait for God's rewards. But we are like this host. When the honour must be now. Of that urge to serve those who we know can love us back.

We need rewards from others now when we do that. And when there is no prospect of rewards and blessing from God in the future, if that's just not on our radar, then things become very tight and stunted, don't they, in our service now.

[ 18 : 26 ] We start to do selective serving and selective hosting. And I think this is why many of us refuse to accept help from one another and service from one another.

Maybe some of us need to learn to just take more responsibility for ourselves. ourselves. But I suspect many of us are shamed by having to ask somebody, I need you.

I can't cope. Because we think in the same mindset of the host and the guests in these stories, that if we ask for that, it puts us in somebody else's debt and I will have to repay them.

and our earthly expectations and our earthly ways of doing things expose our heavenly expectations where we start to think of the Lord Jesus Christ in the same way too.

We're not actually sure whether God is a giver at all. we see him rather as a taker. Imagine the story of a little girl who wakes up on Christmas Day and it should be a really exciting day, shouldn't it?

[ 19 : 46 ] But she is dreading it because she knows her parents are going to give her at least one present for Christmas. Christmas. She goes downstairs, there's a Christmas cake, there are piles of presents, many of them with her name on them.

There are decorations, there's the smell of mulled wine and turkey in the oven and her family are waiting in the kitchen with smoked salmon, scrambled eggs and crispy bacon.

She looks sad though and finally she breaks the awkward silence. Mum, Dad, thank you for the presents, thank you for the breakfast, thank you for Christmas Day, so how much do I owe you?

It's often how we think of God, isn't it? We think of him as the taking God and not the giving God. We haven't realised how much he has given to us today and we have not learnt to wait for all that he will give us.

in the end. We ask God, how much do I owe you? And when we think God runs his church like that, we will return the favour to him and to each other.

[ 21 : 12 ] When serving Jesus is done just to be good enough for him, and serving one another is about impressing one another.

Serving Jesus is about getting something from him. And serving one another is about putting people in our debt, building up favours for ourselves.

When serving Jesus is a case of I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine, Lord. And we express that in different ways, don't we? We express that hopefully, Lord, I've done so much for you, so surely you are going to give me this thing that I want.

We express it fearfully, I should have done those things for you, Lord, and so I'm expecting an awful time.

We express that bitterly, I did all of those things for you, Lord, and you have not done this for me that I wanted. We think he is like us, don't we?

[ 22 : 25 ] That he is a host who serves selectively, a host who chooses his guests carefully so that he can climb up some kind of pride ladder, associating only with the great and the good.

And we imagine him like that. And when we imagine him like that, we become like that too. We become tight, we become selective servers. But the question we've got to ask is, is he really like that?

Is that true about him? So thirdly and lastly, what makes a great party for Jesus Christ? What makes a great party for Jesus Christ?

Jesus tells a parable in verses 15 to 24. 24. And we're not going to go through it in great detail now. But it's a parable that brings some of the themes of the first two sections together.

It's the story, isn't it, of a host who invites some guests of honour to his party, but in the end he has to fill his banquet hall to invite the lowest of society, the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.

[ 23 : 36 ] And the key thing to notice about this parable is that those who refuse the invite, refuse the invitation simply because they don't want it.

It's just not their idea of a great party. So they come up with excuses, don't they? One, something about property, the other one, oxen, the other one's sorting his wedding out.

thanks but no thanks, Jesus. They are effectively saying to the host, aren't they, that I've got the invitation but the party just wouldn't be worth my while.

I've got better things to do. On the social calendar, the way that we do parties, Mr. Host, is that we need to get something out of it now.

And on the social calendar, this party is not important to me now. And all three of them vote with their feet, don't they? It seems like this host is no longer socially acceptable.

[ 24 : 45 ] His seats of honour are not good enough for them now. They've got better things to do now. Associating with this host will mean dishonour rather than honour now.

Because the enjoyment of it maybe is in the pride of it and nothing more. And this is the problem for so many who get an invitation to Jesus' banquet that our ideas of a great party don't match his. They have decided to receive Jesus' gifts in this life but think of him as a bore. They see him as socially unacceptable, as an oddball in this world.

world. He is no way to climb the ladder in this world now. He is no way to find honour now. And they won't wait for honour that is going to come later.

And so life on earth as they see it, although it is not perfect, is enough. Eternal life at Jesus' banquet, they know, without even tasting it, wouldn't please them.

[ 25 : 58 ] And this is the whole point of the three banquets, that those who should be at the banquet are those who enter in simply because they want it. They want to.

And this is how Jesus runs his banquet, with guests who want him and the honour that he will give to his guests in the end.

To sit in the low seats now is not a problem. With a host who invites those who have nothing to give him in return.

It's not an I'll scratch you back and I'll scratch your back and I'll scratch my back, I'll scratch your back thing. But a great party for Jesus is filled with people who love it simply because they're there. And they would be happy to eat the crumbs under the table. And he is a great host. And his parties are so great because he expects no payment.

[ 27 : 05 ] The story goes of Captain Jerry Lind and navigator Major David Maguire who'd been on a routine training flight near a base in Oxfordshire.

As they came back to base though, their plane suffered a massive hydraulics failure. And they had very little control. The operations tower was telling them over the radio to eject.

But they knew that ejecting would mean crashing the plane into a nearby village. So Captain Lind and Major Maguire chose to stay at the controls to steer the plane clear of the village.

They just managed to avoid it. But by that point it was too late to eject. And they were both killed in the crash. Now it wasn't their fault that the plane had broken, was it?

And they didn't owe those people anything. They could have ejected. They paid with their lives without expecting any payment in return.

[ 28 : 16 ] And this is what Jesus loves about hosting at his banquet. The joy he gets from serving the lowest, from serving sinners who cannot repay him, and who wait for God's reward.

Of being able to invite the worst of sinners to his banquet, despite the dishonour they might bring to him, and the associations he has with them, and of being willing to call people like that my brothers and my sisters.

Because he says, I can wait for the honour that is due to me. I can wait for God's exaltation, for God's reward.

Now we're almost finished, but I just want you to see that this part of Luke's gospel is in a big middle section where Jesus journeys towards Jerusalem.

And we call this the travel narrative section of Luke's gospel. And the journey starts back in the end of chapter nine. Please turn there. Chapter nine verse 51.

[ 29 : 32 ] And here's the beginning of the journey. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. So he's on his way to Jerusalem, isn't he?

And this is the journey to Jerusalem. But I've only just seen this until recently, and I can't believe I've missed this until now. the journey to Jerusalem, Jerusalem is actually only a stop off.

It's kind of like he's visiting Jerusalem, but that's not the destination that he's heading for. Look at that verse again. When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

He goes to Jerusalem, and yet his journey is to heaven, isn't it, in his ascension.

So he goes to Jerusalem to be killed by those who should give him honour, because he knows heaven is coming. He goes to Jerusalem to associate himself with the lowest in society, upon a cross.

[ 30 : 48 ] and he says, I can wait for heaven, for my exaltation there. He goes to Jerusalem to be spat on, saying, I can wait.

He goes to Jerusalem to be slapped, saying, I can wait. He goes there to face the ultimate dishonour upon the cross, knowing that he can wait.

He takes the lowest seat, and dies a sinner's death, looking to heaven, looking for the reward that the father will give him. Saying all along, I can wait, I can wait.

For any true king, if Jerusalem was his final destination, his banquet would have the great and the good there, wouldn't it? it would have to be sumptuous, it would be with the elite of society, his last meal, something really special, maybe finish it off with a great speech, and as much honour as possible in that moment, before he died, with a lavish funeral, and accolades from the best in the temple.

But he wasn't looking to Jerusalem, he was looking beyond that, wasn't he? And he could wait for the rewards and the exaltation that would come.

[ 32 : 20 ] And as we come to this humble meal, and as we are at this humble party of the church, we need to align our expectations and our desires of what a great party is, with what Jesus says a great party is.

to be served by a man who was rejected and thought of a bore and is still hated today, and to eat with him and associate with him in the lowest places in society.

But if we will come and sit with Jesus and serve, not selectively, but serving the lowest, knowing that we can wait for the exaltation that we will have when Jesus returns.

As we eat this meal this morning, we will enjoy this banquet and we will hear those words, Jesus saying to us, friend, move up higher.

As we eat this meal together and as we worship God in the church, and as we live the Christian life, and as we stand for the truth in our workplaces, in our homes, in our families, no one will think we are honoured, will they?

[ 33 : 49 ] No one will think we are special. A little piece of bread and some wine, no one will say that's what I call a great party. But the enjoyment of this meal is not in the pride of it now, but in simply being here with Jesus, sitting with him, and waiting for him to say, friend, move up higher in the end.

And that will be hard, won't it, in our lives, in our everyday lives. But taste this meal now and know, and hear our host saying, it is worth the wait.

those who exalt themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves following Christ will be exalted. Let's pray together.