

# Don't miss this party

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[ 0 : 00 ] let's ask God for his help. Heavenly Father, as we come this morning, I pray that we would indeed hear your fatherly voice.

If your fatherly voice speaks to discipline us today, I pray that we would heed that discipline. If your fatherly voice speaks as one that seeks to assure us today, I pray that we would hear that assurance.

Above all, no matter what, I pray that we would hear your voice as the voice of the father who loves us, who wants the best for us, and who wants to bring us to be more and more like Jesus and to enjoy your riches that you have provided for us on that final day.

So we pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, it seems to be the season for elections. India just had dias, Fran just caught one, and the United Kingdom is also about to have one.

And so the British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, has been out and about campaigning. But last week, he made a critical error. While just about every other Western world leader, Joe Biden, Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz, were at Omaha Bridge to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings, popularly known as D-Day, he decided to leave early so he could appear on TV for an interview.

[ 1 : 41 ] Now, if you don't know what D-Day is, it's considered one of the most significant events of World War II, in which the Allied forces achieved a significant breakthrough against Hitler's Nazi forces.

Many historians now recognize it as a turning point in the war, one which many people owed their lives to. But it didn't happen without sacrifice.

Thousands of soldiers lost their lives that day. And so you can just imagine how many of the surviving war veterans felt when they heard what the Prime Minister had done.

One person asked him, these men made the ultimate sacrifice, and you couldn't even sacrifice an afternoon? They felt their sacrifices had been disregarded, and they were not happy.

Well, that's the war veterans, but I wonder if we've ever considered this question. How might God feel when Jesus is disregarded?

[ 2 : 52 ] How might God feel when we see Jesus' sacrifice, shrug our shoulders, and ignore him? You see, that's the question Luke wants to ask today.

In case you've forgotten, we're at a party of a prominent Pharisee. Jesus has been invited, and as usual, he's been anything but a boring guest.

If you were here last week, you would know. The Pharisees had attempted to lay a trap for him, but he manages to turn the tables on them and expose their proud, self-exalting hearts.

And so the tension is thick in the air. Everyone is fumbling for what to say next. And amidst the silence, the voice of a nervous guest pierces the air.

Verse 15. Blessed is the one who will eat the feast in the kingdom of God. This poor guy can't take it anymore, so he tries to lower the temperature.

[ 3 : 56 ] He begins to change the topic. Picking up on a word that Jesus has just used in verse 14. Blessed. He says something that he hopes is quite uncontroversial.

But really, he's just trying to brush aside everything Jesus has just said and pretend they were never spoken. You see, our hearts can be so hard, can't they?

Sometimes Jesus speaks, but his words don't penetrate our hearts. We just politely brush them aside. But Jesus doesn't give up.

He tells another parable in the hope that our hearts will soften. And the first thing he wants to show is God's high regard for us.

God's high regard for us. Let's begin by asking, is verse 15 true? Blessed is the one who will eat the feast in the kingdom of God.

[ 4 : 58 ] Is that true? Answer? Absolutely. You see, one day, just like the man in the parable that we're about to hear, God is going to hold a party.

Now, some of you, like me, are introverts. A party might not sound very exciting to you. You're already planning from the moment that you step in how you might make a quiet getaway. But rest assured, this will be the best party you've ever been to.

One that even introverts will love. And God wants to hold this party for you and me at the end of time. It's going to be one grand feast.

The party to end all parties. And why is this party going to be so good? Isaiah 25, our first meeting today, tells us.

The prophet says, look where this party takes place. It's going to be on Mount Zion, the place of majesty, the place of God's presence, the place of peace.

[ 6 : 04 ] And it's going to be on Mount Zion. And it's going to have the richest of foods and the finest of wines. But it's not the Michelin-starred food that will make this party so great.

Rather, it's because at this party, death will have no place on the guest list. No, he will be completely destroyed and the whole universe will have life to the full once again.

And in fact, he's not the only one who's not invited. Tears caused by pain and sorrow and disappointment will have no place either.

Disgrace will have no place either. Now, just imagine being somewhere where all those unwanted guests are absent. What a party. And like the host in Jesus' parable, God says to everyone, come. Everything is ready. Anyone can come. You don't need an exclusive VIP backstage pass to attend.

The party is open to all.

[ 7 : 14 ] Jesus made that clear already back in 13 verse 29. He said, people will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the kingdom of God.

So come. You see, that is our God, isn't it? Like this man in verse 16, he has the ability to hold a great feast.

In fact, who else has the ability to hold the Isaiah 25 banquet? Who else has the ability to banish death? Who else has the ability to keep this party going and going forever in a way that will only get better and better?

Only God. And like this man, he wants many guests. That's what verse 16 says. Come take the seats of honour at my banquet, the owner of the house says.

And that's how much regard God has for us. Although we've ignored God, and cold-shouldered, and even outrightly defied him at times, he still gets ready this party, and he says, come.

[ 8 : 43 ] That's our God. And I have stressed this because if we don't get this right, we might misunderstand the parable. We know that when God says, come, from previously in Luke's Gospel, he means, yes, that it's come on the road where you have to carry your cross and face division from family and lots and lots of other tough things.

But ultimately, God says, come on this road because it leads to my party. So don't miss out. Don't believe the lie that Satan told Eve back in the garden.

God is not a killjoy, but a giver of it. But here's our issue. God has a high regard for us.

He says, come. But so often we say, no. Don't we? We make excuses because, actually, we have a low regard for Jesus.

That's our second point for today, our low regard for Jesus. Now, if I were to ask you right now, will you say no to God when he calls you?

[ 10 : 07 ] My guess is, many of you will say, what are you talking about, pastor? Of course not. Of course I'll come. Am I not a Christian? I believe in God. And many of the Pharisees would have said the same.

They would have said, of course I'll be on the guest list at God's feast. Of course I'll be there at God's party. But Jesus says, really?

Are you sure? Well, let's read on, shall we? Verse 17, at the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, come, for everything is now ready.

Now, a bit of cultural background is in order at this point. It helps to remember that all this is happening before there are things like fridges and freezers. So you can't really prepare food far in advance.

As a result, it was customary to issue a double invitation. The first invitation, given in advance, gives all the details and gets the invitee to RSVP so that the host knows who is coming and how many are coming.

[11:30] And then, only when the dinner is ready, a second invitation is issued to say, as this man does in verse 17, come, you can show up now as you have already agreed to.

And that way, the host can plan for how many animals he has to slaughter and to cook. If it's not too many people coming, then maybe he can just sacrifice a few chickens.

But, if it's going to be a big number, then maybe he's got to slaughter his fattened calf, which is a significant expense indeed.

And of course, he'll also need time to source the necessary ingredients from various dishes and so on. You know, it's a time-consuming process. So he's got to know numbers.

Now, in some ways, even with all our modern amenities, we still do that, don't we? You know, here at church, whenever we put on a conference or a seminar where lunch is provided, we often ask you to register so that we can know numbers and we can try to reduce wastage.

[12:47] And so the guests in this parable have already RSVP'd. They've already received the first invitation and they said they will come. But now, when the host issues the second invitation, he says, come, dinner's ready.

Suddenly, verse 18, they all alike began to make excuses. That's the shock. These guests, it turns out, won't be there after all because they don't want to be there.

Notice the language. They all alike began to make excuses. It's not just that three people didn't show up.

We only hear three excuses, but they are representative of the many, many more excuses the host receive.

Can you imagine that? you plan for months, you've decorated the banquet hall, you've bought what you needed, you've slotted the calf and you've cooked it and you've marinated it, and suddenly everyone says, sorry, cannot make it.

[14:09] And with this twist, Jesus confronts his audience, Jesus confronts us.

He's forcing us to reflect. Maybe we do say we believe in God, but when God calls, how do we really respond?

We said, we'll come, but when the kingdom of God comes calling for our direct participation, do we actually respond eagerly and wholeheartedly?

Or do we say, sorry, cannot commit after all. I cannot come. And just what are their excuses?

Well, let us hear them, verses 18 to 20. The first said, I have just bought a few and I must go and see it.

[15:14] 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. Now, at first glance, we think, hmm, maybe these are reasonable.

After all, the first two concern major purchases and the third involves a major life change. These are basically things that happen in life and well, sometimes life gets in the way, right?

But let's look at these excuses again. Just look at the first one. I've bought a field, so I've got to go see it, the guy says. But, hmm, wait a minute, no guy in the first century would ever dream of buying a field without going to check it out first.

You would want to know what the rainfall is like, whether you can dig wells there, how is the state of the soil before you even make such a significant purchase.

[16:32] You know, it would be just like a guy who's decided to buy a house without bothering to check its condition or the neighbourhood it's in and all those things. And besides, this banquet was almost certainly happening in the evening.

So even if this guy wants to go and see his field, see what? It's too dark. So this excuse sounds more and more implausible once we start thinking about it.

But what about the second guy? He says he's just bought five oxen, which by the way is a really big investment. This is not just like buying five bowls of beef noodles.

No, this is like buying five heavy duty tractors. And just like the first guy, you certainly would want to test them before you buy.

One commentator famously puts it this way. This is like a guy calling his wife and telling her that he's already bought five used cars, the bank transfer has already been made, and only now he is going over to the dealership to see if they can start.

[ 17 : 51 ] So if you didn't check them then, why check them now? You've already handed over the money, you have to start with them.

And what about the third guy? Is his excuse more reasonable? Well, yes, if he was going to war, since Deuteronomy 24, verse 5 allows him to decline enlisting in the army if it's his first year of marriage.

But is that an excuse for skipping a feast? Is he really comparing going to a party to going to war? Is that how he feels about this party?

Besides, it's a bit suspicious that if this was his excuse, he accepted the invitation in the first place. Was he not married then?

Did he just somehow meet a wife after the first invitation had gone out and had a whirlwind romance? Well, maybe. But if you suspected this wasn't actually the truth, no one would blame you.

[ 19 : 13 ] Do you see what is happening? These guys don't really want to come. And they get more and more blatant about it.

At least the first guy is polite. He says, please excuse me, but it is necessary for me to go and see the fow. But the second guy just says, oh, it's not that I must go to see my oxen, but I just want to, so I'm on my way.

And by the time we get to the third guy, he doesn't even bother to say, sorry, please excuse me. Just say, no, I'm getting married, too bad. You see, so often the excuses we make are not really the real reason we don't want to respond to God, is it?

We say, I cannot come, I'm just too busy, or I'm just too wary, or I don't have what it takes. But what we really mean is, I will not come.

I'm just not bothered enough. I don't think your party is worth the time. And when these guys say that they don't feel like going to the party, what they are actually making clear is that they don't want to spend time with the host.

[ 20 : 53 ] They are saying to him that they don't really like him, they don't really care about him or what he's done to prepare this party, that there are more important things than him.

it is thoroughly insulting. Can you imagine how the host feels?

There's no crisis, no emergency, not even another party happening at the same time, just guests showing a lack of regard for him.

To use the language of Gen Z, they are basically ghosting him. Now you can see how that might apply to the original audience, can't you?

These Jews knew that God was going to throw a party at the end of time and they were confident they were going to be there. But here is the problem Jesus says.

[ 22 : 03 ] You've got the invitation. You have the Old Testament. But now I've come to tell you that the feast is just about ready.

The kingdom of God is near. The party is about to begin. But certainly you Pharisees are putting in your excuses.

I mean you're even laying a trap for Jesus. Because actually you've come to realize that this party looks a little different to what you want it to be like.

You don't want a kingdom where Jesus gets to shape it. You only want a kingdom that you want to shape. But don't think that this is just a word for the first century audience.

Because this is God's word and Jesus is speaking as much to us as to them too. Now remember Jesus isn't speaking to people who heard God's call for the first time.

[ 23 : 05 ] He's speaking to people who heard it many times. But they can't be bothered. Why? Because in the end actually they love something more than God.

Now let's look at the nature of these excuses again. They concern property, and work. And family. Don't they? And don't these three things more or less make up the essential commitments of life? After all, most of us will regard buying our first house, marrying the right guy or girl, and working our way up the career ladder as key milestones in life.

And of course, there's obviously nothing bad about property, work, or family in themselves. But Jesus is showing us that these are the very things that could stop us from feasting in the kingdom of God at the end of time because these are the very things that could consume not just our time, not

just our energy, but even our loves.

You see, what we often regard as the biggest threat to Christians, maybe some of us think that it's some major moral revolution like LGBT ideology or taking over entire sectors of our society or something like that.

[ 24 : 49 ] Maybe some of us think that it'll be some major persecution where people who really hate Christians come into power and discriminate against us and work against us or something like that.

But actually, perhaps the greatest rival to the kingdom of God are not those things. It is actually just these everyday commitments that we accumulate the further we go in life.

Property, work, family. These were the very things that stopped these guests from giving Jesus their highest regard.

And they can stop us too. I think of my friend who genuinely seemed interested in Christianity and even seemed to accept it was true.

But he was also very interested in his career and as soon as he figured out that work might have to take more of a back seat should he become Christian, he dropped Jesus.

[ 26 : 07 ] He knew Jesus would say chasing money should no longer be his priority or that he couldn't just trample over everyone as he climbed up the ladder. And so he felt that Jesus' kingdom wasn't for him.

I cannot come. Or I think of another person who had dipped his toes into full-time paid Christian ministry for a short while.

But when kids were on the way he realised that he was not going to be able to give them an overseas education and overseas holiday on a full-time worker salary.

You know, the very things that he had enjoyed growing up. And he felt like those were the really, really important things that he wanted to pass down to his children.

He wanted to give them those things. And so he could it be that he simply lost sight of what is truly important?

[ 27 : 11 ] You see, as Christians, in theory, we say that we want to give God our all, but then life has a funny habit of getting in the way. And sometimes we just shrug our shoulders and we say, oh, well, that's life.

Jesus, I was going to go all out for you, but you know, I need to pay attention to my field and my oxen. And yes, we can worship Jesus by the way that we attend to our property and work and family.

I'm not saying that we can't. But let us be careful not to kid ourselves. Be honest. Evaluate ourselves.

What do we value? Whatever we truly value, we will be able to make time for, busy as we are.

So what do you truly value? Is it God's kingdom or my kingdom? Who do you truly value?

[ 28 : 19 ] Is it the host of the best party of all time? Or is it someone else? God truly cares about your answer to this question.

And that brings us to our third point this morning. How God feels when we disregard Jesus. In verse 21, the servant reports back to his master.

And how does he feel? Oh, it's okay. Never mind. is that how you would feel if you had prepared everything, paid for everything, communicated everything, but your guests didn't bother to show up and didn't even bother to message you about it beyond oh, sorry, got something better to do.

God would do. No, of course not. Such a response from the guests would greatly displease God.

You see, perhaps sometimes we subconsciously think that oh, God wouldn't mind too much if we begin to disregard Jesus a little bit, especially if something that looks better comes along and calls for more of my attention.

we're sure that God wouldn't mind if we say to Jesus, oh, thanks Jesus, we were still friends, I still love you, but well, you understand, you can't be at the centre all the time.

[ 29 : 55 ] But God hates a look-see, look-see attitude to Christianity. He hates it when we think we can play games with Jesus and decide when we want to be with him, or not be with him according to our own whims.

And the reason God hates it is because Jesus is the very price God paid to endure our invitation to his party.

And he is no trivial price. You know, this week as I was preparing for today, I listened to one of my friends preach on this very passage.

And he pointed out that no one really pays much attention to the servant in this parable. But he says, think about it. Who is this servant?

He is the mouthpiece of God, isn't he? He is the one who speaks on behalf of God. He is sent with the invitation to the banquet. And to go back to Isaiah for a moment, who is it that sends the invitation to the Isaiah 25 banquet?

[ 31 : 15 ] It is also a figure known as the servant. It is the servant who says the words we heard in our call to worship in Isaiah 55 this morning.

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters. And you who have no money, come buy and eat. Listen, listen to me and eat what is good.

It is the servant in Isaiah who brings in the poor, the lame, and the crippled. And in Isaiah it is ultimately the servant who pays the price.

He suffers greatly, he gets pierced for our transgressions, he gets crushed for our iniquities, and with that, he makes sure that we don't have to fear death anymore, or worry about having sadness as an eternal part of our lives, or letting our sins and letting our guilt leave us hanging in shame for all of our lives.

See, the servant, he did it all for our sake. And just imagine if we told God, thanks God for what you've done through Jesus, but okay, let me just get on with my life.

[ 32 : 49 ] Imagine knowing that and giving the same kind of excuses to God's servant as those of the guests in this parable. When we do that, no wonder we bring grief to God's heart.

So how does God feel when Jesus is disregarded? He hates it. But that is not all that God feels. Instead, he remains resolute. Did you notice that God didn't cancel this party? What did he do when all those initial guests said, I don't want to come?

He simply makes a new guest list. Why? Because he really, really, honestly wants people to enjoy what he has prepared.

And so he says to the servant, go out quickly to the streets and the alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. In other words, go find those who actually want to be at a party and bring them along.

[ 34 : 09 ] Which beggar would turn down a banquet? And indeed, he says, don't just invite them, but bring them in.

verse 23 says, compel them. The idea seems to be this, the host knows that these poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame might need some persuading that the invitation is actually serious.

I mean, it's too good to be true, isn't it? Somebody says, come and makan for free. And more than that, they need to be persuaded that their inability to pay back is no barrier to them attending this feast.

And that's what Jesus has been teaching, isn't it? You see, do you hear the passion in God's voice? He wants his house to be filled, even if there are outcasts from the roads and country lanes.

He wants people everywhere to enjoy his grace. In fact, that is why he asks us to share the gospel with others. He wants his banquet hall to be filled. He wants to show his love and share his love.

[ 35 : 29 ] He is not satisfied until the hall is overflowing with people who will experience his overflowing love. That is how God feels.

So this morning, what does God want to say to us? First of all, don't miss this party. You have an invitation. If you want to go, you can.

And God wants you there. He wants a full house. All you have to do is just say yes to the servant. Say yes to Jesus. God has prepared everything and paid for everything.

You don't have to do any more good works or any more religious rituals to be on the guest list. It is all grace. And if today you are not a Christian, this is an invitation for you too.

To become a Christian is really to say that you want to accept an invitation to this party. And if you are a Christian, to say yes to show up when God calls you to follow this road and to give up time when the host of the party says he wants to spend time with you.

[ 36 : 59 ] But second of all, there is a warning. don't miss this party by your careless disregard of Jesus. And that is the point of verse 24.

Here it seems as if this is now Jesus rather than the master of the parable speaking because the you in verse 24 is actually in the plural.

And Jesus says, it's easy right now to make excuses. It's easy to say, look Jesus, right now there are more urgent things occupying my attention.

That was what all the guests in the parable said, didn't they? You're important Jesus, but right now there is something more important. But Jesus says, verse 24, I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.

If you are not careful and you ignore Jesus, you might find yourself missing out on the greatest party of all. And what can be more important than that?

[ 38 : 15 ] Did you notice in verse 24, for the very first time, Jesus says that this banquet is his banquet? So do you really want to ignore the servant when it turns out that in the end he's the host?

Is that what you really want? So don't miss out. Don't be foolish. Don't trade your long-term future for short-term gains.

Don't disregard Jesus. He's so good to us. So don't feel like giving your priority to your property, your work, or your family over him is a good idea.

No. Don't miss this party. For blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that your voice is heard loud and clear.

[ 39 : 34 ] I pray that the voice that says, come, come and eat, come and feast, would be heard loud and clear. And I pray that we would not turn down that amazing opportunity we pray that we would let the kingdom of God be what we seek first and that we will let it shape our lives knowing that that is what will give us joy in the end.

So I pray, Lord, that we will not be swayed and turn to the left or to the right, but stay on the straight path that leads to you and that leads to this party.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus. Amen.