

The Great Banquet

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[0:00] Well, how many of you have ever been invited to something, but you kind of didn't really want to go? Maybe it's something that you've gone to before, like an event or a meeting, and it's even a really good thing.

But there's just other things that you feel are more important. Of course, you don't want to offend that person who invited you. And so you find yourself searching for an excuse not to attend. It's something that we've probably all experienced. We don't want to lie. We don't want to say that we're sick when we're not. Sometimes we just decide to go anyway because it's just easier than having to tell that person who invited us that we don't really want to go.

Other times we've just sort of made up our mind and, no, I'm not going to go. And we resort to giving the best reason that we can think of.

And hopefully it's something that we feel the other person will understand. Well, believe it or not, Jesus actually uses that same experience that we've all had to teach us a lesson about the kingdom of God.

[1:22] It happened like this. Jesus was at the home of a prominent Pharisee, as we've been talking about. We heard about that last week. He was invited over for dinner.

And there's other Pharisees and experts in the law who are there. And they're watching Jesus carefully. And it's the Sabbath day.

And Jesus has just healed a man who has abnormal swelling right in front of everybody. And then Jesus watches as the guests rush for the best seats in the house, the seats of honor.

And Jesus gives them some wisdom. It becomes a teachable moment about how we can conduct ourselves with pride or humility. And even some wisdom on who we should invite over for dinner in the first place.

And as Jesus is teaching, one of the men around the table speaks. We read this in Luke chapter 14, verse 15.

[2:30] When one of those at the table with Jesus heard this, he said to Jesus, Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. Now, we don't really know too much about this guy.

Why did he say this? What is he thinking? It could be that he's been listening really carefully to what Jesus has been saying. Because we know Jesus talks a lot about the kingdom of God.

We heard it just back in chapter 13, verse 29. Jesus was teaching about the narrow door. And how they need to make every effort to enter into the kingdom of God through the narrow door.

And Jesus talked about the kingdom of God in that same sort of language, with the language of a feast. He said, people will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

And so it could be that this man has been receptive to Jesus' teaching. And that in this moment, he's even expressing his own anticipation of being part of this future feast in the kingdom of God.

[3:46] But there was another guy whose thoughts on this I read this week. And he thought, well, no, I think this guy's just another self-righteous Pharisee who assumes that he and all of his companions will be at that feast.

Whatever the case, this comment from this man sparked the fire of Jesus' teaching. And Jesus launches into another one of his parables.

Let me read it for us from Luke chapter 14, beginning in verse 16. Jesus replied, Please excuse me.

Another said, I've just bought five yoke of oxen and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me. Still another said, I just got married, so I can't come.

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.

[5:30] Sir, the servant said, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room. 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.

I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet. There's a few details in this parable that we really got to chew on in order to get what Jesus is talking about.

Because that's the question, right? Why this parable? What does this mean? What's the point? And the first details that we get from Jesus are about the banquet itself.

He says, A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. So we're not just talking about a little dinner invitation or a fancy dinner party.

This is a large banquet. In today's world, maybe the closest thing to this would be like a big wedding reception. Or maybe a graduation banquet.

[6:46] Or something to commemorate a special milestone in someone's life. Maybe a 60th birthday. Or a diamond anniversary. And the size of this banquet is seen in the number of guests invited.

Many guests were invited, says Jesus. Before we get any further, what does this great banquet correspond to in reality?

Any guesses? Heaven. Heaven? Pretty much. The kingdom of God. If we look back to what the man just said right before this.

Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. So that's what Jesus' parable is about. That's what this banquet corresponds to in reality.

The kingdom of God is like a great banquet to which many guests have been invited. Now let's just pause and think about this.

[7:54] Those kinds of banquets I mentioned earlier. Weddings, graduations, milestone birthdays and anniversaries.

Do you like to be invited to those kinds of banquets? Yeah. Okay. Not everybody loves the dressing up part.

We know people like that or maybe you feel that way. But usually these are joyful occasions, right? A time to celebrate. Enjoy some good food and drink with others who are also there to celebrate. These are special and happy occasions. Unless maybe you're down in the dumps and just really not wanting to be with people or something like that.

Who wouldn't want to attend a great banquet? And Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a great banquet. That right there says something about the kingdom of God.

[8:59] It's a place of joy and celebration. Of music. And singing. And even dancing.

The kingdom of God, when it fully arrives, will not be boring. It will be full of joy and celebration. This parable really is well suited to Jesus' guests.

Not his guests, but the other guests at the table. The Pharisees, the experts in the law, they were sort of well to do in their day. And they love to invite each other over for meals and put on parties and banquets.

And so Jesus has their attention. They can relate. I think we can relate too. Who doesn't love to be invited to attend a good banquet?

And so it probably shocked them to hear Jesus tell them this surprising twist. At the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, Come, for everything is now ready.

[10:14] But they all alike began to make excuses. Back in their day, it was common to have a double invitation to an event like this.

There was the first invitation, which would go out well in advance and let everybody know the date of the banquet, the purpose, who was being celebrated or what was being celebrated.

And back in their culture, they didn't put the time to arrive on the invitation when it first went out. Preparing big feasts was a complicated and difficult thing.

To estimate just what time of day it would be ready. So they would just set the day for it. And then on the day, when everything was ready, you'd get the second invitation. They'd send someone around to go and tell everybody, All right, it's time to come.

The banquet is ready. You did typically still have to RSVP, in our language, to that first invitation. And to let them know, yeah, I'm coming.

[11:18] Either accept or decline. And if you accepted, only if you accepted would you get the second invite when they would send someone around.

Well, the shocking twist happens here in verse 18. They all alike began to make excuses. And not just some of them, but all of them made excuses.

And Jesus, still in parable mode, gives three samples of the kinds of excuses that the invited people made. The first said, I've just bought a field.

I must go and see it. Please excuse me. 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 just got married, so I can't come. We'll talk about the excuses in a minute, but first let's just hear the reaction of the host one more time.

[12:28] 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 lame, bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

Why is the host angry? Yeah. How would you feel if you'd been working all day to get this big feast ready for a whole bunch of people that you'd invited to celebrate something very special and not a single person showed up?

Think of the time and the effort and the cost even of putting on a large banquet. If you want to have a good catered banquet meal these days, you can easily spend \$40 to \$70 per plate depending on the menu.

Just for fun, I thought, why not look up the catering company that we decided to not use for our wedding. We were thinking about it. They had a great reputation, great food, great service.

We did manage to find something that's a little bit cheaper 14 years ago. But today, for a classic turkey dinner, you're looking at \$37.50 a plate.

[14:06] And that sounds like a lot, but for assorted fresh-baked rolls and bread, spinach salad with mandarin oranges with some pomegranate and pumpkin seeds sprinkled through, butter-glazed corn with roasted vegetables, honey-roasted carrots with toasted almonds, creamed mashed potatoes, slow-roasted turkey, gravy, cranberry sauce and pickles, and a slice of homemade pumpkin pie.

And even the whipped cream has a little bit of cinnamon in it. Suddenly \$37.50 doesn't sound so bad, eh? Well, if you want the beef tenderloin, it's \$70 a plate.

So, chew on that. We'll go with the classic turkey dinner for \$37.50. And let's just times that by, let's not get too crazy, but let's just say 250 guests.

Well, that's about \$9,400 just for one meal. And that doesn't even include the drinks or any of the other related expenses for the banquet.

And can you imagine spending that and nobody shows up? Back then, they also didn't have freezers and fridges and all that good stuff that we have today.

[15:30] So, to keep things fresh, they probably would have slaughtered and butchered one or two animals in time for this meal. And so, it was costly. Everything's ready.

But I do imagine that probably the cost was not the biggest factor in the master's anger. Probably the bigger factor is that those who were invited, it's sort of implied that they had already accepted the invitation the first time.

Just sort of rudely cancel at the last minute. When it comes right down to it, barring an emergency, that would have just been downright rude and disgraceful.

And again, it's implied they had already accepted that first invitation. They'd already put it on the calendar and said, yeah, I'll be there.

They've had plenty of time to decline if something else that's more important comes up. But now the day of the banquet has come and last minute, no, I'm not gonna go.

[16:45] Think of the public embarrassment on the part of the host having prepared all this and nobody's gonna go. So it's not surprising that he is angry.

This twist probably would have shocked Jesus' dinner companions. Who would do such a thing? What on earth would they rather be doing than being at the banquet, going to the banquet?

Well, let's look at those excuses. One guy would rather go and see the field that he just bought.

Well, that's kind of a poor and disappointing excuse, isn't it?

I mean, if he's already bought the field, can't he just go look at it tomorrow? When it comes right down to it, it's like the guy's just more interested in his property than in the person and in the

occasion being celebrated.

The second guy says, I just bought five yoke of oxen. A yoke is a pair. So ten animals. This guy must have had some wealth.

[17 : 55] But even for a big purchase like this, I mean, that's kind of a poor and disappointing excuse. Just like with the field. If you've already bought the animals, like, do you have to try them out right now?

What about tomorrow? When it comes right down to it, this second guy, he's just more interested in his animals than in the person and the occasion for celebration.

The third guy says, I just got married, so I can't come. At least this third guy isn't putting property ahead of people.

But we have to wonder here too, what about just getting married means they can't go to the banquet? I mean, the wedding's already happened.

Surely the wife would have been welcome to attend with him. And besides, the banquet's like a one-time deal, whereas the marriage is gonna last for a long time.

[18 : 58] Why can't he and his new wife come? They've known about it for a long time. I think Jesus deliberately chooses excuses that are sort of common.

And if we're honest, we can kind of relate to these kinds of excuses, can't we? being excited about a new purchase or maybe just not feeling up to it during a transitional moment in life.

Or, if we're honest, maybe just more excited about being with someone else. Whether a wife or other friends that are maybe a little bit more fun to be around.

But then again, it's implied they had already accepted the invitation when it first came. They knew the banquet was set for this day. These excuses sort of reveal what's going on in their heart.

It shows what's most important to them. They would rather go look at the new field, take the new animals for a test drive, hang out with the new wife, than go to the banquet.

[20 : 10] No wonder the host of the banquet is angry. And so what does he do? Well, he makes a quick decision to send out the servants again.

Verse 21, 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.

And the servant goes and does it and there's still room. And so the master sends him out a second time. This time, a little further, out into the countryside. Round up anybody who will come.

Fill my house. Go out to the roads and country lanes. Compel them to come in so that my house will be full. Now that word compels maybe, I wouldn't, I'm not sure that's the best translation.

It's not force, but that word can mean to strongly urge. Like, don't just give them the quick invite and then pass by if they say no, no, persuade them. Tell them about what's being celebrated and what's prepared.

[21 : 15] Persuade them if you can. And then the parable ends with this comment from the master. Verse 24, I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.

Many have noticed how Jesus kind of shifts to the first and second person pronouns here. Jesus often spoke that way. He often said, I tell you. I tell you.

And so is Jesus right in this moment speaking to the people around the table. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet. Or is this just the host in the story?

I can't resolve that question, but it sure makes us think. Well, what does all this mean? We already know it's about the kingdom of God, this parable.

We know Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God is like a great banquet to which many have been invited. What do all these details add to that? The invitations go out to many, but when the time to come to the banquet and sit down at the feast arrives, the excuses come in.

[22 : 34] And those who were initially invited don't want to come. They're preoccupied with other things that are more important to them. even though their declining of the invitation sounds polite, it's rude and it's dishonorable to choose the lesser things at the last minute.

I believe that Jesus is describing how it goes with the kingdom of God using this parable. It's like a great banquet, the kingdom of God, a wonderful thing that God is very generously giving and preparing for people and many are invited to come into his kingdom and to be a part of it.

Even to feast and celebrate with him and maybe the first promises of it sound really good and many, oh yeah, I want to be a part of that. I'll be there.

I accept the invitation but then at the moment when all is ready and God now extends the call, come, it's ready.

Those who were invited refuse and they're just preoccupied with things that they consider more important. I think the first stop as we apply this parable is to think about how it describes the very moment that Jesus is in in human history.

[24 : 23] What has Jesus been doing up to this point? He's been traveling all over Israel saying what? the time has come. The kingdom of God has come near.

Repent and believe the good news. It's time to come to the banquet. It's time to enter into the kingdom of God and this is it right here.

and we could go into all the details of what about the double invitation? Was the Old Testament prophets the first invite and Jesus the second or was it John the Baptist the first and Jesus the second?

Was the banquet fully ready at Jesus' first coming or is it kind of at his second coming? We could really dig into all that and maybe get ourselves spun around in here. Some have even suggested that maybe the first invitation or the second invitation to the poor and the blind and the crippled and the lame well that's to the Jews and then the next one is sort of further out to the Gentiles and these aren't unreasonable ideas.

I'm not sure if Jesus really meant all that specificness through the parable but to me I think that anchor truth that really helps us see what this is about is how have people been responding to Jesus when he says the time is here the kingdom is at hand.

[25 : 48] Well the same way right? Excuses rejection the strongest rejection has been from the Pharisees of course and the religious leaders of the Jews right around the table there with him but we've also heard excuses as well back at Luke chapter nine near the end there Jesus was saying follow me and people were saying well that sounds great but first let me go and take care of some stuff and so I really do think Jesus is like that servant who has been sent out to tell people the banquet is here the kingdom of God has come near but the many the people of Israel many in Israel that in Jesus very day they didn't want to come they didn't want to follow him they made excuses and kind of like in the parable this isn't just a sort of optional event the kingdom of God it's not like

Jesus can just say well whatever floats your boat that's good for you don't worry about it no this is a rude rejection of a very generous God he has put before them an invitation to his great and glorious kingdom and they don't value it they care about lesser things more they make excuses and how does God feel about this I think angry does describe it maybe not with that sort of typical unrighteous anger that we have or that we imagine the banquet holder in the parable having but with a holy and righteous anger those invited have spurned him they've turned up their noses at his gracious invitation they've said

I'd rather play with animals than come to your banquet and what does God do well in the parable the host of the banquet doesn't cancel it the banquet is still going to be on everything is ready and if those who were invited won't come then go out and invite those who will come round them up till my house is full I think this is meant to highlight the generosity of God even the mercy of God the so called friends of God aka the Pharisees the religious leaders of the Jews they won't come and so God opens wide the door to the people that they would least expect to be in the kingdom of God the poor the crippled the blind why would these people be invited

I think we kind of know it's not because the master is just desperate to have people at his banquet no it shows his generosity he will make people who have nothing to offer his honored guests instead and what's interesting about this little detail of poor and blind and crippled in the real story of what happened who responded favorably to Jesus it was the same sorts of people quite literally the poor the crippled the blind they came to Jesus they called out to Jesus remember that paralyzed guy who had his friends bring him on the mat and put him through the roof right down in front of Jesus remember blind

Bartimaeus on the side of the road calling out with all his might Jesus son of David have mercy on me I want to see and Jesus commended them not just because they were so!

[30 : 20] desperate that they came to him but because they had faith that Jesus could heal them they believed that God was really at work through Jesus and so in a sense literally the kingdom of God will be full of people who were actually poor and crippled and lame and blind but that being said I really do believe that the poor and the crippled and the blind stands not just for poor people or people with disabilities but for all whom our world considers nobodies and worthless that's what

Jesus has been talking about at the dinner table already how the lowly will be exalted and how the proud will be humbled I think we're seeing this truth again here that with the kingdom of

God everything's going to be turned upside down those who thought they were going to be in the kingdom will be on the outside wishing for even a taste of the banquet and those that they thought would never make it in will be the honored guests seated at the table of God God's going to turn it all upside down and for those who do get in the kingdom of God it's it's not that they're there because they were worthy but because God is exceedingly generous think back to that first comment that sparked the whole teaching moment blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God that guy said to Jesus and I believe that Jesus with the parable and response is basically saying yes indeed but many who think they will be at the feast in the kingdom of God will not be and many who you think least likely to be at the banquet will be at the table who are the first disciples of Jesus fishermen!

A tax collector! A prostitute! A woman who had been possessed! By demons! to name a few! Meanwhile the Pharisees the chief priests who served at the temple the experts in the law rejected the invitation that Jesus is bringing!

This little parable captures really well how things actually went as Jesus walked the earth! But how does it apply to us today?

[33:20] I think that's part of the great surprise of the kingdom of God it has come near and it did come near in Jesus but there's still a final moment which awaits when the feasting finally begins there's this gap in between Jesus first coming and his second coming and in that gap it has been given to all a brief window of time to be born to live and to die and in that brief window for each of us there is still time to respond to God's gracious invitation to come and be part of the banquet to repent and believe the good news and so the question it really brings us to first of all is have you accepted the invitation of

God to his banquet or are you still making excuses about why you can't come are there other things that you think are more important if you don't really believe in Jesus and you know it I'm interested what is your excuse and is it really worth it more to you than to have a place at the feast in the kingdom of God as Jesus said in the last chapter narrow is the door of salvation and many will find themselves locked out at the end and it's not because God doesn't want them in they stand outside pleading to get in at the end and longing for a taste of

God's banquet because they refuse to come when the invitation was given and eventually our time is up that window that we have in our lives it closes the door is shut and then it will be too late the time to respond to Jesus invitation is now don't make excuses other things might feel really important or seem really important in this moment but in the grand scheme of all things set those things aside for Jesus and for his kingdom finally for those of us who have accepted the invitation it can be easy for us to forget how we got this standing that we have with

God it's not because we were more worthy but it's because God is gracious and generous we are the poor the blind and the lame who have come in but it can be easy for us to look around at others and be like the Pharisees thinking that we're somebody that we really deserve those seats of honor in the kingdom it can be easy for us to look down on others who are poor or who are struggling in the eyes of our world are worthless again what did Jesus urge his host to do for his future dinner parties he said invite the poor the crippled the lame and the blind and you will be blessed you've made it in if you've accepted that invitation of

Jesus but who are those people in your life right now and maybe God's plan is to use you to bring them into his table let's pray father in heaven thank you so much for this parable it really does stir our thoughts and convict and we just ask that you would help us to see more clearly in our world through it fill us with wisdom give us that sense of urgency that you show us about our time and our moment in this life our opportunity to listen to you and respond to you but also to be at work with you in your purposes to save others thank you for these moments we have together soften and speak to our hearts we pray in Jesus name amen may