

Come, for everything is now ready

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Date: 29 April 2018

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[0:00] Let's turn for a few moments this evening back to the parable that Jesus told, and especially these words, the words of the master, the one who had set the banquet.

He said, come, for everything is now ready. When I grew up, we had a summer home that we would go to every weekend, and depending on which of my parents arrived first at the house would determine which mat was put out at the front door.

We had two. If my mother arrived first, she would put out the mat that just said, welcome. If my dad arrived first, he would put the mat out that said, go away.

Now, I think that reflected their character and personality. Of course, my dad didn't want people to go away, but you get an idea that the two mats had two very different messages.

And as we come to this parable, can I ask you a question? As a fellowship, as a community of God's people, what mat are you putting out? What message are you putting to this community?

[1:10] What message do you think you are putting out? But a more searching question is, what would the community say is your message to them?

Is your message a message of welcome? Please come in. Not just come into this building, but please come in. Please come to know and to believe and to understand what we know and what we believe.

And please come to treasure and to value what we treasure and value. Or do you think that maybe the people that might live roundabout, I don't know, as an outsider, I'm just asking the question, but do you think that they might think that actually the mat that's put out actually says go away?

That people like me or people like us, whoever me or us might be, we don't seem to fit here. Or we might not feel welcome here. And as we think of those questions, keeping those questions in the back of my mind, because it's one thing to say you're welcome.

That's important. It's another thing for people to hear you're welcome. We'd love to have you here. So I'm asking what the perception is of ourselves and maybe what the wider perception is of others.

[2:25] But I'd also like to ask a personal question. Because I'd like to suggest that we should be able to find ourselves somewhere in this parable.

Now, I know a parable is not an allegory where you're able to identify each fact and say this means this and this means that and this means the other thing. But if in the parable there seems to be, well, the main character is the master, the one who put the banquet on.

We're simply told that a man once gave a great banquet, invited many. So there's the host. Now, we're not the host. I'm not the host. I'm the preacher this evening, but I'm not the master.

I'm not the one in charge because in this church, there is only one who is in charge. And his name is Jesus. He's the head of the church. He's the master of the banquet.

So we shouldn't identify with the host. But if you're a Christian tonight, if you're a believer in Jesus, I wonder whether you identify with the servant. Because the servant is there to do the master's bidding.

[3:34] Notice that the servant does not question the master. The servant does not make suggestions to the master. The servant simply does what the master tells him or her to do.

So if you're a Christian, do you identify yourself as a servant? Jesus, the master, he's the boss. And I'm just one of his servants. I'm one of his employees.

That's the word and the language that the apostle Paul would readily use. Paul, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. A slave of Jesus Christ.

And it seems that Jesus often emphasizes that what he expects from his people, what he expects from those who name his name, is that we are a people that are characterized not by pride and arrogance.

Look how good I am. Look how great I am. Look at what I've done. But rather a people that are characterized by humility and lowliness. I'll take the lowest seat at the banquet.

[4:39] I'll take the role of a servant. Because when we read a parable like this, and much of what I have to say will be to the prospective guests, because while none of us is the host, some of us are the servants, I would also suggest that there are some here tonight who are in the category of prospective guests.

Maybe you're in the category of those who have been invited. Maybe invited many times. Or maybe you're in the category of those similar to those who were just invited at the very last moment. But somewhere, some way, I think we can find ourselves here.

Because, you know, as a Christian, you might read this parable and say, that's a wonderful message for the outsider. That's a wonderful message for the person who's not yet a Christian. And it is. But I would also suggest that Jesus has something profound to say to his own people. He has something to say to us about our attitude. He has something to say to us about our action. He has something to say to us about our mindset. Because he says there's the standard of the world. And the standard of the world is that leaders in the world lord it over. They let others know that they're the leader.

[5:51] They let others know that they're in charge. He says, not so with you. Because even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

So here tonight, as we listen to the message of Jesus, as we listen to the invitation of Jesus, let us ask ourselves if we see ourselves in this parable as one who has received an invitation that may not have yet responded.

Or maybe we see ourselves as that servant who simply does the master's bidding and leaves it to the master to do the work. So with you tonight, I'd like to look at this simple phrase, come for everything is now ready.

Among the many jobs that I've undertaken over my career, after I left school, none of which particularly successful, so I'm hopeful that this one might prove more lasting.

I was an accountant. So like Andy Cumming, I was an accountant. I prepared tax returns. I was also an English teacher. I taught English as a second language. That lasted for about two years.

[7:04] Loved it, but it just wasn't for me. But when you teach your own language, you begin to understand a little bit more about what our language is made up of. Because when you just speak your language, it's just your own language.

You know it. You don't need to understand it very well. But when you're trying to teach it to somebody else, you need to kind of break it down a little bit. And when we look at this verse here, you can break it down into two parts.

Because the master is saying two things. He's saying come, which is a command, or the technical term is an imperative. And then the next phrase is, for everything is now ready.

That's just a statement of fact. You can say it's, again, the technical word might be indicative. It's an indicative statement. But these two statements go together. These two phrases go together.

The command and the information. And I want to say to us tonight that the information in and of itself is not adequate. Simply accepting the information is not an adequate response.

[8:11] Simply agreeing with the indicative statement, everything is now ready, is not an adequate reply to a command. Now, I mentioned this morning D.L. Moody, the famous evangelist.

He was a native of Massachusetts, but spent much of his life in the city of Chicago. And Moody preached. And Moody focused his preaching and his sermons on Jesus.

Not surprising. But on the person of Jesus. He says, I do not preach a creed or a doctrine, but I preach Jesus Christ as a personal friend.

And he went on to describe it. He said this. He said, Doctrines are all right in their places. But when you put them in the place of faith or salvation, they become sin. If a man should ask me to his house to dinner tomorrow, the street would be a very good thing to take me to his house. But if I didn't get into the house, I wouldn't get any dinner. Now, a creed is a road or a street. It is very good as far as it goes. But if it doesn't take us to Christ, it is worthless.

[9:20] So this phrase, everything is now ready, is a statement of fact. That the gospel of Jesus says that God has done everything. He has done everything that is necessary.

Just like the master of the banquet who sets the table and all that's needed now are guests. In terms of our salvation, God in Jesus Christ has done absolutely everything. He has lived the perfect life. He has died the death on the cross. He has been buried and raised from the dead. So the gospel message to you is, everything is ready. Everything has been done. Everything is completed. You do not need to bring anything. This last month, it must be a popular month for weddings in Edinburgh. We've received several invitations to weddings. And the wedding invitations are beautiful. They look nice and they tell you all the information, where the wedding is, what time it is, where to show up, and where the reception will be.

[10:20] Not one of these wedding invitations asks you to bring food. Not one of these wedding invitations gives you a list of dishes that it would be nice if you could bring along with you.

When you go to these wedding feasts, these receptions, you expect to have dinner. And lo and behold, every time I go to a wedding reception, I get dinner. I eat. I've never brought a packed lunch. So the gospel is, everything is now ready. The table is now set. And when you look at the Bible, time and again, we have these statements that are critical in our understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

So for example, you look at Romans chapter 5. For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person, one would dare even to die.

But God shows his love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That's a statement of fact. Paul summarized his ministry in 1 Corinthians as, we preach Christ and him crucified.

[11:29] Now, a response is not simply to say, yes, I agree. Or yes, I share in that belief. Now, that belief is essential. That understanding is essential.

But it is not sufficient for our purposes. Because if we come to the parable, we see that there is a plan. That this wedding banquet, that this feast, this great banquet, was not a surprise.

There was a group of guests that had been told and prepared. And when the banquet was ready, the message was then sent to this group. We see the introduction, Jesus said in verse 16, a man once gave a great banquet, invited many.

And at the time for the banquet, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, come, for everything is now ready. Now, the context of the parable is Jesus is speaking to the religious people, the people who should have known better, the people who should have been ready for the one to come, Jesus.

But by and large, these were the people that were not ready. And they were not prepared. And they were not welcome. And they were not open. And they were not willing. So they were the ones that were invited.

[12:44] And they had been told of the banquet. But when the servant came, what do we read? They all alike began to make excuses.

Come, for everything is now ready. Simply accepting that everything is ready, understanding that there's a table set, understanding that a banquet has been prepared, that is not an adequate response to a command or an invitation.

And when we look at the facts of the gospel, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Jesus Christ died on the cross to forgive our sins. Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day.

Those are essential facts, but they are not sufficient for your salvation. So you can say to me, I believe everything you've just said. I believe every verse that you've just read.

I believe the Bible from cover to cover. Does that make me a Christian? The answer is no. Because simply believing in a fact is just like what Moody said about a street.

[13:48] A street can take you to a place to dine, but it's not dinner. What the gospel does is takes us to Jesus. So we're not interested so much in what we believe about Jesus, but the key is, do you believe in Jesus?

Have you come to know Jesus? Have you come to respond by faith to this invitation, which is also a command? So we're told that this group began to make excuses.

Now in a sense, their response was the same. Their response was no. They gave different excuses, of course, very simply. One, he bought a field.

You know, he was an investor or maybe a farmer. Another brought yoke of oxen, five yoke of oxen. And, you know, the first one wanted to see his field. The second one wanted to try out the oxen. The third had just said, I got married. I'm just too busy. I can't come to your banquet. All of these guests had been previously invited. You know what sometimes happens.

[14:54] You might get a postcard and it says, save the date. Be prepared. There's a wedding coming. It's not a technical invitation, but it's, you know, we want you to know that we're getting married and when the invitation comes, we want you to say yes.

So we're warning you or preparing you ahead of time. But they all alike began to make excuses. In verse 21, the servant, remember, if you're a Christian, think of yourself as this servant, the servant who had gone to those who were invited and had been rebuffed and had all been given all sorts of excuses, the servant came and reported these things to his master.

As servants of Jesus Christ, we are not responsible for the results. We are not responsible for making people believe.

Thank goodness, because we can't do that. We are simply responsible for doing what we are commanded to do. Let's leave the results with the one who's commanding us.

Let's leave the results with the master. Let's leave the results with Jesus and with the Holy Spirit. But as servants, we simply obey. Again, using an illustration of D.L. Moody, D.L. Moody had an assistant minister.

[16:12] I was an assistant minister for 12 years, so I understand how being an assistant works. So D.L. Moody had said to his assistant, R.A. Torrey, he said, Torrey, I want you to engage the largest theater in Chicago on such and such a date.

To which Torrey responded, but Mr. Moody, the Chicago fair is on. It's on the other side of town, and all the theaters are shut because nobody will come. He said, just do as you're told.

And as an assistant minister, that's a good rule of thumb, just do what you're told. If the senior minister tells you to do something, you do it because you're being told to do it. And Torrey hired this huge theater expecting that nobody would come.

He was actually engaged. Moody said, you'll preach at noon. And he went there just before noon and he could barely get in. And he said, but I realize that none of the people here were there to hear me preach, but everyone was there to hear Mr. Moody preach.

It just goes to show that when you do what you're told, you're not responsible for the results. You just, you know, I did what I was told. If the servant is told, go and tell, you go and tell.

[17:20] You can't persuade people. You're not responsible for people responding, but if you do what you're told, you've done your responsibility. You've fulfilled your duty. And listen to what the servant is then instructed.

Then that master of the house became angry and said to his servant, go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and lame.

The master was angry. The master had prepared a banquet at a great cost. And the master wanted people to be at that banquet and to enjoy that provision.

The master, sir Jesus, has gone to great costs and great length to prepare this banquet. He has paid a high price and he does not want his banquet table to be empty.

He wants his banquet hall to be filled. Now those who previously were invited, all alike, began to make excuses. So the master is undeterred.

[18:21] He simply says to the servants, well, you go out and you invite the poor, the blind, the crippled, the lame. What we notice here is that the servant does not say why. Why should I do this?

This is a waste of time. If the people who were invited already aren't coming, how do you expect people that weren't invited to come? It doesn't make any sense, does it?

Because if the invited guests say no, what about the uninvited guests, just the random people on the street, why would they come? But as you read in the parable, the servant said, Sir, what you commanded has been done.

I did what you said. But there is still room, still space at the table. There's still space in the banquet hall. There's still food that can be enjoyed.

There's still places left that are not taken up. The master then says, Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled.

[19:21] For I tell you that none of those men who are invited shall taste my banquet. So what is Jesus looking for? What is Jesus teaching?

Well, he's teaching us that simply knowing that there's an invitation, simply knowing that there's a banquet, simply understanding that the table is filled and all is prepared, that is not an adequate response.

What he's looking for is people to accept his invitation and to come. to come to his banquet, to enjoy his provision. So that's why the statement, all is now ready, everything is now ready, and come, must be understood together.

We are not just asked to accept that Jesus has done everything for us. Though the fact that Jesus has done everything for us is absolutely essential to the gospel. But we must respond to this same Jesus.

We must accept his invitation. We must find ourselves at his banquet table. Those who began to make excuses, they weren't at the table.

[20:30] But it's interesting that the unlikely people, the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, those in the highways and those in the hedges, those who previously weren't invited, those who previously, those who wouldn't generally be invited to a great banquet, they were the ones who tended to hear the invitation and say, yes, I'll come.

But notice that they were invited as they were. No time to get ready. No time to spruce themselves up. No time to buy the fancy suit. No time to make themselves presentable.

You know, they were just literally taken off the streets and you say, come. There's a banquet.

There's a place at the table. We'd love you to come. The master has told me to come and tell you that there's a place for you and if you'll come, yours, the banquet is yours to enjoy.

I asked earlier about the perception, the welcome mat. Welcome or go away. In this parable, the master wants it to be crystal clear to anyone and everyone that there is a welcome mat and they are welcome as they are.

Do you think people feel that they can come to faith? That they can come to be part of this fellowship as they are? Or do they need some type of preparation?

[21:55] Do they need some type of maybe a new set of clothes or a new, you know, a new outlook or a new way, a new type of behavior? Because these are people who were literally taken off the street and brought into the banquet hall.

The respectable people had been given the invitation and they said, no thank you. But the disreputable, the non-respectable people, they heard the invitation gladly and they came.

This happens to be my favorite, I say favorite, John 3 is one of my favorites, but this is my favorite parable that Jesus told. If you're a student of history like I am, Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon entitled Compel Them to Come In.

You can Google it on the computer and you'll get the sermon. It was the 5th of December 1858, just before the year of 1859, which was the year of worldwide revival.

And Spurgeon credits that sermon as being the single most effective sermon for the conversion of men and women that he ever preached. He preached the gospel and persuaded and exhorted and pled with people to come in.

[23:10] He was preaching to about 6,000 people in the Surrey Music Hall. So it was the most singularly successful sermon Spurgeon ever preached evangelistically. It was also the single most criticized sermon that he ever preached.

He was criticized for being too generous, too open, too unconditional. He was criticized for literally inviting anyone and everyone to come and to believe in Jesus.

So you see, when you do what the master tells you to do, you might find that there'll be plenty of critics, plenty who will find fault, plenty who will not appreciate such zeal or such enthusiasm or such willingness to do what the master says.

But Spurgeon was undeterred. As an interesting correlation, this was an early sermon in Spurgeon's career, the last sermon that D.L. Moody ever preached was on this text.

He was, by that point, dying of heart failure, but there was a series of evangelistic services in Kansas City, Missouri, and he felt compelled to go to Kansas City, persuaded that there were souls to be saved in that city, and though he was far from well, he preached on Luke chapter 14.

[24:31] And he said this, as he closed, he said, he asked his audience, he said, would, he said, suppose we would write out tonight an excuse.

How would it sound? To the King of Heaven, while sitting in the convention hall, Kansas City, Missouri, November the 16th, 1899, I received a pressing invitation to be present at the marriage supper of your only begotten Son, I pray thee, have me excused.

And he exhorted this overflowing crowd, he said, is that what you want to say? Is that how you wish to respond? Do you want to add your signature to that reply?

And he suggested, however, that there was another way of responding. He said, you could respond in this way. He said to the King of Heaven, while sitting in the convention hall, Kansas City, Missouri, November the 16th, 1899, I received a pressing invitation from one of your messengers to be present at the marriage supper of your only begotten Son.

I hasten to reply, by the grace of God, I will be present. Hundreds of people that night responded to the gospel.

[25:43] They heard a simple gospel plea. They heard a simple gospel address. They heard an earnest invitation from a servant filled with zeal.

They heard and they responded. Tonight, you are presented with that same invitation. If you're not a follower of Jesus, you may have heard about Jesus.

You may believe many things concerning Jesus. But I'm asking you tonight, there's an invitation to a banquet. Everything's prepared. You don't need to bring anything. You don't need to get ready. You don't need to smarten yourself up. You don't need to turn over a new leaf. You don't need to fix the broken things of life. Jesus is saying, come. Come as you are. Whoever you are.

Come no matter what you've done. Come despite what you've done or even in spite of your best efforts. Come to this feast. Come to this banquet and enjoy all that the Master has provided.

[26:44] When we take God's word seriously, and we take God's word seriously, because it's God's word, because it's powerful, it's authoritative, it's true, and God accompanies his word with power by the Spirit.

So the Spirit not only has authored the word of God, but the Spirit takes the word of God and applies the word to the human heart. So as the invitation is given, God enables people to respond. He enables people who previously had said no. to say yes. People who previously may have said not now, to say now, or not me, to say me.

Yes, I want this. Yes, I'm willing to accept this invitation. I'd love to be there. And if you're asking me to come as I am, I'll gladly come as I am.

So the Master says to the servant, go. Go and get. Go and tell. Go and ask. Go and invite. Go and invite. And you are either the servant who is commissioned to go, or you're a prospective guest who's invited to come.

[27:54] But nonetheless, the Master is expecting us all to obey. To either be the servant willing to invite, or to be the guest willing to accept. But the Master requires a response, and the Master deserves a response.

He's gone to great effort. He's gone to great pain. He's gone to great cost to make this invitation possible. Jesus Christ gave himself.

Jesus Christ paid this price. I mentioned earlier those texts from the Bible that gives us the key statements of the faith. Jesus Christ died for the ungodly.

We preach Christ and him crucified. But let me give you another example of a statement that's not just a statement of fact, but a statement of faith. When the Apostle Paul was addressing the Galatians, the Galatians as a church had got a lot of things wrong.

They thought that you could add something to the gospel. And Paul says, well, actually, if you add something to the gospel, whatever you have is no longer the gospel. The gospel plus anything actually equals nothing.

[29:01] Whereas the gospel plus nothing equals everything. And the Apostle Paul put it this way in chapter 2 of Galatians. He said, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. A statement of faith.

A statement of trust. A statement where he now puts together the life of Jesus, his own life, and says that by faith, Christ and me are now connected. And Jesus is the one who loved me.

And Jesus is the one who gave himself for me. And notice how he defines himself. He says, I. He defines himself as the one for whom the Son of God, the one whom the Son of God loved.

And the one for whom the God, the Son of God, gave himself. So Paul doesn't just give us the facts of the gospel as essential as they are, but he gives us this statement of faith.

[30:03] This statement of trust. This statement whereby he declares himself to be a believer in this Jesus. To have accepted this gospel of Jesus.

And in turn, he has become a servant of that same master. He receives the invitation and almost immediately he becomes an ambassador. He receives the gospel and almost immediately he becomes a witness to, an ambassador for, a spokesman of that same message.

So you see, when we come to know Jesus, no matter how young or how old, no matter how much or how little we might know, I find that there's always something for the follower of Jesus to do.

That we can make Jesus known by our words. That we can make Jesus known by our actions. But if we appreciate what the Son has done, one of the natural outworkings of that appreciation is this. We want others to enjoy. And we want others to share. And we want others to take their place with us at this great banquet. We want others to enjoy this great provision.

[31:19] Everything is now ready. So this command requires a response. But as a command, it requires obedience.

Now the gospel, you think of as an invitation for God to love the world, that for God to love the world, he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

That's a response. There's an if and a then. But the Apostle John puts it this way. He said, whatever we ask, we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

So when we obey God, when we please God, when we keep his commandments, when we do what he calls us to do, we know that we receive all that we need from God.

But he goes on to describe what he means by commandment. He said, and this is his commandment that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us.

[32:22] The gospel is an invitation, just like the banquet had an invitation. But the same form of speech is a command. Come is a word of welcome.

But come is also a command. You must. You have to. This is a command that God gives that requires your obedience. So when you respond to the gospel, you are accepting an invitation, but you are also obeying a command.

The opposite is also true. When you reject the gospel, when you find an excuse to take the place of an acceptance, you not only are saying no to the invitation, you are disobeying the command of God concerning his Son.

Why would you want to add insult to injury? We already have enough problems. We've already done enough that we've regretted or not done enough that we would have wished we had done. But to disobey a command from God concerning his Son, adding insult to injury, making a bad situation worse. The parable was told to a group that was making excuses.

[33:34] The parable was told to a group of people who thought they knew best. But the parable was told to a group of people who ultimately largely said no to Jesus. But the good news today is approximately two billion people on this planet from all different backgrounds, from all different cultures have said yes.

many people who are the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind, they have nothing of this world's goods. They have nothing of this world's power. They have nothing of this world's prominence. But somehow, somehow, they heard the invitation. And they took God at his word. And God accepted them. God welcomed them into his kingdom. I mentioned earlier that it does matter what people think about us, what people might think of this church, this fellowship of God's people, what people might think of us individually.

But above all, it matters of infinite importance what people think about Jesus. What do you think about Jesus? Is he the one who loves you? Is he the one who gave himself for you?

Is he the one that's inviting you tonight? Is he the one that's welcoming you tonight? Is he the one that's calling? Because he deserves a response. He merits a response. He's worthy of a response.

[34:46] You can ignore me. You can ignore the elders. You can ignore your fellow Christian. But please don't ignore Jesus. Because he's worthy of a reply. He loves you.

He loves you with word. And he loves you with action. He says it. He shows it. And for us as Christians, let us share in that love. And let us share in that concern.

And let us share in that desire that the Lord Jesus has for others to sit at that table. To put into words. To put into actions. And to say to people.

And to show people that we love them. That we care about them. We're concerned about their welfare. And that we would love for them to join us at his banquet. Come, says Jesus.

For everything is now ready. Let's pray. Go, says Jesus. Go, go, go, go, go. Let us pray.

[35:42] Go, go. Very good. Go, go. Go, go, go. Go, go, go. Go, go. How do you speak? Go, go. Go, go.

Go, go, go.