

Feeble Excuses

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[0 : 0 0] today's reading is from Luke 14 starting at verse 15 when one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things he said to him blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God but he said to him a man once gave a great banquet and 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 but they all alike began to make excuses the first said to him I have bought a field and I must go out and see it please have me excused and another said I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to examine them please have me excused and another said I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come so the servant came and reported these things to his master then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the cities and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame and the servant said sir what you commanded has been done and still there is room and the master said to the servant go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled for I tell you none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet well Penny thanks very much indeed for reading good morning everyone lovely to see you do please keep Luke chapter 14 open and I'm gonna pray for us let's pray together psalm 19 the law of the lord is perfect reviving the soul the testimony of the lord is sure making wise the simple the precepts of the lord are right rejoicing the heart the commandment of the lord is pure enlightening the eyes heavenly father we thank you for the privilege we have of reading your words and hearing it proclaimed and we pray that you would indeed revive our souls make us wise rejoice our hearts and enlighten our eyes and we ask it for Jesus sake amen now I wonder what the best invitation is that you've ever received perhaps a birthday party invitation in a fantastic location or perhaps the wedding of a best friend a wonderful day to celebrate or perhaps it was an invitation to uh I don't know watch your favorite sports team or go and see your your favorite bands or perhaps it was an invitation to join a whole bunch of friends in a magnificent uh surroundings doing something uh together I think probably for me one of our uh best invitations was to a black tie dinner at the guild hall in the city and the invitation came on an extremely kind of heavy duty piece of card it was a gold embossed all the way around the edge the dress code was definitely black tie the evening started with drinks in the old library which itself felt as as if it was about the same size as a cathedral followed by dinner in the great hall you won't be surprised to learn that we RSVP'd extremely quickly well today this morning we are looking at the greatest invitation you could ever receive Jesus invitation to his heavenly kingdom this parable this well-known parable of the great banquet and yet the shock is that Jesus tells this parable to explain why it is that so many turn the invitation down because remember this section of Luke's gospel starts with that question back in chapter 13 verse 23 just look back to it lord

will those who are saved be few and we've had haven't we the answer over the last two weeks not so much few because there will be many it's just that they won't be those who you would expect not the religious not the impressive not the opinion makers not the elite not the powerful but in many respects the also rams perhaps it's all best summarized in chapter 13 verse 30 as Jesus says some who are last will be first and some who are first who will be last but why is that well we saw last week it's not that Jesus lacks compassion but that people lack humility they won't humble themselves before Jesus they won't say to Jesus I know I don't deserve to be in your kingdom chapter 14 verse 11 for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted and so Jesus tells this parable that we're looking at today in part to urge those who have yet to accept his invitation to do so and to do so urgently and there may well be some of those uh some of us who are joining uh Grace Church here this morning for whom that is precisely the take home from today but primarily Jesus tells this parable to help those of us who are his disciples to see why it is that more people won't follow him so that we're not discouraged when we face apathy

and rejection or when people seem just disinterested or too busy and so that we persevere in proclaiming the gospel far and wide knowing that on the final day there will indeed be many a great multitude in Jesus' kingdom so that's where we're going this morning and if you printed off a copy of the outline uh you'll see our first point there there's nothing wrong with the invitation there's nothing wrong with the invitation have a look at Luke 14 verses 15 to 17 when one of those who reclined at table with Jesus heard these things he said to him blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God but he said to him a man once gave a great banquet and invited many and at the time of the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited come for everything is now ready now one of the ways in which the Lord Jesus talks about his heavenly kingdom is as a great banquet it's how the section begins back in chapter 13 verse 29 we're told and people will come from east and west and north and south and recline at table in the kingdom of God and that language is now picked up by one of the guests at the dinner party which began in the start of chapter 14 as he says in verse 15 blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God it's a banal rather awkward comment designed to change the subject Jesus you'll remember last week he's been exposing the religious and political establishment their refusal to humble themselves their refusal to enter his kingdom this is a hasn't the weather been lovely kind of comment which is designed to break an awkward silence and change the topic of conversation and yet of course it also reveals this man's presumption that he will be in God's kingdom and so Jesus replies by telling this one of his best known parables the parable of the great banquets it's a far cry isn't it from what is often I guess the popular view

of heaven of being sort of stuck on a cloud you know wearing a nightie playing a harp instead Jesus describes his heavenly kingdom as a banquet a wonderful picture of enjoying God's good gifts his good creation and of course above all it is so very relational isn't it here is God in the very presence of his people in the new creation how much of this would have been familiar to Jesus' listeners I put Isaiah chapter 25 from the middle of the Old Testament on the outline just see how Isaiah describes that heavenly banquet the new creation in Isaiah 25:6 to 8 on this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food a feast of well-aged wine of rich food full of marrow of aged wine well refined and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples the veil that is spread over all nations he will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth for the Lord has spoken now will you notice that this is a banquet with a difference it's a banquet in which death itself will be swallowed up now whatever we live for ends in death it covers doesn't it even the greatest of lives I was just uh noticing some of the some of the people who have died this year so Ken Spears the co-creator of the Scooby-Doo cartoon series the actress Diana Rigg the 1966 England World Cup winner Nobby Stiles the Diego Maradona Justice last week Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg James Bond actor Sean Connery all have died and yet here is God's promise hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus Christ that one day death itself will be swallowed up forever in many respects it is the world we all long for in a sense it's it's a world that movements such as the such as Me Too or Black Lives Matter or extinction rebellion are all about longing for a perfect world no more death no more tears no more sickness no more pain no sadness no loneliness and no disappointment and who are the expected guests well Old Testament Israel like the Pharisees and now in the arrival of Jesus Christ everything is ready after all remember at this point in Luke's Gospel Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem by dying on the cross in our place Jesus unlocks the gate to the heavenly party the forgiveness of sins the peace with God everything will be ready to invite people into his kingdom all we need to do is to accept the invitation and follow him it really is the best invitation you could ever receive so why don't more people follow Jesus well there's nothing wrong with the invitation that's easy I think to forget how wonderful the invitation is especially perhaps if we're someone and actually we've been following Jesus for many years after all following Jesus in the UK means very much being part of the minority being on the cultural edge so to speak it's very much not mainstream it's easy to lose confidence talking about Jesus easy to lose confidence inviting people to hear about Jesus or simply to lack energy and enthusiasm for the work of the Gospel and yet the fact is that all the jubilees and carnivals and fiestas and banquets and laughter and festivity of a thousand years of human history will not compare with the wonder and glory and joy of the celebration which the King of the universe has planned there's nothing wrong with the invitation but secondly there's everything wrong with the excuses have a look at verses 18 to 20 but they all alike began to make excuses the first said to him I bought a field and I must go out and see it please excuse me and another said I've bought five

yoke of oxen and i'm going to examine them please excuse me and another says i've married a wife and therefore i cannot come now in the days before refrigeration and online food deliveries you couldn't simply order your posh party food from your favorite supermarket and have it delivered the next day now that meant that in the first century dinner party protocol was such that two invitations would be sent out when there was an upcoming celebration the first would have been sent several weeks beforehand so that numbers could be sorted out so that you knew how many people were coming and so that you could order the food and make sure everything was ready the second invitation was then sent at the point when the celebration itself was ready telling people now is the time to come in other words each of these guests who make their excuses they've already said yes to the first invitation now that the second invitation comes they say no and they really are the worst excuses you'd ever hear a first century farmer wouldn't have dreamt of buying a field without seeing it i guess it'd be rather like going onto ebay and looking at a house and uh and parting with a million pounds despite the fact that you all you've seen is pictures and then decided to go and look at it afterwards nor would he have dreamt of buying some oxen without first going to examine them to see if they were fit and healthy it'd be as foolish as uh buying a car over the phone parting with your cash and then only later taking it for a test drive as for the third excuse why that is the most contrived of all in a culture where wedding plans took months it's inconceivable that he had suddenly decided to get married just with a few days notice you know it's as if he kind of opened his diary uh you know on monday morning just to check what what he had on that week oh yes i've got that business meeting on monday i'm meeting up with those friends on tuesday evening for a drink oh and and look oh i quite forgot i'm meant to be getting married on wednesday and unlike the others there's not even an apology what keeps people from jesus banquet a piece of land a yoke of oxen and a wife none of them of course bad things in themselves it's simply that other things these other things were more important to them than jesus kingdom there are deals to be done there are careers to be pursued holidays to be enjoyed

kids to ferry around pleasures to pursue and all without any reference to god i wonder what you make of their excuses because when all is said and done they are fake and as far as god is concerned they're an insult just listen to one commentator on these verses let the words of our lord on this subject sink down into our hearts infidelity and immorality no doubt slay their thousands but decent plausible smooth spoken excuses slay their tens of thousands no excuse can justify a person in refusing god's invitation and not coming to christ when you say what are the implications for us well if we haven't yet accepted jesus invitation it's vital to see our excuses for what they are they are as offensive to god as the excuses of the people in this parable i guess it's the equivalent of a of a friend or a colleague perhaps inviting you to to a party or to go and join them for a drink uh one evening when we're out of lockdown you're able to do so and of course ordering your substantial meal at the same time and you say to them well of course i'd love to join you but i know tuesday evening is my sock um tidying evening or it's my hair washing evening or it's my phone update evening they are just fake excuses hope we can begin to see how actually this gets very close to the bone indeed for every millicent atheist banging out books and articles on their keyboard running against christianity there must be 20 others who think they can safely ignore jesus or just pay lip service to him and that somehow they'll be welcomed into his heavenly kingdom and be at his heavenly banquet nonetheless but they won't and therefore if you've never accepted jesus invitation why not at the very least i take it you should be asking yourself do my excuses really stand up to scrutiny well those of us who do belong to jesus why we need to see people's excuses for what they are we live in a country where jesus is largely ignored he's largely ignored by the establishment by the opinion makers by the elite he is scoffed at he is sidelined he is paid lip service to he is barely given a nod at state occasions or he is simply ignored it's very easy to be unnerved by all of that very easy to lose our confidence so why is it that people reject jesus what stops more people following him is it because the new testament documents are lacking well we've just heard from adrian they're not is it because the claims of jesus don't stack up is it because actually the invitation it's just not all it's cracked up to be no it's simply because people don't want to go other things are more important to them they have other priorities now of course it shows how to pray how to pray for colleagues and friends and neighbours like that it also shows how to pray for ourselves that we wouldn't be unnerved by it unnerved by people's excuses i guess it reveals too doesn't it something of the the limitation of what what is often

[20 : 14] called apologetics you know trying to answer all those questions you know can i trust the bible what about suffering hasn't science disproved christianity how can jesus be the only way to

god is christianity misogynistic all those kinds of questions jesus is showing that at the end of the day it's not intellectual objections and intellectual questions that stop people entering god's kingdom it's simply that they don't want to and other things are more important to them thirdly watch out for the reversal watch for the reversal have a look at verse 21 to 24 so the servant came and reported these things to his master then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant go out quickly to the streets and the lanes of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame and the servant said sir what you commanded has been done and still there is room and the master said to the servant go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled for i tell you none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet now i guess we might expect the the master perhaps to be disappointed or anxious or or sad or embarrassed it's easy to present god like that as a kind of wounded party but no notice he is angry and rightly so because his his gracious invitation has been turned down this is his just righteous anger and so the invitation goes out to others to those who would never imagine that such an invitation would come their way i think it's what explains the word compel there in verse 23 it doesn't mean the servant forces people to come rather he is showing them precisely how much they are wanted that actually the invitation really is for them in fact it's very easy i think to miss the significance of the servant in the story he actually bears a very close resemblance indeed to the lord jesus so notice in verse 17 he he announces the banquet is ready just as jesus came to earth to proclaim and invite people into his kingdom he then notice returns the master to report back just as after his death and resurrection the lord jesus ascended back to heaven but he then goes out a second time to compel people to come in again the parallel with the lord jesus as by his spirit the message of this glorious invitation goes out to the ends of the earth it's the reversal that lies at the very heart of this section of luke some who are last will be first now that is precisely what we see in luke's second volume in the book of acts as the gospel goes out to the nations as all sorts of people from north south east and west become disciples of jesus an ethiopian eunuch a roman centurion a lydia the businesswoman the first convert in mainland europe the apostle paul who himself would take the message of jesus to the heart of the roman empire some who are last will be first but some who are first will be last like the pharisees here in luke chapter 14 they think you see that the only person they've rejected is jesus they certainly don't think they've rejected god's invitation to his heavenly banquet and yet of course once we see how very central the servant is

to this parable we see that if you're rejecting jesus then you are rejecting god himself what do you say what are the implications well i think just one word perspective perspective because of course the tragedy is that the banquet is so good no one who's sitting at the table in that banquet no one's going to be fussing about the fact they didn't pay more attention to their field or to their oxen or their career for those who have yet to accept jesus invitation don't let the attitude of the pharisees lock you out remember chapter 13 verse 24 strive to enter through the narrow door it's hard isn't it to go through a door which other people aren't going through we begin to think to ourselves oh perhaps perhaps it's not really the right door to go through at all or perhaps if i do go through actually what's on the other side isn't really that important after all jesus wants us to see what is really important in life you say you're too busy really you say that work is so demanding really you say that your weight you get older and you've got less on your plate really you say that you have so many family commitments really can we see jesus isn't fooled by our excuses so let's make sure that we're not fooling ourselves of course it may well be that actually we relate much more easily to the second group of people who were invited those who never really imagined that such an amazing invitation would come their way in the first place perhaps you don't regard yourself as part of any establishment let alone a religious one you're far from god and you know it in which case the lord jesus christ wants you to know that this invitation is for you if only you would accept it but what about those who have accepted the invitation well again it's that one word perspective when we feel we're in a minority when we feel that jesus kingdom is insignificant when we feel intimidated or just ignored by a secular culture that barely pays lip service to jesus why we're to get a sense of perspective we're to get the right perspective the banquet's not cancelled it's just that on the whole it's not the impressive the opinion makers the powerful those perhaps we might think of as the first who are going to be there so let's expand our horizons perhaps change our perspective and rejoice that actually across the globe even today there are indeed those from north and south and east and west who will be at jesus kingdom and open our eyes to those around us those around us where we live or at school or at work who might be thought of as being amongst the last perhaps those who

are far away from god because of their lifestyle or their culture or their sexuality or because of their background and prayerfully seek to bring jesus invitation to them let me lead us in prayer let's pray together for i tell you none of those who were invited shall taste my banquet heavenly father thank you for this glorious invitation which the lord jesus issues to this heavenly banquet thank you that he died on the cross and rose again thank you that death is indeed defeated for those who belong to him and we thank you too heavenly father for helping us to see why it is that so many reject this wonderful invitation and we pray therefore for all of us for a sense of perspective for those who are holding on to these kinds of excuses pray for an ability to see them as you see them to see their excuses as you see their excuses for those of us trusting in the lord jesus already again we pray for a sense of perspective to see how glorious your banquet will be to be reminded there are indeed people from north south east the west who are coming into your kingdom please would you alert us to those who we might think of as being last such that we might be able to invite them to hear of jesus glorious invitation and no more so than in these weeks ahead leading up to christmas and we ask it in jesus name amen thank you you you