

The Parable of the Great Banquet

When Jesus was going around Galilee and beyond, he was summoning people to God's great supper. He was inviting people to join his kingdom, where there would be a great celebration. God blesses us in this life, but the one to come is going to be even more amazing!

This great supper celebration is something that the Jews had been waiting for, for hundreds and hundreds of years. Our reading from Isaiah would have been ringing in their ears when Jesus was telling this parable.

The Lord Almighty will spread a wondrous feast for everyone around the world—he will remove the cloud of gloom, the veil of death that hangs over the earth; ⁸ he will swallow up death forever. The Lord God will wipe away all tears The Lord has spoken—he will surely do it!⁹ In that day the people will proclaim, “This is our God in whom we trust, for whom we waited. Now at last, he is here.” What a day of rejoicing!

This was a moment Israel has been waiting for and at last, with Jesus, the time has arrived. Those who are invited long ago must hurry up now and come.

But Jesus tells us in his parable that most of those who knew this day was coming and were excited and expectant of this day refused to turn up, giving all kinds of reasons.

You see the **expected** guests to the banquet are the Jews, who had been waiting and waiting for the Kingdom and his chosen Messiah, only to find when it arrives, they have seem to have more pressing and important things to occupy them. What could possibly be more important than responding to God's invitation?

Of course, in Luke's Day, many Jews had become Christians, so it pushes the point a bit to say that none of those who were invited should taste the banquet, since clearly many Jews were part of Jesus's Kingdom movement from the beginning.

But the majority of the nation, both in Palestine and in the scattered Jewish communities in the rest of the world, were not Christians, and it was these Jesus was talking about in his parable.

But see who God's messengers turned to, to come to the banquet. They had gone out into the roads and hedgerows of the world, getting all kinds of unexpected people to join in the party. Those people must have been delighted to be included, the poor, the disadvantaged and disabled. They came in and celebrated with Jesus. But it was not just the Greek gentiles, but people with every kind of moral and immoral background, people quite different from them culturally, socially, ethnically, and ethically.

Everyone is invited, those people we think should be, and those we would rather not associate with, and hope won't be. Everyone is invited.

We mustn't be smug, and think that we are more special than anyone else.

Everyone is invited. If we read just a few verses before, in Luke 24, Jesus was talking with his disciples, telling to them about the importance of not just inviting our friends to dinner, but going out and inviting those we wouldn't normally include.

So, this is a continuation of that teaching and once again, we are challenged. This parable is as relevant today as it was when it was written 2000 years ago. We need to work out in our own churches and families what it would mean to celebrate God's Kingdom, so that the people at the bottom of the pile, at the end of the line, those that we wouldn't normally associate with, would find God's kingdom to be the good news it is.

God invites everybody; we have all been invited, and it's not right for **us individually**, or for this church, to exclude anyone because they are different from us.

This church is an amazing inside out church, with a real heart for reaching the poor and disadvantaged, but there is still work to be done. I still hear some pretty judgemental comments, said in semi-jest, I'm sure, about some who are not worthy of our help and love. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God and we all need to fight against complacency and self-righteousness.

We all need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and reflect on whether we are too busy or have too many other important things to do rather than seek first his Kingdom and his invitation to the banquet that is prepared for us.

Amen