

# The Party at the End of the Universe

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[ 0 : 00 ] Before we do that shall we pray. Let's pray. Lord we thank you for something to sing about. We thank you that there is hope, hope in our lives and hope even at the end when we die.

We thank you Lord that there is something to look forward to. Beyond 70 years maybe 80. We thank you that all of this can be found in your word. We pray that you would help us to understand it, remember it, live it. In Jesus name, Amen.

Have you ever had that experience when you come back to work or to school after the weekend and you find that everybody else has been at an event or a party or something and you weren't invited?

Have you ever had that? Sometimes nobody even told you about it. So the first you hear about it is when you get into school or work the next morning.

That moment is pretty crushing isn't it? I remember a few of those when I was a kid. And it's a little bit of an example of FOMO. Do you know what FOMO is? Fear of missing out.

[ 1 : 15 ] That's a recent acronym isn't it? But actually it's a very human thing. I think we've always had it with us. Kind of a lingering sense that there's something more important going on and we aren't part of it.

We've missed it. So there's FOMO to do with like whatever birthday party it was at the weekend.

But there's something bigger than that which I think we all sit with. A kind of a cosmic fear of missing out. I don't know if you recognise the book that I just put down here. It's a book by Douglas Adams.

He wrote a popular series of science fiction books called A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. And my theory is that Douglas Adams had FOMO on some level. Because the second book that he wrote in the series is called The Restaurant at the End of the Universe.

Probably too small to see there but you can look it up later. The Restaurant at the End of the Universe. Now Douglas Adams was an atheist so he didn't believe in heaven or hell. And yet when he opens up his imaginary world and starts writing about it, somehow he still finds himself at the restaurant at the end of the universe.

[ 2 : 27 ] Where you can order whatever you want and you sit around the table with your friends. Cosmic FOMO. Now how can we get to the place where we are okay with being left out of things down here?

How can we get to the place where that cosmic fear of missing out actually is sorted? Because it's going to happen, isn't it, at some point. We're going to get left out of something.

Either because we're off somewhere else doing something good. Or potentially because we're off somewhere else doing something bad. The wrong thing. And we'll miss the chance to be involved. So how can we sort that out?

What is going to help us not miss the most important thing that there is? The Bible passage that John kindly read out for us today tells us that the universe ends with a party.

And actually it tells us how to make sure that we don't miss out on that party. And it tells us that there's someone who's willing to move heaven and earth. Make any sacrifice to ensure that we will be at that party if we trust him.

[ 3 : 45 ] And that's what Jesus wants us to know today. In a sentence. There's a party at my house at the end of the universe. And nothing will stop me making sure that my house is full.

So don't miss out. Say that one more time. There's a party at my house at the end of the universe. And nothing is going to stop me making sure that my house is full.

So don't miss out. Let's have a look at the passage, shall we? Verse 15. When one of those at the table with him heard this.

Now we've got to cast our minds back a couple of weeks. Jesus is sitting at the table where he's been invited by one of the leaders, social leaders of the Jews. And he's already spoken to that group called the Pharisees. And he's spoken to the guests about the way that they were picking seats.

And he's spoken to his host. We're still at that table. And now this man speaks up. And what does he say? He said to Jesus. Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.

[ 4 : 50 ] Sounds really good, doesn't it? Makes you sound quite holy. Blessed are those who will eat at the feast at the end of the kingdom of God. And it's very hard to disagree with, isn't it?

Just like. Imagine somebody comes up to you and says. It's just so good that people in heaven are happy. It's just so good. It's hard to disagree with.

Makes me sound pretty holy. Well, Jesus has made things awkward, hasn't he? He's made things awkward in the passage that goes before this for the Pharisees. He's made them feel awkward.

Then he's made his host feel awkward.

And he's made his guests feel awkward. So what do you think he's going to do here? He's not done yet. Oh, by the way, if you ever feel awkward in a sermon, could be because it's a bad sermon.

Could be because Jesus is speaking. So what does he say? Verse 16. Jesus replied, a certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.

[ 5 : 52 ] Jesus says, yes, you're right, friend. There is a banquet. There is a party at the end of the universe. So let's talk about that. And Jesus loves talking about things in parables, doesn't he?

Who's the man? The man who's organized the banquet. Well, that's God. You can see that in verse 24. And the invitations are sent out. And the responses come back so that the host can plan the food.

Because that's how it worked if you went to a party in the ancient Near East. You got an invitation. You responded. The host planned the food. And they've said yes. And do you know what?

God tells us in the rest of the Bible that this feast is a real thing. It's not just a story that Jesus is telling. It starts in the garden when God provides for the people that he has made. Beautiful food.

And then you see it again on the mountain, Mount Sinai in Exodus, where his people are invited to come and feast with him on the mountain. And then you see it again at the end of the Bible.

Revelation chapter 19, verse 9.

[ 6 : 53 ] The angel is talking to John. He's giving him God's message. And he says, The angel said to me, Write this. Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

So this isn't a made-up party. There really is a party at the end of the universe. And there are lots of people invited, verse 16.

It's not just for a chosen few. Just imagine the best party you've ever been to. For me, it would probably be one of those house parties that we sometimes go on.

Maybe the church weekend away or a CU house party. Or, you know, you go away on holiday for a weekend with a couple of sort of best buds and their families. And you've got good food and all your favourite people.

And there are comfortable beds. And, you know, if it's really good, then you go for catered. And there's no chores. That's amazing, isn't it? Just a little bit like that.

[ 7 : 48 ] I think that's what Douglas Adams, the atheist, was writing about with his restaurant at the end of the universe. You know, it all just arrives beautifully prepared. No stress. No fuss. That's what this is like.

Verse 17. At the time of the banquet, this man sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, Come, for everything is now ready.

Who do you think the servant is? Get your Sunday school answer ready. It's Jesus. With Jesus' arrival, everything is set. Everything is ready.

All the Old Testament preparations are over. Jesus is here. And that means that everybody who has heard these words, including everybody in this room, is invited.

That's why this passage is here. That's why you're here today. To hear the invitation to God's feast. Did you know? That there was a party at the end of the universe?

[ 8 : 50 ] Did you know that? That would kind of explain the cosmic fear of missing out we've all got, wouldn't it? If there really is a party at the end of the universe, did you know that you're invited?

Did you know that God is the host? And that he sent his servant Jesus to say that everything is ready? And that you should come now?

Did you know that? What happens next? In the parable. We're invited, but oh dear. They all alike, verse 18, began to make excuses.

When I was thinking about what to say this week, I decided to go on Reddit. Reddit has got some amazing things on. Not all of them good. But among what's on Reddit, I came across this list of worst reasons for declining a wedding invitation.

Do you want to hear some of these? Let me tell you they're good. I can't come to your wedding because I need to be home to walk my dogs. Or even better variation, because my dog has diabetes.

[ 9 : 59 ] Presumably they never leave the house. I can't come to your wedding because it's too far to drive. They live 20 minutes away. I can't come to your wedding because I'm too busy training for a half marathon.

And I can't take a day out of my training. Or people who arrived halfway through the wedding and said, we lost track of time. Really sorry. And then they left halfway through dinner as well.

Ouch. Unfortunately, we won't be able to make it due to the bad weather. And the reply was received three months before the actual wedding day. This one, I guess, probably really hurt.

I had to choose between you and a charitable event in another town. So I chose the charitable event. Love, Granny. Sorry, it's Pokemon Go Fest that weekend.

Or this text. Sorry, flights not aligning. Have a good wedding. Love, your sister.

[ 11 : 11 ] Have a good wedding. Or, possibly the worst one of all. Here's the one received. A month before the wedding happened. So sorry I won't make your big day.

My new girlfriend's family are going on holiday. And I've decided to go with them. Love, the best man. Now, how would you feel? How would you feel getting those?

It's once in a lifetime, isn't it? When you get invited to a wedding. All being well. And you know how expensive those invitations are. And that's just the printers. Forget about what you're laying on.

How would that make you feel? The first man said, I've just bought a field and I must go and see it. Please excuse me. Still another said, I've just bought five yoke of oxen and I'm on my way to try them out.

Please excuse me. And still another said, I've just got married so I can't come. On the surface, they kind of start by looking like major life events, don't they? Very important.

[ 12 : 20 ] Presumably good reasons for missing a wedding. But actually, the Bible says, they are excuses for backing out of the commitment made to do something that they're more interested in right now.

So yeah, you bought a field. But of course, in those days, you would never buy a field without looking at it first. Because you would use that field for raising livestock or farming crops. And the idea that you would pay a sum of money for it without seeing whether it was suitable.

Five yoke of oxen. That is an enormous investment back then. That's like saying, I've just bought a fleet of second-hand cars and now I'm off to see whether any of them actually start.

And the last one is maybe a bit trickier, but you know, you knew the date of the party. Does the change from being not married to being married mean that you cannot come?

Verse 21. Jesus is clear.

[ 13 : 31 ] The Lord is angry with these excuses. Because they come from pride. They come from thinking, I know better. I know you think that's important, but I think this is more important.

And so I'm not coming. And we have to admit, if we're honest, that we're great at finding excuses for not doing things that we don't want to do. Aren't we?

All of us. And sometimes we even believe them. That's the human heart. I can't commit to Jesus now. When I'm done travelling and seeing the world, that's when I'll do it.

Or when I'm done with uni or school. Or I can't commit to Jesus now because I'm not well. So when I've recovered, then I'll do it.

When all my questions are answered, that's when I'll commit to Jesus. When I've got the next promotion so I'm financially secure, that's when I'll commit to Jesus. When the kids are grown up because they need me too much, right?

[ 14 : 40 ] Then I'll come to Jesus. Jesus would say, if you're going to go travelling, go with me.

Jesus would say, if you're going to go to university, if you're at school, I'll guide you. I'll go with you. Jesus would say, if you have questions, I'm the answer.

Come and talk to me. Jesus would say, if you're thinking about getting on in your career, guess who really hands out the promotions? Jesus would say, if you're not well, I'm the great healer.

Jesus would say, if you love your kids, which is a good thing, then bring them here. There is no better place to be. Some of us have come to church for years, haven't we?

Jesus has invited us to the greatest wedding feast in all of history between himself and the people that he loves. are we still making excuses? Thankfully, that's not the end of the story.

[16:00] Let's look at verse 21 again. The servant came back and reported this to his master, and 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 had ordered has been done, but there is still room. And 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.

God's house will not be empty. He sent Jesus to gather in exactly the kinds of people that he has said a real banquet is about.

Flip back to verse 13 in the passage that we looked at a couple of weeks ago. Speaking to the host, 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.

And who is Jesus sent to gather in? Exactly those people. Not the rich, the people who have five yoke of oxen.

[17:18] Not those with the status, who can afford to buy fields without going to look at them. Not necessarily those who have the fairytale happy ending and the wedding that they dreamed of.

No. It's those who have very little when we look in on them from the outside. They are the ones who are given places by God at his table. Those who are weak but willing.

And for those of us who know that we are weak but willing, what will Jesus do? Well, the second time that the servant is sent out, he's given instructions to compel people to come in.

See, Jesus, if we are lame, will carry us. If we are blind, he will lead us by the hand. One way or another, he will get us over the threshold.

There's one John Calvin called Irresistible Grace. It's easy to mistake Jesus' parables for morality stories. There are lots of morality stories around, aren't there?

[18:32] You guys heard of Aesop's fables? Lots of books with Aesop's fables and other stories from different cultures. The thing is, they are morality stories so they end up with a lesson, therefore you should do.

You know, the moral of the story is you should do this. Jesus' parables aren't morality stories. They don't have a moral. They have a message.

Morals say, you should do this. Jesus' message, especially Jesus' message, is God will do this. So what about here?

Well, I want to tell you about the man who made friends with Pete the Homeless Guy. The man who made friends with Pete the Homeless Guy saw Pete every day and he would buy him a sandwich and a drink.

And then one day, Pete the Homeless Guy wasn't at his usual patch. So the man asked around to see where he was.

[19:34] And then he phoned the local shelter to see if he was there. And then in his lunch break, he went to the police station to see if anybody there knew anything about it. And then he phoned the hospital eventually and he found that Pete was in the hospital.

So what did he do? He took a day off and he visited. And he brought Pete lunch there. And he asked about family. He made sure the family could come.

And he helped him fill in the forms. And eventually, when Pete was let out of hospital, he gave him a room in his house. And that is God. That is Jesus, the servant that God has sent out.

He is absolutely determined to bless. In other words, that means he is completely committed to what is good for us. To a happy ending. And his grace cannot be defeated.

God's house will be full. No amount of rejection or ridicule will stop God from filling his house for the great feast.

[20:35] And no one is too weak or too sick to come. Because it doesn't depend on us. It depends on Jesus' love. And power. So the message of Jesus' parable is that God will fill every place at his table.

And that is good news for those of us who are weak but willing. Isn't it? But there are two kinds of people there usually are in Jesus' parables.

There are the people who are willing but weak who suffer from FOMO as we all do. Those who miss out in this life. Especially those who miss out because of Jesus in this life.

But there's also another kind of person. Verse 24. I tell you not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.

And so it's not just good news this parable but it is also a warning to those of us who are running after something else. Who are too proud to come and who offer God thin excuses for not committing to him.

[ 21 : 46 ] I was driving to Frimley Hospital the other day and I was in the car and I nearly missed turning as you do sometimes.

And I didn't thankfully but I imagined that there would have been a 20 minute drive around as there sometimes is when you miss the motorway turn off. And the reason I almost missed it is because I was busy fiddling with the radio.

I was trying to get it to the right station. The right station is BBC Radio 2 by the way. Maybe you could have guessed that. As it happens I didn't. I didn't miss the turning.

But I was almost too focused on what was going on in the car to take the turning that I knew I needed to take. And that is this. See the invitation to exit the motorway to the party at the end of the universe is signposted and it's repeated.

And it's already open. And your place is paid for. All you have to do is indicate and turn off. But if we're too focused with making things just right in our car then the risk is that we miss the turning completely.

[ 22 : 59 ] We miss the turning towards eternal joy. And then there's only the broad road. We said at the beginning didn't we what a difference it would make if we knew someone who was willing to move heaven and earth do anything that it takes make any sacrifice to make sure that we will be at the party at the end of the universe.

We know someone. His name is Jesus and he's paid for our place. And the cross proves it doesn't it? And so that's what Jesus wants us to know.

There's a party at his house at the end of the universe and he will do everything necessary to make sure his house is full. So let's not miss out. Amen.

Let me just pray. Lord we thank you for the words of Jesus. We thank you Lord that many many places are reserved at his table.

We thank you that the invitation is for everyone Lord. We thank you especially that you will move heaven and earth to make sure that people who are weak but willing come in and sit at your table.

[ 24 : 18 ] Lord will you speak to us if we are making excuses for not coming? Help us to put our trust in you we pray. Amen.