

There Is Still Room

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[0 : 00] In the parable of the great banquet, these words, verse 22, and the servant said, Sir, what you have commanded has been done, and still there is room, still there is room.

And on this last Lord's Day morning of 2019, it's good, it's essential, I would say, it's essential to reflect on the Lord's dealings with us as a church, to reflect on the Lord's dealings with each one of you under his hand, and as we do so, to return thanks to him, to thank him for his every blessing towards you, to thank him for his blessing towards this congregation.

We look back and we do give thanks for the many, many blessings that God has given us as a people, as families, as individuals. And it's good to do so in the context of a worship service where we gather together in God's name on this last Lord's Day of the new year, this particular service, to give thanks.

Yes, to look back and to give him the glory. And I know that for many here, that yes, there have been many sadnesses in this past year.

There's been loss, there's been pain, there's been bereavement, there's been setbacks even. But again, remember that all has been under the perfect, sovereign love of God, and we can truly say that behind that drowning providence lies the smiling face of God.

[1 : 42] And so, you know, looking back, of course we have to be realistic about one particular thing, and that's our witness, our witness for the Lord. And, you know, for each one of us to examine our hearts and to ask, if you have to ask myself, you have to ask yourself, have you truly been a servant of the Lord even in this past year?

Have I served Him with all my heart and soul and strength and mind? Have I truly loved God and my neighbour as myself? And in that love have I lived out my profession in the Lord Jesus?

As we ought. As I ought. As you ought. Have you nurtured that missionary heart that seeks the spread of the good news of the Gospel, both in our own land and overseas?

Do you have that, as it were, that global perspective of mission? Have you been in fire for the Lord or just a damp squib? Because, as we're going to see in this parable in a certain few moments' time, as Jesus said in the parable, in the Kingdom of God, there's still room, yet there is room. Whether it's in Livingston or Fastgate or Broxburn or West Calder, East Calder, Mid Calder, whatever town, village, city you live in, whatever island you live in, wherever humanity dwells in this land or overseas, there is still room.

[3 : 17] There's still that place to be filled in the Kingdom of God. And the urgency, the urgency to spread the good news of the Gospel is such that, you know, we are each one challenged to think missionally, to have that zeal to tell others of the Saviour, wherever the others might be, whether it's on your doorstep, your next door neighbour, indeed even in the wider world.

Because the need truly is great. You'll have seen that even travelling to church this morning. The need is out there. It's great. There's an organisation, a tremendous organisation, called Doctors Without Frontiers.

Medecins Sans Frontières. And its mission statement is this. We go where the need is greatest. We go where the need is greatest. And if you know anything about that organisation, you'll know that they go to bring healing, physical healing in places of natural disaster or war-torn areas, conflict zones, epidemics, where the need is greatest.

Shouldn't that be applied to you who know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour? Shouldn't that be applied to Christians? To be active and go to where the need is greatest.

Where there is that spiritual need, that epidemic of sin, that war zone of a spiritual warfare. Third, you go where the need is greatest. And where is that greatest need?

[4 : 51] It's right in front of you. Yes, it's in different lands. Of course it is. But the need is your neighbour, whom you exchange pleasantries with, maybe every morning.

The family member who in his heart or her heart wants nothing to do with Jesus. It's the work colleague who wonders why on earth he goes to church on a Sunday morning or evening, or and evening.

It's the friend who says, I admire your faith, but actually it's not for me. It's the spouse who loves you deeply, but there's no place in his or her heart to love the Saviour.

It's the people groups in a thousand of places in the world where the name of Jesus is barely known. It's the countries where they need to educate and teach the things of truth that are so desperately, desperately needed.

It's the world. It's the world. Remember what Jesus said to his disciples when Jesus rose after his death and his resurrection. He told them to make disciples of all nations.

[5 : 55] He said that two thousand years ago. And he's saying it still today. There's still room. There's still, if you like, space. There's spaces in the kingdom of God for sinners to come to know the Saviour, to know that saving grace of the Lord Jesus.

There's still room in the kingdom, that room to be filled, as Jesus said here as he taught this parable to those who were reclining with him at that table in the house of the Pharisees.

And we need to, of course, see this parable in context. We remember it as a parable, so a parable is a story that you play side by side with gospel truth.

And so in the main characters, the main events in the parable represent something greater, point to something and someone greater. And of course, in the parable here, it's a teaching about who will enter the kingdom of heaven and who will not.

And as you go through this parable with me, then I pray that as you do so, you'll be challenged and convicted and concerned.

[7 : 05] I'm concerned for my lack of zeal and for all our lack of zeal and our commitment and the work of mission to the world, that mission that God sends us on to reach out to the lost in Jesus' name.

So we're going to take a closer look at this parable. And of course, as I say, we need to get the background to it because as we read at the start of chapter 24, Jesus has been at, or is at, a Pharisee's home.

He's already shown that he's completely reversing the standards and religious values that the religious leaders had in that day.

You notice that the day that Jesus is at that meal, it's the Sabbath, it's the Jewish Sabbath. And maybe just as an aside, but very interesting, Jesus saw no problem in accepting an invitation to dine at another's home on the Sabbath.

He used that opportunity, of course, to witness to the true light of the Gospel. He used that opportunity. And if you get that opportunity, do so.

[8 : 12] Use that opportunity to reach out to those who were trapped in their legalistic mindset. That mindset that hindered rather than helped the cause of the Gospel.

So, on that Sabbath, that Jewish Sabbath, Jesus is being watched. People there are trying to catch him out. They're going to watch him to see if he's going to flout the rules and regulations.

These rules that have nothing to do with truly keeping God's law. And as we read there in chapter 14, we might say there are four acts, four separate but connected parts of the conversation that Jesus has in that house.

Four acts that bring out the great truth about who Jesus is, about what his mission is, and particularly how self-righteous people have to change their ways from having spiritual pride to being humble and in humility following Jesus.

And as we see, as we see it in verse 22, 23, 24, to notice who are called, who are called to come into the kingdom and who accept that call and receive it with true joy.

[9 : 31] We'll come, as I say, come back to that later. But let's very, very briefly, because we do need to see how Jesus gets to that parable. Very briefly, the three sort of acts, the three component parts before that parable.

Act one, if you like. He's asked if it's lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus asked him. No reply. And what does Jesus do? He heals that disabled man. He does so in the very midst.

And he sends that man away, whole, completely healed. And he asks these censorious Pharisees, these lawyers, well, what about you?

If you had an animal or a son who had fallen into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you rescue, wouldn't you call it a rescue? Again, no reply. So you see, act one, there's been that confrontation between the love of Jesus and the hard-hearted legalism of the Pharisees.

That legalism, that focus on law without grace that actually prevents anyone receiving the kingdom of God in his heart.

[10:37] So that's act one. And then act two, verses seven to 11, there's Jesus again in a parable showing what it truly means to know exaltation in your life.

The wedding feast. Someone, that feast secures a place of honour. The top table, goes straight to the top table. But then he's told, well, actually there's someone who deserves that place more than you do.

And that displaced person's put to a place of least honour and all the shame that that brings. And the message that Jesus gives that to exalt oneself means actually to humble oneself.

In fact, humbling self is a sign of true greatness. Jesus said on another occasion, remember he'd not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Sinners who know that they're sinners before God. Sinners who know that they can't save themselves by their own efforts. And then verse 12 to verse 14, we have act three, if you like.

[11:42] Again, you see that this thread that runs through these parables, this focus on selfless, humble living that honours God. I mean, Jesus has spoken to the guests at the meal.

Now he speaks to the host, the man who invited them. And he's giving advice about motive in that self-absorbed society.

Self was king in it. In many ways, self still is king in our own society. And the invitations that a person gave out to a meal for self's sake. You know, if you invite someone to a meal, he'll invite you back.

The self-centered act, not for the sake of others, but for the sake of self. But Jesus says that true selfless love is seen in inviting those who can't repay.

The poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind. You'll see that category again. And Jesus speaks of those who are invited to the kingdom of God and receive that invitation, with thanksgiving and joy.

[12:46] And again, the point is, you know, as Jesus said, look at the motivation in your action. Are you loving God and serving others? Are you simply serving self?

So, Jesus has given these teachings, or if you like, that thread through these various acts of conversation. Teaching about humble service, selfless service, that selfless action, these selfless actions that characterize the true citizen of heaven.

And then he, then he comes to the main parable, if you like. And in this last Lord's Day morning of 2019, a parable that we do well to focus our hearts on.

To see the great importance of Jesus teaching here that speaks of urgency. Urgency in hearing the message that Jesus gives.

Urgency in receiving that, the good news of salvation. And the urgency of going out with that message to others, to tell others the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:51] So, let's look at what we see here in that parable of the great banquet. First of all, the invitation given. So, Jesus has spoken to the host.

He said that, you know, those who don't live for self, in fact, will actually show their faith by works, the works of, in loving God and their neighbour as themselves.

Jesus said that selflessness will find its reward at the resurrection. And then a rather pious individual, as you see in the passage, he sort of blurts out, blessed are all who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

And Jesus uses that opportunity to tell of the kingdom of God and uses a parable to teach the vital message of mission.

Because it's God's mission. It's God's initiative. God has initiated the proclamation of salvation in Jesus. And to give you that message to give on and to pass on to others, so this parable then, as we look at it more carefully, I pray that it will convict you.

[15:06] And you who know the blessings of already being in the kingdom, don't keep that message to yourself, don't keep that privilege to yourself. And if you haven't yet come into the kingdom of God, if you haven't yet given your life to the Lord Jesus, if you haven't yet responded to

that invitation in that positive thanksgiving and receiving, well, this is an opportunity for you to consider your heart, to consider your ways and to accept that invitation and hear what Jesus is saying to you for your eternal good.

So, what about the invitation? Who gives it? Well, obviously, if it's an invitation to a banquet, it's going to be a very wealthy individual who's giving this banquet.

Obviously, this is a person who's got a great standing in the community, somebody who'd be highly respected enough to host this lavish, sumptuous meal.

I mean, this was a bit like today and certainly in Jewish society 2,000 years ago, a banquet was no ordinary meal. It was lavish. It was sumptuous in a day and an age where obviously provision of food was limited.

A banquet was something very, very special and the best of everything. And the warm, convivial atmosphere in that social interaction in that house, it was to be, you know, sought after, you might say.

[16:33] So, that banquet then, the lavishness, the sumptuousness, surely a representation pointing to the kingdom of God, the kingdom that Jesus had come to earth to bring in.

A kingdom that speaks of the abundance of blessing. The kingdom that speaks of the fullness of grace and the fullness of provision for eternal life for all who receive that invitation and respond by accepting that invitation.

and this ultra-generous host that we see here, of course, points to God. God who sends out the invitations to come into his kingdom.

It's that invitation that you hear Jesus proclaim, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I'll give you rest. The invitation that Jesus gives that fully, to fully, to satisfy you fully, to satisfy your deepest need fully, to give you that eternal safety for your soul.

And you see in verse 16 the invitation, who's it given to? It's given to many, to many, to the invitation to come into the most wonderful, the greatest, the most fulfilling, the most satisfying, the most rewarding place in all eternity, the kingdom of God.

[17:56] That's what's been, that's the invitation to come to. the reign of the Lord Jesus in your heart. A kingdom where your most precious possession, your soul, your soul is safe.

A kingdom that's got no end. A kingdom that Jesus came to bring in when Jesus came in human form when he was born in Bethlehem and came to proclaim good news, the good news of salvation. You've all received that invitation. But what's been your response? Well, look at the different responses that we've got here as we read on in the parable.

As we see the invitation rejected. You see three representative responses that actually really are one if you look at the theme.

What are we told of the first person? One man, the man who's been given the invitation and he makes the excuse he's bought some land, he's got to go and check it out. That's obviously an excuse.

[19:01] I mean, obviously to buy the land, he would have had to have checked it out first. He's just making an excuse. He doesn't want to come to that banquet. And then the second man makes the excuse he's just bought some animals to help plough his field.

He's going to have to test them. But again, it's just an excuse because of course he would have had to have tested them and checked them out to see if they would perform the task he wanted them to do. Again, an excuse.

He simply didn't want to accept that invitation. Then the third man says, just because he's married, just married, he can't go to the banquet.

Again, it's an excuse. His marriage is going to be safe even if he does go to the banquet. What are we seeing? What's the theme? What's the thread in each of these excuses?

The thread surely is this. The busyness and the business of everyday life has taken priority over accepting the invitation to come and dine with the master.

[20:08] In other words, bring that, what's the parable pointing to it? Things, others, matter more than Jesus. Even human relationships, taking precedent over your relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Worldly possessions, other people, you've made them your gods, rather than following the one true God and receiving Jesus as your Savior.

Is that anyone here? Maybe you've been putting off, accepting that invitation to come to know him as Lord and Savior to enter into the kingdom of God because you've got other claims in your life,

other claims in your heart.

Because when you reject Jesus, you're actually showing that your priority, your first love isn't him, but it's someone or something else. But God has to have first claim over you.

Another year is almost over, God willing, another year is soon to come. But don't leave another year without accepting by faith, accepting that invitation that Jesus gives you to come to him and know him as your Lord and Savior.

[21 : 22] Because he makes and gives that invitation in love. Don't keep making excuses. Excuses maybe some of you have been making all your life. You've heard the gospel, you've heard the message.

Come to him and know him as your Savior. But we've been shown three excuses that basically show the same principle of self-first rather than Jesus.

But there are those who will receive and will accept the invitation. You see that in verses 21 and 22, the invitation accepted. And those who made their excuses, they've not been given chance after chance after chance to accept that.

They've had that invitation in their possession long enough. They've had time to accept. They've made their excuses. They're not going to be invited again. It's a warning that all who persistently refuse, they offer a salvation of Christ alone.

But isn't that continuous giving out the invitation? There'll come a time when that invitation is withdrawn. But the same invitation is received by others as you see here in the parable.

[22 : 40] And notice those who are given the invitation and who accept it are the same category of people that you saw there in, as it were, that Act 3 in earlier, the parable of the wedding feast.

The poor, the poor, the blind, the lame, they make no excuse. They all accept their invitation. invitation. But why does Jesus mention this particular group who accept the invitation?

Who were they? Well, they were the outcasts, the people that the bulk of Jewish society rejected, the city dwellers whom people would go out their way to avoid, the poor, the blind, the crippled, the lame, those who had no self-prime, those who grasped at the invitation out of their need, out of their sense of need.

People who were surprised by grace. Like at the start of Jesus' ministry, Jesus spoke of his mission to the lost. As we said, he'd come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

He didn't come to call those who by their own sense of worthiness, said we don't need a saviour.

But Jesus came to proclaim, as he said, good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, the spiritually poor, the spiritually blind, the spiritually oppressed, all who know that you can't enrich yourselves in salvation by your own efforts, but it's only through Jesus and his work of salvation that you can be found acceptable before God, you who know that sin's oppression can't be relieved except by the saving work of Jesus, and you who surrender all to your saviour, and you who have received that invitation, you who have had your eyes opened, and who've had your life enriched by saving grace, you know that your salvation has nothing to do with your own efforts, it's not by any kind of self-perceived righteousness, but you know it's through the grace of

[25 : 10] God, the grace that saves, and so in this last Lord's Day morning of 2019, give thanks, we said at the start, we look back to give thanks, we'll give thanks in your heart for that great salvation that's yours in Christ.

The year's almost come to an end for some of you. This year's seen a number of beloved individuals, family, friends, loved ones who've been taken home to glory, and you know that those who have been taken home, who gave their lives to the Lord Jesus, you know that they're safe, you know that because they received that invitation, they received that invitation to come to the banqueting house of the Lord, and you know that by faith they accepted that invitation, and the comfort you have is that they're safe in eternity because they were of the poor, the blind, the crippled, the lame, who received the invitation, who knew that their deepest need was satisfied in the Lord Jesus.

But all of you who remain, the invitations are still being sent out, and all over the world people are accepting that invitation to come into the kingdom and leave their past behind.

But notice, notice in the parable, that's in reality, there's still room, there's still room for the kingdom to be filled. As you see there in verse 23 and 24, the invitation extended, go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled.

So the servants, now the servants of the master have been called to go out on a mission. It's a mission of persuasion. And notice, it's a mission in places outside of the city this time.

[27 : 07] They're to go out into the country, into the hedgerows, the country lanes, the rural areas, because there's still room in that banquet. And the lesson surely is this, if you're a servant of the Lord Jesus, you've got a mission to undertake, a mission of compelling, persuading, strongly persuading others to come to the banquet, to come to that eternal feast, to come to the one who offers you that lavish gift of eternal life in the kingdom of God.

There's still room. The work goes on because there's still room. I mean, the servants there were sent beyond the city to, as we said, to go into the rural places. And we might say, yes, bring that to ourselves today.

People are still being sent out of their comfort zones to go elsewhere to serve in mission. For some it's going to be to leave these shores to go overseas with the message of the good news of Jesus Christ.

For others it's going to be leaving your comfort zone, go to where the Lord leads you in different parts of the country and for you to be willing to be sent where the Lord sends you. But the point is, surely, whether it's the city, whether it's the rural areas, it speaks of the worldwide mission of the church.

church. So what end do we take from this parable? What does it point to? Surely, first of all, it points to God. God is the one who invites and sends.

[28 : 41] God doesn't demand anything of you other than to receive the invitation that he gives you to receive it positively by faith. Because Jesus has done all the work. Jesus has made it possible for you to be reconciled to God and enter his kingdom.

And then, we'll say this again, it's so important, the master in the parable there, he invited the poor of the city as well as the poor of the rural areas.

As we said, there's that worldwide call of Jesus. Because the name of Jesus has been proclaimed and must be proclaimed to every tribe and nation and language group and people.

It's the universal call of Christ. The mission field is the world. The Lord Jesus is the Lord of the harvest and that harvest of the world.

And then thirdly, the parable, this parable shows the love of God. That God should invite anyone into his kingdom because none of us deserve to receive that invitation.

[29 : 51] But he calls and he brings into his kingdom by his great love. So, as we close this service, this last Lord's Day service, morning service of 2019, give him the praise and the glory.

Give him thanks for the grace that God has shown even in this congregation and showing his kindness and inviting sinners to his banquet, to his kingdom because he's prepared a place for you. He is the one who you love, who first loved you. And you who know that love, pray for loved one because there is still room in the kingdom of God.

and yes, when you go out to compel others, go out in the name of Jesus and bring the name of Jesus to those on that mission field and your doorstep elsewhere.

Tell them of the Saviour who loves you, who gave his life for you. Tell them of the Saviour who truly satisfies you now and satisfies you eternally.

[31 : 01] And do so for the glory of his name. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, you have given us much to ponder, much to meditate upon, to contemplate, and much to put into action.

And so, Lord, we call upon your name to give us your strength, your enabling. Give us that courage, we pray, to go in strength of your name so that we might be servants of the Master, inviting others, compelling others, to come and know Jesus, a Saviour, to come into the kingdom of God.

And so, Lord, bless, we pray all that has been said and considered this morning. May it have been to your praise and to your glory. Go before us, Lord, in all things we ask.

And we pray these things again in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close now in Psalm 47 on page 62 of our psalm books.

As with the psalm, earlier psalms we've been singing, this is a psalm of mission. All nations, clap your hands and shout, let joyful cries to God ring out. How awesome is the Lord Most High, great King, who rules the earth throughout.

[32 : 25] Psalm 47, the whole of the psalm, to God's praise. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.