



HG14: The Parables Of Jesus 'The Parable Of The Great Banquet'

Luke 14:15-24

Home Group Sermon Notes

24th May 2009 - David Costelloe

There are three points that I want to make this morning. The first is that we are each personally invited to the kingdom of heaven. The second, that this parable is for each of us individually to heed and apply, and the third that an invitation from God should not be lightly refused.

Important things happen around meals in the gospels. For example there is this occasion in Lk 14, there is the meal where Jesus is anointed with costly ointment (Mk 14:3-9), the last supper (Lk 22:14-23), breakfast on the beach after Jesus rose (Jn 21:4-14), and others. A meal shared invokes a sense of unity, as we eat the same food together, and invariably there will be conversation, a sharing of ideas. Meals satisfy hunger. We all need food, physical for our earthly needs, spiritual for our souls. *Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Dt 8:3)* People come to God to satisfy their spiritual hunger. The "Why Jesus" booklet for the Alpha course says we come to Jesus because he satisfies our hunger for meaning and purpose in life, life beyond death, forgiveness.

In this reading Jesus is at a meal, he has been invited by a prominent Pharisee. He tells this parable about a meal, at a meal. Jesus has given us a parable. There are other ways of making a point, of teaching something, but he chose a parable. In doing so he has left it up to each hearer of the story to extract the meaning for himself. It's a personal thing. We are all different, so we are likely to get different things out of the story. And because Jesus chose to tell a story, it would not be right to reduce it to a rule to be learned by rote. The story is to be passed on as it is, for each generation to interpret according to their circumstances. The fact of being a story emphasises the individual nature of the invitation to each person to read, reflect and apply it as they will. It is the individual's response that matters.

We turn to the text. The reading is from verse 15 of Lk 14, but the setting begins at v1 - *One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.* Presumably this happened after attending the synagogue. As he is watched, he heals a man with dropsy, on the Sabbath, when by the Law you are not supposed to do any work, not even healing according to the Pharisees. Jesus rebukes them for caring more about their interpretation of the Law than about the man's suffering. Then he tells them a parable about being humble when choosing your place at a wedding feast. He also tells them not to limit their hospitality to rich friends. He must have come across as a very challenging guest.

We come to v15 where one of those at the table with him says - *Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.* The kingdom of God is of course Jesus' own special territory, and he responds with this story.

v16 *Jesus replied: A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'* What did Jesus intend his hosts and fellow guests to make of this story? Well there was an obvious link with the feast in the kingdom of God. So the certain man would be equated with God. And the great banquet would be equated with the feast in the kingdom of God, which was expected at some unforetold time.

Who were the invited guests? They are the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, the subject of God's covenant with Abraham. The guests had received their initial invitation by the covenant with Abraham. The servant's task was to tell them to come to the feast now, it was ready. The guests had known it was coming but not exactly when.

Off goes the servant with the glad tidings that the feast is ready. Who was the servant? We may think it was Jesus, but they may have thought of the prophets, or the Messiah who was to come.

The servant returns with a list of dismal excuses for not coming.

v18-20 *But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'* Another said, *'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'* Still another said, *'I just got married, so I can't come.'*

Why did these things take priority over the invitation, which they knew was coming? The irony of these excuses is that the subjects are all wonderful things to have, things to celebrate and rejoice over, as blessings from a generous God. But in the story they are cited as reasons not to come to the feast. How perverse is that? Would we do that?

v21 *The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'* The owner becomes angry, and instructs the servant to bring in other people. The Jews were familiar with the notion of God's anger. The prophets said much about it. e.g. Is 51:20 *Your sons have fainted... They are filled with the wrath of the Lord and the rebuke of your God.* The dispersion of Israel, and the exile of Judah to Babylon, were understood to be a consequence of persistently offending against God's word.

The owner responds by sending the servant out a second time v21b *bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame* people who are not materially well off, who had no fields or oxen, no expectation of being invited to rich man's feast. This is in stark contrast to the first invitees, who had fields and yokes of oxen.

The owner sends the servant out a third time v23 *Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full* to go beyond the city to people who not just had no expectation of the feast, but possibly had no knowledge of the giver, i.e. people who were not Jews, but strangers and aliens who lived among them.

The story concludes with the host affirming his disaffection with his original invitees v24 *I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.* To the Jewish leaders, such as the Pharisee who was Jesus' host, the implication that God no longer favoured the Jews must have been outrageous, shocking, insulting. There was an expectation that God would show his favour beyond the Jews (Is 49:6b) but salvation was first for Israel, then for the world. The point of the parable must have been to give that shock, a wake up call for the Pharisees. No one can be complacent about God's call to them.

Not surprisingly this is where Luke's account of Jesus' meal at the Pharisee's house ends. It's hard to imagine the social event surviving such a suggestion.

And now let us consider what the story means for us, in our context. The key teaching point stands – that when you become aware of a call from God, an invitation, do not ignore it. God's word is more important than anything else in your life

God has said – *I am the Lord Your God... You shall have no other gods before me* (Ex 20:2,3). Nothing should come between us and God, not our house, not our car, not our job. All of these would be ridiculous excuses for declining God's invitation right away. (Psalm 95:7,8) *Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts* and Jesus says (Jn 4:23) *a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.* We are urged to respond to God without delay.

I wonder how the story will call to you. Perhaps you have answered His call, but not shown your gratitude, have kept your joy too carefully hidden. Well you can worship the Lord, in prayer, in song, generosity, creativity. Let yourself go, you have nothing to lose and all of life to gain.

Do you feel that like the servant you should go out to spread the word and bring people in to the knowledge of God's love and His promise of salvation through Jesus? Perhaps you could be a better witness, readier to share God's love in practical ways, better placed to speak up for your faith when an opportunity arises? If that is your call, then turn to God in prayer, acknowledge His word, and ask Him to show you what to do.

Is there a twinge of your conscience, about something you know is not right in God's way; a bad habit, or an unhelpful relationship, or a commission you have ignored? Whatever it may be .. *Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.* Respond to his word. Seek his forgiveness and do what you know you should.

For the implication of the story is clearly that to refuse God's invitation is to risk his anger, and whatever that might entail. And I think the story tells us that if we fail to heed God's word, we will not thereby frustrate His plan: someone else will be called in our place. And we would miss our chance. The Lord our God is generous, the God of the second chance, but it is not prudent to refuse your first chance, as the story clearly tells.

Conclusion: We have each received an invitation to seek the kingdom of heaven. The call on your life is as individual as you are, and your response is a matter between you and God. And for heaven's sake, for your sake, respond, don't let God's word go unheeded. *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.* (Rev 22:17)



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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

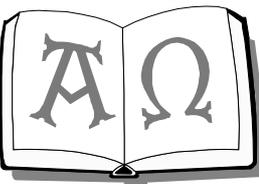
Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.

Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)



Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

1 Where was Jesus when he told this parable? (see verse 1)

What can we tell about his host and fellow guests, to whom the parable was told?

2 The feast in the kingdom of God (v15)

What did the speaker know of the feast of the kingdom of God? (see Isaiah 25:6)

When did Jesus refer to it? (Mt 26:29)

Do you think of Communion as a foretaste of the kingdom of God?

Did you feel that last time you took Communion?

3 The roles in the parable

Who do you suppose Jesus' hearers thought he meant by:

- the man who gave the banquet?
- the guests who were initially invited?
- the servant?
- those subsequently brought in to the feast?

Who do you take them to refer to now?

In which role(s) do you see yourself?

4 The excuses (v18-20)

How is each excuse ridiculous, beneath its veneer of plausibility?

Can you imagine yourself, or someone else, using similar responses?

5 The owner's reaction (v21)

Was it reasonable for the owner to become angry? How would you have felt?

What examples do you know from the bible of God's anger? (e.g. Gen 6:12,13; Gen 18:20,21; Ex 32:9,10; Is 34:2; Rom 1:18). If you are worried about God's anger, remember Rom 3:23,24

6 Your response

You have been invited to the great feast in the kingdom of God. How does your response to the invitation compare with:
- those who were initially invited?
- a good response?

What happened to those in the parable who declined the invitation? (v24)

Who are their contemporaries? How does that make you feel?

7 Who in the parable got to eat the feast?

Are you expecting to be surprised in heaven by who else is there? How has this passage affected your expectation? Does it make you want to reappraise your attitude to any of your neighbours?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).

