

The Parable of the Big Party

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[0 : 00] Good morning St. Mark's. We're going to look now at the parable of the great banquet, or as I like to call it, the parable of the big awesome party. I want you to think of back in the day, you might not be able to remember it, when we could invite people to parties.

Remember before lockdown, you actually had things called parties where people would come around to your house without masks. They didn't even wash their hands at the door with hand sanitizer. It was so unhygienic.

But it was fun, wasn't it? Remember those days when we had people at our house, and we hosted people, and we had parties and dinners together. I look forward to that again. I've missed those things.

But imagine, boys and girls, you invite someone to your birthday party, and they, at the last minute, make an excuse for why they can't be there. And it's a pretty lame excuse, and you suspect, actually, they just don't want to come.

You probably don't even have to imagine it, because it's probably happened to you. It's probably happened to all of us, where we invite someone, and they just make an excuse that they really don't want to be there. And it doesn't feel that nice, does it?

[1 : 10] But imagine, everybody you invited did that. That everybody, every single person you invited, said to you, Actually, I've got something else on, and I'm not going to come.

That would feel pretty horrible, wouldn't it? It's not very nice. It would make you very sad. But that's exactly what happens to this man in the parable that Jesus talks about, the story he gives, of a man who holds a lavish banquet, a big feast, and invites a whole lot of guests, And one by one, each one of them comes up with a lame excuse for why they can't be there.

But then what the man does next is quite unexpected. He goes and invites anyone he can find. He sends his servants out onto the streets to invite everybody and anybody to his party, Because he's not going to let some spoiled brats ruin his party.

He's still going to go ahead with his party, and he doesn't care who comes. He just is happy for anyone to come in. Now that's what this story is about.

And we're going to spend a little bit of time trying to work out what Jesus is saying here. But before we do, we first need to understand just how shocking this story would have been to his listeners.

[2 : 31] Because we've got to understand a bit about hospitality in the culture of ancient Israel. And hospitality back then was a very important thing.

Eating meals wasn't just about getting food in your tummy so you could carry on living. Eating meals was an opportunity for social advancement.

And it was very important, and you'd be very careful as to who you invited to your parties or to your dinners. And there were two main reasons that people would, or how people would choose to invite others.

Firstly, was they would invite people who could pay them back in kind later, That they could then be invited to other important parties in the future, Or people could do favors for them because they invited them.

And so they would think who they would like to owe them a favor, and that's who they would invite. Secondly, they would invite people who were important enough to elevate their own importance.

[3 : 33] And so the more important the people you invited, the more important you could be seen by the other guests and the people in society. And so boys and girls, it was basically like, if you've got a birthday party, It was like choosing your guest list to include only those you knew who would bring the most expensive birthday presents, And including those who were in the cool crowd at school, so that you could also then be part of the cool crowd.

Now I know that that wouldn't make a very fun party, and it's not a very nice way to invite people, But it's what they used to do back in the day when they invited people to their parties. But now Jesus comes along, and he spends time with these people. They've invited Jesus because at this point he's quite an important rabbi. But then he starts to tell them some shocking things. And we read about these things in Luke 14. We read about him saying, Oh, you know, the people you invite to your party should be people who can't pay you back. And they're like, What? But if we understand actually Luke itself, and what one of the major themes in Luke is, We understand why he was saying these things. You see, in Luke, we read about Jesus actually challenging the way that human society works, And the norms of human society.

[5 : 03] And Jesus has come to earth, he tells us, to introduce and to bring about a new society, A new way of relating to other people.

That wasn't known before, and that challenges the norms of the society of the day. It's a society that he's going to be king of, and it's a society that doesn't work like this world does. And he is teaching about what this new society is going to look like. And this parable is really a culmination of that teaching. It's the climax of his teaching about this new society that he has come to bring about.

But what is it actually saying? We understand then that it was quite shocking for those hearers to hear about a man who would invite just anyone to his banquet. But what is it telling us? What is the meaning of it? Well, to understand that, we need to look a little bit at the context. And we don't need to go far. Actually, if you look just at the verse before the parable, we start to see what Jesus is really talking about.

[6 : 07] We start to see the underlying meaning. Look at verse 15. When one of those who reclined at the table with him heard these things, he said to him, Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

Now, what he's talking about is something that the Jews knew was going to come in the future. A feast in the kingdom of God.

Eating of God's gifts and enjoying of God's gifts in the world that God has planned. And they didn't make this up. God revealed it through the prophets. And one of those prophets, for example, was Isaiah.

Turn with me to Isaiah 25. Because it's important to understand just what this guy was talking about. And therefore, what Jesus is alluding to in his parable.

And in Isaiah 25, we read some very interesting things. Because the book of Isaiah and this part of Isaiah tells us about two things in particular.

[7 : 07] God is revealing that he is going to judge the world. He's revealing in the earlier chapters of Isaiah that he's going to judge Jerusalem. He's going to judge his people for their sin and their waywardness. But here, in 24 and 25, he's actually revealing that there is a judgment in future that he is going to do away with and punish all of the rebellious people of this world.

All of those people who have ignored God in the world that he's made. All of those people who have rebelled against him and lived their own way. And all of those nations that have set up resistance to the knowledge of God and persecuted his people.

All of those nations who believe themselves to be gods, to be worshipped. God is going to come down. And he's going to bring a reckoning to everybody who stood against him. Everybody who's sinned against him.

And everybody who's promoted such sin. And it's quite sobering reading. If you read about the destruction in Isaiah 24, you can read that when you're up to it some other time.

But then God also tells about the salvation and the hope and the restoration of this world. He's not just going to come destroy evil. He's going to come and bring about a good world.

[8 : 21] A fixed world. A restored creation like he's always planned. And in that new world that God has always planned to bring about.

We read verse 8. He will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face. And remove his people's disgrace from the whole earth.

For the Lord has spoken. So here we read about a society. A creation. A world. Which we could not even imagine. Because we're so used to death being part of life.

Inevitable. We're so used to the brokenness of this world. That is here because of sin. And because of our disconnection with God. We're so used to pain. And discomfort.

And sickness. That it's very hard for us to conceive of a world without those things. But that is the world that God has planned. Once he does away with sin and rebellion and evil.

[9 : 21] He is going to bring about forever. The good world. The good life. That he has made us to live. And that is what he is expressing through the prophet Isaiah here.

But I want you to see in verse 6. How he's going to kick off this new creation. And it's awesome. Look at verse 6. On this mountain the Lord of armies will prepare for all the peoples a feast of choice meat.

A feast with aged wine. Prime cuts of choice meat. Fine vintage wine. So God is through Isaiah describing a party.

A great party that he has planned to start the new age. The new creation that he's going to bring about one day. And at this party are going to be tangible physical enjoyments.

Things that we would have enjoyed in life. But so much better. Feast of meat. And aged wine.

Prime cuts of meat. This is... He's using very tangible, palpable language.

[10 : 28] To tell us that it's not about going up to an eternal church service in heaven. No, it's about enjoying the earth and its gifts and God's gifts without limit. And we're going to do that at this party that he's going to kick off the new creation with.

I want you to think of the best party you've ever been to. Think of some of the good parties you've been to and what made them good. I can remember one of the best parties I've been to is in 2004. New year 2004. I was in Switzerland. I had the opportunity to go for a skiing holiday when I was living overseas. Really cool. Skiing. If you have the opportunity to ski on snow, you should really try it out.

But it was for a few days. And it was over New Year. And on New Year's evening, they closed off the streets in this little idyllic Swiss village.

With all the snow and the snowy roofs. And it was beautiful. And they closed off the streets and there was a huge dance party. And everybody just came and there were stalls selling food and Swiss chocolates and coffee and all kinds of things.

[11 : 35] And people would just come and dance. There was great music being played. They would meet other people. Just so much fun. And then at New Year's, as the clock struck 12, there was like a 25-minute firework display in the sky.

It filled up the whole sky with light. And the music was going and people were dancing and looking forward to the New Year. It was a really cool party. And it's one that sticks in my mind for a long time.

I'm sure you can think of great parties that you've been to. Well, the party that God has planned for His people to kick off the new creation is going to be a thousand times better than the best party you've ever been to on earth.

And that is what God was talking about when He was talking about this feast that He's going to lay out for His people one day. The question though is who is going to be part of that party?

It's not going to be everyone. And that's important to realize. Because lots of people will be in those who are going to be judged and eternally destroyed by God bringing about judgment to this earth.

[12 : 41] So who is actually going to be part of that party? Well, that is what Jesus is telling us in this parable. And what He reveals in this parable in response to this man's reference to this feast to come, He then goes on to tell them this parable.

And He tells them, You know who's going to be at that party? It's going to be people you don't expect. It's not going to be who you expect. You see, the Jews expected that the people would be at the party of the nation of Israel.

The Jews and those who had earned it through their religious works, through their law keeping and through the various religious things that they had done. And because of who they were and their heritage and their connection with Abraham, they assumed they were the ones who were going to be at that feast.

But then Jesus in this parable says, You know who's actually going to be at the feast? It's those who don't deserve it. Not those who deserve it. Not those who were even originally invited necessarily.

He says at the end, I tell you, Not one of those people who were invited will enjoy the banquet. And that's of course in the parable. But it's quite a shocking thing to say that the people who assumed that they were going to be there because they deserved it, actually are going to end up not being

there.

[14:00] While those who don't deserve it are going to end up being at that party one day. That is what Jesus is revealing through this parable. And those people who don't deserve it, look at verse 23, actually need to be compelled to come in because they don't deserve it.

Then the master told the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in. Or literally compel them to come in. Now why would poor people need to be compelled to come to an awesome feast?

Well I'll tell you why. In that culture that Jesus is talking into, you wouldn't accept an invitation to a meal unless you were able to repay the host in kind.

Unless you would be able to invite him to a similar meal. And so it's very likely that if a poor person was invited to a meal, he would feel obligated to reject the invitation.

Because he wouldn't be able to earn it. He wouldn't be able to pay for it. And that's why these people in the parable need to be compelled to come in. They need to be convinced, Actually, don't worry. You don't have to pay for it.

[15:08] No, surely I've got it. No, you don't. You don't have to pay for it. It's free. The master just wants his house full. Come along. Come. Are you sure? Yes. Come. And that is how God is actually wanting to call people into his kingdom.

By compelling them that they don't have to pay for it. And that is why, by the way, people who don't deserve to be in the new creation and at God's great feast one day will be there.

Because of what Jesus did on the cross. Because of the gospel. Because of what Jesus came on earth to do. Not just to tell us about the kingdom to come. But to open it up for those of us who don't deserve it.

And God is inviting and calling people in to his kingdom. He wants us. He made us to enjoy him and all of his gifts forever.

He made us to enjoy the new creation. And he is calling us in. And he is saying, you know what? You don't even need to pay for it. It is free. You don't deserve it. But I've made a way through Jesus Christ that you can come in anyway.

[16:12] That you can enjoy that party one day. And so that is what Jesus is telling us in this parable. That those who think they deserve it won't be part of it. And those who realize they don't deserve it will be.

And the reason we see is because the people who think they deserve to be part of the new creation. To be part of the party to come.

They end up getting distracted by earthly things. Because they take their place in the kingdom and future for granted. Look at verse 18 onwards.

But without exception they all began to make excuses. The first one said to him, I have bought a field and I must go out and see it. I ask you to excuse me. Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen.

I am going to try them out. I ask you to excuse me. And another said, I just got married and therefore I am unable to come. These guys, they took their invitation for granted.

[17:10] Of course I am going to be invited to that feast. I am important. But I have got actually so many other important things to deal with. They were focused more and distracted by other things.

And that actually caused them to lose their invitation at the end of the story. And so the people who assume they will be invited end up distracted by possessions that they have.

That they think they can, that is going to give them happiness and joy here. As well as alternate sources of joy. The guy at the end, I just got married and therefore I am unable to come.

Now there is nothing wrong with getting married. Marriage is a gift from God. But in those days, and in today, in today's times, marriage is accompanied by a feast.

The wedding reception, there is often a big meal after a wedding. Back then it was very important. It would often last a week. The big festival feast that they had after a marriage.

[18:09] And so I think what is happening here is that this guy has an alternate feast. A competing feast. He's got married. He's so focused in the happiness of this life and what he's celebrating here.

That he's losing sight of what he's being invited to. And I think Jesus is saying the same thing about people today. Is that if we've got so much here.

If we've got possessions. If we've got things that make us happy here. Now lots of those are gifts from God and we mustn't spurn them.

But they should never be distracting enough to distract us away from the feast that is coming. And to distract us away from focusing primarily on that.

And prioritizing following Jesus. And believing and trusting in what he has done to bring us to that future. Prioritizing that over the things that this life gives us.

[19 : 09] And that's really what these guys didn't do. And that's why they lost their invitation. But then we also see the reason that the guys who were invited did come.

Is because they were poor. They had nothing to lose. They knew they didn't deserve it. And they were compelled to come in. They realized that it was free of charge. And of course they would come in. Those people who value it because they know they don't deserve it.

End up being the ones who make it to that great party. And that's why one day I think we're going to see at that new creation.

At that party. We're going to see a lot of people we never expected to be there. People who we thought were so far away from God. That their life was in such a mess. But they are people who have come to realize they don't deserve it.

And value it. And follow Jesus and trust in him. And I think we're going to see a lot of. We're not going to see a lot of people who we expected to be there. We're going to look around and go. Oh. I expected to see him or her here. And they're not here.

[20 : 09] Because they were so religious. They were so upstanding. They did so many good works. But you see those people who might rest on their works. And think that they deserve a place in the party.

Those are the people who end up actually getting distracted by the things of the world. So much that they lose their invitation. And so this is a real warning. This parable. It's really sobering. And it's the cross of Jesus. And following him. And treasuring what he's done for us. So much so. That we put aside everything in this life.

Remember what we learned last week. That we put aside everything that this life can give us. And focus all on following him. Every day we prioritize.

Serving Jesus. Living for Jesus. Growing closer to Jesus. Growing more like Jesus. Learning from Jesus. And seeing our life. In light of what Jesus has done. And where he's taking us.

[21 : 06] Rather than every day thinking about our career. And our toys. And what we can get for ourselves. And how we can improve our lives on earth. That is what. That is one way.

To lose your invitation. To the great party to come. And so there's a few things that this parable teaches us. And I want us to take home. Now. Well you're all at home.

But I want you to actually take home into your hearts. And. The first. Is just to realize. That you are invited.

No matter who you are. Whether or not. You think you deserve it. And I can tell you right now. You don't deserve it. You don't. You don't deserve. And deep down you know this.

You don't deserve to be. In the world that God has planned. You don't deserve to be in a perfect. Restored creation. Because you know you're not perfect. You know you'll probably mess that up. If you were there. But.

[22 : 02] Realize that because of what Jesus has done. To save you from your sins. To wash away your sins. To give you his righteousness. And to transform you. Into a person.

Who will live in the new creation. Because of what Jesus has done. You are invited. You need to be compelled. To accept that invitation.

And I think a lot of people need to be compelled. To believe. That because of what Jesus has done for them. They are invited to the party. To come. Because it sounds too good to be true.

But it isn't. You see Jesus has done. The total work that's needed. That you could never do. So that you can be invited to the party. Without having to earn it.

Without having to pay for it. And maybe you still need to be compelled. That that is the truth. Read the gospels. Read what Jesus has done for you. Read how his death and resurrection.

[22 : 54] Is complete. And it's done everything. For anyone who believes in him. To enter into God's eternal future. Through faith alone. Believe that. And if you do believe that.

Compel others. Help them to realize. That the invitation. That God is offering them. Is free of charge. All they've got to do. Is receive it. Accept it. Through faith.

And submission to Jesus Christ. And who wouldn't want to do that. Given the party to come. Then the second thing. That we need to take into our hearts. From this parable. I think. Is a warning.

There is a real warning here. And the warning. Is to those who have been. Invited. Those who would call themselves Christians. Those who have maybe been brought up. In the Christian church. Believing these things. And the warning is. Don't take your invitation. For granted. Because if you do. If you just treat.

[23 : 52] What Jesus has done for you. As a heavenly insurance policy. That's all signed and sealed. Then you know what you're going to do. You're going to. Concentrate on this life. You're going to concentrate. On your.

Fields. And your yoke of oxen. And your feasts in this life. And what Jesus is saying. Is if you get too absorbed. Into what this life can offer you. You will lose your invitation.

And so it is a very. Real warning. To not be distracted by. Worldly things. And by. What this world can give. And then thirdly. And finally. We've got to understand.

This new society. That Jesus is forming around himself. And that it doesn't. Go according to the rules. Of the world. As we're used to it. And understanding. The society.

Should then affect. Our own understanding. Of our own society. And who we spend time with. And who we're willing. To socialize with. And understanding. Who God shares his table with.

[24 : 49] In the future. Should affect. Who we're willing to share. Our tables. And our hospitality. With. You know. If God includes those. Who don't. Deserve it.

Then we need to. Learn to include. People into our lives. Into our hospitality. Into our society. Who we wouldn't normally. Have included. And who.

According to the rules. Of this society. We wouldn't include. You know. People who don't.

Necessarily do much. For us. People who don't. Give us back. What we give them. People who.

We don't necessarily. Get on with. And people who can't. Invite us in return. And those are the people who. By inviting them into our lives. People who. We wouldn't normally.

We reflect. And foreshadow. This new society. Where. There will be no barriers. Between people. Where everybody. Will love spending time. With everybody else.

[25 : 46] And there will be perfect love. Because we will. Be in right relationship. With God.

Perfectly. And we will be in right relationship. With others. And by. Opening up our lives. And our homes.

To others. Who we wouldn't normally have. As a way of reflecting. That society. Now I know. In lockdown. We can't really do that. In hospitality.

There's various. Other ways we can do it. In who we phone. And who we spend time with. And who we talk to. But. When we do. Open up. I think as Christians. Based on this parable.

We should. Ask. Whether our hospitality. And our social lives. Contrast the world. Around us enough. That it causes. People around us.

To ask questions. And say. Why do they do that? Why do they spend time. With those people? Because when they ask. Those questions. Then we will be able. To answer. Because God did it for us.

[26 : 42] God has invited. Us. To his. Great kingdom. His great party. To come. And that is why. We want to reflect. What God has done for us.

In our dealings. With other people. And he is inviting you. To that too. Well shall we pray. In light of these truths. Lord we thank you. For this parable. We thank you. For this reminder.

Of the awesome party. That you. Are preparing. For those. Who are your people. Thank you also. For this reminder. That. Those people.

Are not who we necessarily. Expect. It's not those who deserve it. But those who trust. In what Jesus has done. To earn it for them. Lord I pray. For all who are listening. To this sermon.

I pray Lord. That you would help them. If they have not yet. Accepted the invitation. That they would seriously. Consider. Why not. Compel them Lord. To.

[27 : 38] To come in. And to accept this great invitation. For eternal life. And resurrection. In the new creation. That you have made possible. Through Jesus. And his death. And resurrection. And Lord.

Those of us. Who. Who have accepted this. And do follow Jesus. Help us not to be distracted. By earthly things. So that we would drift away. From Christ. And following him. And help us.

To be people. Who. Compel. And invite others. To come to this great party. That you have planned. For all eternity. And so we pray these things. Thank you for these encouragements.

And these warnings. Help us to take them to heart. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

