

The power of invitation

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[0 : 00] Today's topic is the power of invitation and we all love an invitation. It tells us that there's something great going to happen and invitations come for a variety of reasons.

Only just two weeks ago I received, this is not normal I have to say, two birthday invitations, a 50th, a 60th, two wedding invitations, a baptism invitation and an invitation to my own birthday.

So all within one week. But today we're going to talk about a particular invitation and this particular invitation is one that has power attached to it.

But before we do that we need to review what happens when we accept the invitation to come to Jesus when we first came to know him.

Now we know and we've been doing this through Romans, we know that the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes and we accept that the gospel we commit, sorry, for everyone who believes and when we accept that gospel we are committing to three things.

[1 : 25] I'm not sure that you actually notice that we commit to these things but first and foremost we all know that we're committing to Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who has come into the world to live the perfect life, to die the perfect death on our behalf and who has risen from death to life to proclaim his power over sin and death.

We know that when we see the gospel. But the second commitment is to the church, to the universal church and to our local church.

We're committed to the body of Christ when we come to the gospel. We participate together in worship, in serving each other, in loving each other.

It's why our mission statement here at St Paul's is to know Jesus, to treasure Jesus and to represent Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

But the third commitment is that when we come to the gospel is to the cause of Jesus. It's to Jesus and his mission is what we come to.

[2 : 42] If we are not committed to what Jesus is committed to, then it's going to question that first and second commitment.

You cannot truly be committed to Jesus and his saving power for us personally and truly committed to the church locally and universally if in fact you are not committed to the cause and the mission of Jesus.

You can, on the other hand, be committed to church and to serving and doing lots of things within a church and to a mission and not be committed to the cause of Jesus, to his mission.

And if that was the case, then we have a serious problem. So we need all three commitments. Now, what is the cause of Jesus?

Well, 1 John 3.8, and I will be jumping from verse to verse all over the place. So if you're a person who wants to reflect on what has been said, you might want to just jot those verses down or flick quickly in your Bible.

[4 : 02] But in 1 John 3.8, it tells us the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. And 2 Corinthians 5.18 says, That is, Jesus' ministry is to destroy the devil's work.

And the Father says that we too have that ministry. Not only do we have the ministry, but we are given the message as well in verse 19, where it says, And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

So, every one of us here who is a child of God's, who has Jesus as their saviour, has a job title.

That is, we are all ministers. And not only do we have a job title, but we have a job description. And that is the ministry of reconciliation.

So how do we do that? Well, we follow the example that scripture gives us. And of course, we follow God's example.

[5 : 33] So God says to come. We read this. Come all you who are thirsty. Come to the waters. And you who have no money, come buy and eat.

Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

The only thing that will satisfy is if you come. You cannot buy it and you cannot earn it, these verses tell us.

Matthew 11, 28 says, Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

So Jesus says come. God says come. Jesus says come. John 14, 6. Jesus answered, I am the way, the truth and the life.

[6 : 36] No one comes to the Father except through me. So Jesus is the way. And if we go to the very end of the Bible in Revelation 22, 17, we read, The Spirit and the Bride say come.

And let him who hears say come. Whoever is thirsty, let him come. And whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

The Spirit and the Bride say come. Who is the Bride? It's you and me. It's the Church.

The Universal Church says come. It's the heart of the Trinity to call people. And we have the pleasure and the privilege to be part of the work that the Trinity is doing.

Don't you find that absolutely amazing? That the Trinity is actually saying, Come on, church. You are part of the same work that we're doing here.

[7 : 55] We want you to be part of this same ministry. And did you notice the flow on effect in this verse?

The one who hears is also to say come. That is for every person who responds to the call to come is also then to give that same call to others to come.

It's a mandate. It's something that we have to be part of. If we have accepted the call to come, we then must, not if you wish or if you feel like it, but we must be giving that same invitation to others. Why did Jesus call us to himself? Well, you most probably know this, because God the Father knows that we have a serious problem and he also knows how to fix that problem because we could not.

Many of us have problems that we're not even aware of. And then some of us have problems that we know about, but we know that we cannot fix.

[9 : 13] A really simple problem often can happen with my computer. I know very clearly when I have a problem with my computer. I also know I have no idea how to fix it.

And so I have to take it to the geniuses, the genius bar down at the Mac shop, and they fix it for me. Because I know I'm totally inept when it comes to that.

But you see, we have a much larger problem than my computer. We know that we cannot fix the problem of our sin by our own efforts.

Only God has the answer through Jesus. So there's an invitation to come, and we have the ministry of giving that invitation if we are committed to the cause of Jesus.

But I believe that there's actually power in this particular invitation. There's power in this one, not so much in the invitation to my birthday lunch or to the weddings or anything of that nature, even though they're really lovely invitations.

[10 : 32] But this one, there is power attached to it. Why would I say that there's power? Well, if you look at John 6, 44, it says, No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 16, 8 says, Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, When he comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.

We see again that the Trinity is involved. The Father, by the Spirit, draws a person to Jesus.

So we are joining with God as co-laborers to say, Come. And there's a power linked to any invitation when you are working with God.

It's the power of God. The one who created the world adds his power to these invitations. But there's also a power that stops that from happening.

[11 : 47] There is an enemy to a person's soul. Satan is prowling around like a roaring lion ready to kill and destroy, Scripture tells us.

In the parable of the banquet that we had read in Luke 14, we saw that there's an escalation of the invitation that went out to attend that banquet.

There was every excuse given to stop those who were invited attending. Some were distracted by their real estate purchases, others by their work, others by their relationships.

And so the invitation went to other people who were ready to hear and accept that very special invitation to a banquet.

And you would have noticed there's an urgency. Near the end, it's, you know, a compelling, go out and compel people to actually come. So what are we to do?

[12:52] We're the children of God led by the Spirit of God. And so we are not to have a scattergun approach to sending out invitations.

That is, we're not called to just go and put some flyers maybe down in the mall and hope that, for an invitation and hope that one day somebody's going to pick it up and come and be here at church and see Jesus.

That might happen. But that's not what we're being called to do. No, we are relational people and our invitations are to be about relationships.

Let me give you three really quick tips. Pray and ask God who he would like you to invite to either church or to your community group social event or maybe to your own home to a barbecue where you have invited some other Christian friends just so that you can get to know other people and your friends can get to know your Christian friends.

The Holy Spirit is about the Father's work. Drawing people to the Father so why not partner with the Father in the work that God is already doing?

[14:22] Open up your spiritual eyes and be aware of when God is leading you. So ask God who are you working with at this moment in time?

Who are you drawing to yourself and let me invite them to something. That's the partnership that I'm talking about. Pray for the person or the persons that God has laid on your heart.

We're in a spiritual battle and we need to take that role very seriously. Give an invitation and when you've given the invitation then follow up on the invitation a few days before whatever the event might be.

Opposition as we've seen in the parable for the banquet opposition will come in the form of distractions just like that banquet. So be on your guard be in prayer and follow up in love.

Now let me quickly remind us that church is not an exclusive club. We are always to be on the ready for change and for growth.

[15:32] We are always to have a heart to reach out to others as mentioned right at the beginning. To be committed to the cause of Jesus' ministry.

And it is our heart that will test the validity of your commitment to the person of Jesus by the commitment to his cause.

Let me say that again. It is your heart that will test the validity of your commitment to Jesus by your commitment to his cause.

So who do we invite? Let me actually tell you really quickly there are four groups of people that are in your circle of influence without even working hard to go and meet people.

Okay, the first one is your family. John 1, 35 to 42. John the Baptist is with two of his disciples and he sees Jesus and he points the two disciples to Jesus.

[16:41] In verse 40 it reads, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him we have found the Messiah, the Christ and he brought him to Jesus.

And then as we know the story there's a transformation occurs in Simon, Jesus gives him a new name and that becomes Peter and then Peter has this amazing ministry but his brother was the one who introduced him to Jesus.

You see, it seems that it's a fruit of a disciple is to have a passion and a heart to bring people to Jesus.

Don't allow your heart to go cold. Irrespective of your age, irrespective of how much ministry you may have already have done, ask yourself who have I introduced to Jesus of late?

Be it even in a small way, ask yourself who am I praying for at this moment that I can say come and see? So the first group is your family, the second group are your friends.

[18:11] Following on in John chapter 1, we see in 43 to 46, Jesus invites Philip to join him and Philip then invites his friend Nathaniel.

Nathaniel then goes into this little discussion and questions, is there anything good that can come out of Galilee? Because Jesus has come out of Galilee and so he's sort of asking questions. Surely we can't trust this guy, he's coming out of Galilee. And what is Philip's answer? It's not a great apologetic discussion. What he says is come and see.

See, we actually don't need all the answers that our friends might give us. Jesus can stand for himself. We just need to give the invitation.

But there will always be a cost involved. It may be your time, it might be your money, it might be your energy. And we may need to lay aside our own plans when we are about the father's business.

[19:23] So there's your family, there's your friends, there's your neighbours. John 4, 28-30, it's the story of the woman at the well. And you all know this story well.

This woman is someone who is already rejected by her community. She's ostracised and that is why she's out in the middle of the day gathering water at the hottest part of the day.

But she's touched by God when she meets Jesus. And even though she is an outcast in her community, she didn't let that stop her from the possibility of being shunned again when she goes back to the community with a message.

She ran and told the community that they must see the man who could be the Christ. She's not even certain at this moment in time.

She's been ostracised by her community and yet she still has an important message that she wants her community to know about. How did they respond to the person that they had cast out?

[20:36] They responded by going and seeing Jesus. Friends, this story I think is remarkable. It's not just remarkable from the woman's perspective but it's remarkable from the community's perspective in responding to her.

This is the woman who they thought was a nobody and yet she comes with this message come I think I've actually met the Christ come and see for yourselves.

You see if we bring people to meet Jesus it's Jesus who does the rest. It actually is very freeing in so many ways.

And the fourth group is our work colleagues. Luke 5 27 to 32 the passage is the calling of Levi the tax collector. He later gets a name Matthew. Remember Levi is rich because he skimmed money from the taxes for himself and the Jews looked down on all tax collectors.

Levi was a hated man. But Jesus sees something different in Levi and Levi in turn sees Jesus for who he is as well.

[21:53] Levi then throws a banquet and who does he invite to the banquet? his fellow tax collectors. It's his work colleagues. They're all the people that are hated.

It's great. The banquet is to honour Jesus because Levi has found that his deepest needs have been met in Jesus.

He uses this banquet to testify to what Jesus has done and it's a non-threatening way to invite work colleagues to your home to have a meal and introduce the person who has met his deep needs.

There is great work going on in this banquet. You can see it all happening. God has changed Levi's heart and his heart has gone out to all of his friends and so there is great work going on and yet the Pharisees are still complaining.

So we must be very careful that we do not hinder the great work of Jesus by our complaints and our criticism when things are not happening as we might think that they should.

[23:20] So in a nutshell being committed to the gospel of Jesus means that we are committed to Jesus the church and his cause.

The Trinity is involved in giving the invitation to come and we are commanded to do so as well.

There is special power attached when we are co-workers with God.

We have a circle of influence where we can give an invitation to come and see. Pray for your hearts to be warm friends.

Warm to Jesus and warm to his mission and in so doing we will see God's kingdom grow. Let me pray.

Our Father we just thank you that you have invited us to come and Father I ask right now that by your spirit you will touch each person here who knows you with a person to invite to just come and see.

[24 : 39] Father might you give us divine appointments this week. Divine appointments where we can see your hand at work and that we give a little bit of ourselves so that our friends might meet Jesus.

We thank you in Jesus name. Amen.