

# Luke 14:12-24

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[ 0 : 00 ] I can still remember the military operation that my wife led 18 months ago for our wedding reception. The first stage was getting the invitations printed and sent out to all the guests.

And if you've ever been involved with planning a wedding reception, then getting people to reply in time is always a bit of a challenge. But there were very awkward moments when some who you thought were definitely coming to the party would cancel at the last minute.

One particular cousin on Emma's side of the family, I regret to say, had to pull out on the day to play a football game. It was a controversial excuse and it sent a bit of a ripple through the family.

It all gets so political, doesn't it? These sort of things. But you know, it made the point that receiving an invitation is a world away from actually accepting it and going to the party to enjoy the feast.

You can receive the invitation, but sadly, never accept it and taste the banquet itself. Now that is the nub of Jesus teaching in these verses that Steve read for us in Luke 14.

[ 1 : 24 ] And the climax is verse 24, if you look down there again. Jesus speaking, I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.

Now as Jesus says that, we presume he is not joking. And he is not bluffing. But it is a warning about the people who receive an invitation from Jesus, but sadly and tragically don't accept it and somehow refuse to feast with him and enjoy his company forever at his great and glorious banquet. Now if you were here last week, don't worry if you weren't. But if you were, you will remember that we have seen Jesus in Luke chapter 14, invited in verse 1 to the party of a well respected religious leader.

But it has been a highly provocative evening. He has brought up the one subject that nobody wants to talk about at a party. It is the question of what happens to you when you die.

And he addresses the host in verses 12 to 14. Don't invite those who you know can pay you back. But invite the lame and the poor and the blind. Because the end of verse 14, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

[ 2 : 52 ] And you know what you do today, now, with me, will have a better day. And you see what Jesus is doing in the here and now of this party. He wants to bring their focus on the eternal destiny of each of the guests.

Don't forget, he says, my party, my banquet is coming at the end of history, at the resurrection of the just.

And you know what you do today, now, with me, will have a bearing on where you are then, on that day.

Now if you can imagine being at this party, it's an incredibly awkward moment, isn't it? As Jesus confronts the host, as he forces the subject of eternity on the guests.

As you can imagine the uncomfortable silence at this party. So in our section this afternoon, from verse 15, we see that somebody at the party pipes up here and interrupts Jesus.

[ 3 : 55 ] And he attempts to cool the atmosphere. So just look at verse 15 again. When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, Blessed is everyone who eats bread in the kingdom of God.

So here is this guest, and he gets this statement in, doesn't he, to the conversation. Imagine the awkwardness of the moment. I hope you can see that what he's trying to do here is to soften Jesus' teaching on eternity.

He's a savvy party goer, isn't he? He's a socialite. He wants things to go back to the way they were. And you know, he is like many of us. Naturally, we want to diffuse Jesus' warnings about eternity, don't we?

Naturally, we don't want to hear about them. We just want to get on with the party of life. But firstly, this afternoon, this statement that this party goer makes, it reveals our false sentimentality about heaven.

Our false sentimentality about heaven. Verse 15, blessed is everyone who eats bread in the kingdom of God.

[ 5 : 14 ] It's a positive statement, isn't it? In an uncomfortable atmosphere. It's an all-inclusive statement about heaven.

But on closer inspection, it's a statement based purely on popular sentimentality. It's the kind of sentimentality that people have at funerals, isn't it?

The idea that heaven exists somewhere out there. That it's a good place. Blessed is everyone that eats bread there. But the feeling generally is that everyone will make it to heaven.

Blessed is everyone who eats there. So, you know, down the road at Mortlake Crematorium, I reckon that at the end of just about every funeral there, the kind of comments that are being made about the deceased are things like, they've gone to a better place.

And they're with the angels now. Blessed is everyone who eats bread in the kingdom of God. Do you see the gist? We all agree with you, Jesus, here at this party.

[ 6 : 29 ] Just shut up. Won't it be great, Jesus? We're positive about heaven, Jesus. But you see, Jesus has to strip off our sentimental thinking about our eternal destiny.

We have to realise that there's a world of difference between being invited to Jesus' banquet and actually accepting his invitation to enjoy it.

Heaven is a place that happens to most of us somewhere down the line. We don't need to think about it now. Because actually all you've got to do is die quietly without murdering somebody or something serious.

But no, that is just sentimentalism. That's true. This guy speaks up because it's so difficult for us, isn't it, to really engage with what Jesus says about our eternity.

It's so painful for us to really think about our eternity, isn't it? So actually we'd rather just sentimentalise it.

[ 7 : 32 ] So you see, Jesus in response to this man gives this parable, doesn't he, which fills the bulk of this passage in 16 to 23. It's a parable, it's a story about a host who decides to hold a banquet rather aptly.

So look at verse 17 with me if you will. He sends out his servant to say to those who've been invited, come for everything is now ready.

But there's a twist, isn't there, in verse 18. Each of them in turn began to make excuses. So you see, our sentimentality about heaven is coupled with our excuses about heaven.

That's our second point this afternoon, our excuses about heaven. So in the parable we see three guests, don't we? And each of them duck out of the banquet at the last minute.

They've each got different excuses. So guest one in verse 18 there, I've bought a field and I must go and see it, please excuse me. Guest two in verse 19, I've bought five yoke of oxen.

[ 8 : 51 ] I'm told that the modern day equivalent of that is about 300,000 pounds worth of tractor. And I'm going to examine them, please excuse me. And guest three in verse 20, I've married a wife and therefore cannot come.

So what can we say about these excuses? Well, some people say that they're bad excuses. I don't know if that's the point of the parable.

I think what we can say though, is that they all have one thing in common. They're all noticeably very normal things. Ordinary parts of human life, aren't they?

Buying fields, buying property, investing in oxen, tractors, making money, marrying, having families. It's just the kind of stuff that fills everyday life for everyday people, isn't it?

But you see, it's the ordinariness of the excuses that is precisely why it's so sad that they make these cancellations.

[ 10 : 02 ] It's when the ordinary stuff of life just fills your time to the point that going to a banquet with Jesus just keeps getting put off again and again and again.

It's the age old problem, isn't it? That the urgent is always the enemy of the most important things in life. Thinking about eternity gets put off with the everyday stuff of life now.

Now just on this thought, would you flick over to Luke chapter 17, it's just a couple of pages ahead, to verse 26. Luke chapter 17, verse 26.

Jesus is talking about the day when his banquet will begin at the end of history. Verse 26. Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage until the day when Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all.

[11:12] You see, it's not what we expect. When Jesus is ready to serve his banquet, there won't be apocalyptic fireworks, brimstone and ashes.

There won't be dragons being slain all over the place. No. Life will look extremely normal and ordinary. People will be having parties, marrying and being given in marriage, making investments, buying oxen, doing the everyday stuff of life.

But you see, it's at that moment when Jesus will appear and say, Come, my banquet is now ready. The urgent things of life have a tendency, don't they, to keep us from the important things.

The important thing of accepting Jesus' invitation. You know, as you think about this parable, it is amazing actually that what it suggests about heaven, what it suggests is that all you have to do to be at Jesus' banquet is to want to be there.

Ultimately, we have to want it more than all of life's stuff. All we have to do is to want to be there and not keep putting Jesus off.

[12:39] So our sentimentality about heaven, our excuses about heaven, but thirdly and lastly, his persistent generosity with heaven.

You see, Jesus is a generous and persistent host. So if you look at verse 21, from there to the end of verse 24, there are four whole verses dedicated just to the reaction of the host in the parable to these cancellations.

And I think what Jesus wants to give us is a picture of his inner mind as he invites people to his banquet.

So if you look at verse 21, if you look halfway through that verse, Jesus says, The master of the house became angry.

He becomes angry. Now at this point, it's worth knowing a thing or two about ancient Eastern party etiquette, because it's slightly different from the way modern Westerners like to do things.

[13:50] So in Jesus' day, there would have been two stages to the invitation process. Stage one was a bit like our RSVP stage. But after that, when people make their responses, the numbers would be set and the meal would be prepared straight away.

And then stage two is just as the food is about to go on the table and it's steaming and piping hot, the servant would be sent out to say, come, for everything is now ready.

But you see, it's at that stage where we see these guests making their excuses. So rude, isn't it? What makes the host so angry is not actually the refusal per se, but it's that there had already been an indication in stage one that the guests were in fact coming.

That's what makes it so infuriating. And you see why this fits with the context, because Jesus speaks here, doesn't he, at this party of Pharisees to people here who are well-respected religious folk, who show signs of saying yes to Jesus.

But you see, the urgent things of life are taking precedent in their hearts. So, I don't know if the royal baby is going to be christened, probably it will be, but imagine the christening party of royal baby George.

[15:22] Wills and Kate send the invites out, don't they? And Posh and Beck say they're coming. But when the day finally comes, Posh phones up to say, actually we're very sorry, but my stylist is coming around at 2.30, and Beck's is out playing football with Rooney.

You see, it's the thin veneer of religion at this party, isn't it? Being peeled off again. Those who receive an invitation make an indication that they're coming, but they stick the invitation on the fridge and don't show up.

That's what makes Jesus angry. But you see, as we close, and I really want us to go away with this this afternoon, just see how persistent Jesus is at keeping on welcoming and inviting.

In those verses, twice, the master says, go out to the streets and lanes. Bring in the lame, the poor and the crippled.

Go out to the highways and the hedges. And, verse 23, compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.

[16:43] Jesus is not happy, he is not satisfied until his banquet is full to the rafters. Until his feast is being enjoyed by as many people as possible, compelling us to come to his banquet.

And who are those people who end up there in the end? Well, this party in Luke chapter 14, it ends in the same way that it begins, doesn't it?

Back in verse 4. Do you remember, Jesus heals a poor, lame outsider with a skin disease. You see, Jesus' great banquet is for the lame, it is for the vulnerable, for the poor, the crippled, for weak sinners, who get it wrong, who mess up.

His banquet is for you and for me. Sentimentality about eternity, excuses about it, but Jesus is a persistent and generous host.

And he says, come. He wants it full of people. For the banquet is ready. And it's for you. But only if you want it.

[ 18 : 08 ] Let's pray as we do.