

Luke 14:15-24

As some of you may know I really like American basketball. Every year, the champions for the NBA are given the huge honour of being invited to the White House to meet with the President. I have read that with Donald Trump as the president however, whole teams have said that they may ignore the invite to the White House. You may think that's fair enough, desperate times call for unusual responses. I mean why else would you give up a chance to visit the white house.

But, despite the huge honour it is to visit the White house, I have read that this is not actually that uncommon for at least one player to say they don't want come, it's not just Donald Trump you see. Apparently every year, some athlete says he won't go because he doesn't like who is in office. Republican or Democrat. Every year without fail, someone makes an excuse and won't go. It seems amazing doesn't it. Well, In today's passage we see various people making excuses not to come to a party. While not the White house, it was going to be a big feast.

What I want us to do as we explore the passage today is think about 3 things.

Jesus invitation

Excuses

Our response

Let's start by reminding ourselves of the setting in which Jesus tells this parable.

Jesus is at lunch. Looking back at the first half of the chapter we see Jesus is being hosted by a prominent Pharisee, with other Pharisees and scribes also in attendance. It was quite an interesting lunch party. At first the Pharisees try and trap Jesus into healing a man on the Sabbath, which Jesus does do, but he silences them with a question as he heals the man.

After this has played out Jesus goes on to tell a parable about humility and stating it is a characteristic of those who will be resurrected and enter the kingdom of God. Jesus targets first the guests and then the host and I am sure they felt insulted at the implication of their lack of humility.

This leads us to our passage at verse 15 and a person mentioned as "one of those at the table" speaks up. He is most likely that person at a party who doesn't like uncomfortable silences and says something that everyone can agree with to get the party started again. You know the type of person. This person says, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God". He is basically saying that isn't it great we will all get to be at the feast in heaven.

What this guest says is true. It's grounded in the passage we read from Isaiah. Heaven is compared to a feast and given that in heaven death will be swallowed up you would indeed be blessed to be there. I am sure most of the people would have nodded approvingly as it was said. Finally some conversation that wasn't controversial. Surely even Jesus would agree with that statement.

But... Jesus did have an issue with it. It wasn't an issue with the statement, it was the fact that they didn't understand what he had been teaching. He had just explained that humility was important for the kingdom of God and straight away the Pharisees are patting themselves on the back because they are going to be the part of the elect in heaven and aren't they great! They completely ignore what Jesus says, so Jesus wants to correct them and tells them a parable about a banquet and the people that were invited to it.

The Invitation

Now, **Banquets** at the time of Jesus were the pinnacle of Jewish social life. An invitation like this was a very big deal. To have a great feast prepared for you and to be invited by a prominent person could be the highlight of your life.

Invites to parties like this worked a little differently to today. The host would send an invite letting people know there was to be a great feast. As a guest, you would then respond to the first invitation to let the host know of course you would be honoured to come. But because it was such a big feast, it

would take time to prepare everything. This wasn't an easy one tray bake meal, it was a lot of food.

Then, when everything was ready, you would receive another invite saying "Now is the time to come to the party". You would gather your things and come to the great banquet. There is no way you would miss out on the chance to come to a great banquet from someone important, it's inconceivable. Except in this case, what do we see the guests doing? Well, the guests didn't come did they? We see they make excuses.

Excuses

I want to spend some time looking more closely at the excuses. On one hand they look like ridiculous excuses. I mean who wouldn't have looked at property or inspected their animals before purchasing them. On the other hand, perhaps there was a reasonable excuse. Perhaps for the third person, he was just married, maybe it was okay for him to not come along. To us, it might seem reasonable to give a last minute reason to not come to a party, excuses seem to be much more acceptable today. I think its the reason we see things like the optional 'Maybe' response on Facebook invites.

But this parable wasn't spoken into the 21st century, it was spoken in the 1st century and as the Pharisees heard these excuses they would have thought they were ridiculous. Not because of the excuses themselves, but because they were

made at all. Do you remember what I said moments ago, for 1st century Jews banquets were the highlight of Jewish social life and given that this sounds like a prominent, well off person hosting, there is no way people would have offered an excuse last minute to a man of high social standing.

In fact, everyone would have wanted to go the party and they would have been doing everything possible to ensure they could go.

It would be like this, imagine your dream holiday destination, got it, now imagine if you, your family and friends had won an all-expense paid, first class trip to that dream destination. You don't have to pay a thing, you just have to go. You can see the value of an invitation like that can't you? It would be amazing and it is very unlikely you would be making excuses not to accept the trip. IN fact, you would be doing everything you could to clear your schedule to go. Despite this type of invite however, the guests in this parable refuse. They make excuses. In response the owner of the house becomes angry and orders his servant to get a variety of other people to fill his banquet.

Who then gets invited?

In verse 21 the owner tells the servant to go out into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. To the listeners, this action would have been just as absurd as refusing a well off person's lunch invite. For a rich man to fill his banquet table

with the riffraff and scum of society would be unthinkable in 1st century Judea. Just as much as the Pharisees would have laughed at the idea of offering an excuse to a prominent person's invite they would have laughed at the idea of inviting the sort of people Jesus suggests.

Jesus then finishes the parable by saying, I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.

So what does the parable mean? Who would the first century listeners have equated the various people in the parable to? The key to this starts with the statement that prompted the parable "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God." The Pharisees were thinking that with their religious practices and high standing together with belonging to God's people were definitely going to get them into heaven and as place at the great banquet. However in this parable Jesus is equating the first group of people to the Jews in general and the religious leaders in particular. They had received the first invite, they had the message from the law and prophets, but now that the final invite to God's kingdom had come in the form of Jesus, they were making excuses not to attend the banquet. They didn't want to accept who Jesus really is, that he is Lord and King, the Son of God, the saviour of the world. The second group that were invited are probably the Jewish poor, the Jewish outcast, the Jewish disabled, the type of people Jesus said to his host just moments before in verse 13 should be invited to their

parties. The final group of people, the ones from the roads and country lanes represent the gentiles the people outside the Jewish community. These second two groups are also invited and if they accept will enter the kingdom of God. We see this represented in our church don't we? Most of us here, are gentiles, non-jewish people who have been invited to the great Banquet with Jesus.

For the Pharisees, listening to this parable, to hear that the disabled and the Gentiles would enter the kingdom of God and that they the religious elite would not was just as absurd as the ideas in the story of making excuses not to go to a prominent persons party and a prominent person inviting the lowly. So as we hear this parable, what **should our response** be?

How does this have relevance to us today in the 21st Century. Well I think there is quite a lot we can learn from this.

As we read this story, we can place ourselves into two different groups.

The first group we can place ourselves into is those who are invited to the Banquet. We see from the parable that all peoples are invited to the Banquet. We are warned to not be like the Pharisees when it comes to obediently following Jesus, we are warned against making excuses to not go to the Banquet.

In the parable there are excuses made around land, property and even family. Now these things in and of themselves are not bad, but they become a problem when they are an excuse to ignore Jesus. Is family, work, pleasure, money, your possessions or owning a house more important to you than God?

While in theory it can be easy to say no, in practice I know I don't always live that out. When I am tired or too busy I often won't spend time reading my bible or praying, but if there is a sports game or friends to hang out with I can be willing to stay up late. Or I don't want to talk to my friend about being a Christian but am happy to discuss various other difficult social issues. When I figure out my giving to church and missionaries do I do it at the beginning of my budget or at the end just with what is left over.

Now while I am talking about "doing things" here, I want to clarify these doing actions are not what is needed to accept the invitation. While you don't have to do anything more than accept His invitation, we need to realise that accepting means a life of obedience to him. You see accepting Jesus's invitation is accepting that he is Lord of your life. And the actions that we do help to show that we *have* accepted Jesus. To make this clear Jesus tells two more parables straight after this one in Luke 14:25-33 about the cost of being a disciple. As we've seen, the invitation goes out to all people. Then in verse 25 multitudes start to respond. "Large

crowds were travelling with Jesus." But Jesus clarifies a few things before they get very far with their excitement. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"

That seems a big ask doesn't it, you start to understand why people make excuses not to follow Jesus. But we need to remember the parable, the offer that the host makes is an amazing one. Instead of excuses not to come, the characters in the story should have been ensuring that in every way possible they could come. One reason people make excuses about avoiding Jesus call to respond is because they don't understand what it is they are missing out on. They can't imagine the great banquet that is on offer. So what can we do to help people see how precious Jesus death and resurrection is?

Well, what about the second group in this story that we identify with. As much as we are the invited people, we could also be the servant in the parable. We are the ones going out to share the invitation that Jesus gives. We can try to help people understand the amazing invitation that Jesus is offering. How do we do that? Well while it is good to explain the invitation and talk about the promise, I think the best way to help people understand Christ's amazing promise is to live in a way that reflects it. If we live in such a way where we

willingly serve Jesus and obey His word rather than making excuses for not doing His will, we show what following Jesus means. When we show love, we show a taste of what the banquet will be like. People start to see it as an amazing offer. That's what I think compel means here. In this context I don't think it means we force people to become Christians. I think it means that we show and convince people how great the promise of eternal life and forgiveness is authentic and totally worth it.

And we should be sharing this with everybody, not just our friends or those on the same or higher social standing as we are. Until Jesus comes back, we can assume that the banquet hall is not full and God is aiming to fill it. So the challenge to the church even now is to go out, without any favouritism to race or colour or class or disability and "compel" people to come in—that is, to be urgent in our invitations and persuasions. I have just come from a week of exposure to various missionaries around the world at CMS Summer School and I am once again convinced that we here at Waitara Anglican have an obligation to spread God's message. Whether it be through going overseas yourself, they were asking for 200 missionaries to Tanzania if you are interested or through prayer and support for our missionaries. Are you praying for the Ongs in Malawi, are you praying for Penny and Ben as they prepare to go to Namibia? Are you supporting mission through giving financially? CMS NSW alone has 18 new missionaries going out this year which

require over \$1m in giving. Penny and Ben still need over 50% of their funds to go and serve. This is a way for you to compel others to come to the banquet. Are you yourself going, praying, supporting and/or giving to the work of mission.

Another lesson we can learn is that just being religious doesn't get you invited. It doesn't cut it. The Pharisees were the standout people of the day for being religious yet because they didn't accept Jesus they were not going to taste the banquet. Today we need to be careful that it is Jesus we focus on for salvation. It's not what we do, it's not us coming to church or doing bible study that saves us, it is accepting the second invite, it is accepting Jesus. We need to avoid the temptation to change our message to just being a morale one to make it more acceptable to society. We need to be careful we do not put extra burdens on people and say they have to act 'religious' to be saved. It is only through Jesus that we are saved. Also note Jesus immediately corrected the person who suggested otherwise. We need to be careful that in our teaching here at church or in our bible studies we don't stray down the path of focusing on what we do rather than what Jesus has done. As I was reminded at the CMS Summer School last week, the difference between Christianity and every other religion or world view is just two letters – the difference between do and done. We need to do nothing but accept Jesus and believe in him, because Jesus has done it all.

Finally I want to talk about humility. Remember what started this lunch conversation. It was Jesus wanting to emphasise humility. We need to be humble as we inform others.

Remember we have done nothing to enter the banquet, to extend the analogy a bit further we don't have to pay a large sum of money to get into the banquet, we don't have to bring presents, we don't even have to bring a dish, this isn't a potluck dinner, it's a banquet put on by God for us. All we need to do is accept the invitation. Given that, we should be humble as we encourage others to come to the banquet. It is yet another reason why we should be looking to invite those less fortunate than ourselves to the banquet - the outcasts, the people that others turn from. We should remember that just like us they have done nothing to deserve being at the banquet and have as much right to be there as we do.

I am going to finish by reading once again the description of the banquet from Isaiah 25. As you leave today, I want to remind you of what an amazing offer of salvation we have through Jesus, of the joy we can anticipate and participate in when he comes again. Share this message. If you want to know how to accept the invitation, then please come and see me, or one of the staff team, or anyone here that you know is a follower of Jesus.

Remember that Jesus offer is unmissable, Don't miss out. Be there for the amazing banquet

Let me read from Isaiah 25.

⁶ On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine— the best of meats and the finest of wines.

⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; ⁸he will swallow up death forever.

The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.

The LORD has spoken.

⁹ In that day they will say, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."