

Lovingly Invited

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this morning for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. In the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 14, page 1053, if you're using the Pew Bible.

Luke 14, and we'll read again at verse 16. This is when Jesus gives this parable. And I'm going to examine them. Please excuse me.

And another said, I've married a wife, therefore I cannot come. So the servant came and reported these things to his master. And the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame.

And the servant said, Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room. And the master said to the servant, Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.

And so on. Well, as you know, this morning is our Back to Church Sunday. And it was an opportunity for us as a congregation to invite people in our community to come to church.

[1 : 49] Whether it's family, or friends, or neighbours, or work colleagues, who are either out of the habit of going to church, or who have never been to church before.

And the simple reason for our invitation service was to invite people to come together as a community to worship God. Because as a church and as a community, that should be our desire. Our desire should be for people to know Jesus, and to follow Jesus, and to love Jesus. And coming to church, it shouldn't be something that's scary, which it sometimes can be.

And you shouldn't be apprehensive coming. Because church should be a warm and friendly place. It should be open and welcoming. It should be the place where we want to come on a Sunday morning.

Because the church isn't a closed place. It's not for an elect group. It's not for a certain class of people, or type of people. The church is for everyone.

[2 : 53] This church is for everyone. Because Jesus is for everyone. And the gospel is for everyone. And if this church was to have a slogan, I would want it to be, a church in the community, for the community.

Because that's what the church is for. That's why it exists. It's for us, as a community, to come together, and worship the God who made us. And I don't want anyone thinking that this church is just a museum of good people.

Where everyone looks so pristine and proper, and they're all in their best, giving the best presentation of who they are. And that their lives are perfect, and everything that goes on at home is fine.

That might be true for some people, but not on the whole. Because that's not the reality. That's not what the church is for. The church is not just a museum. It's not a museum of good people.

It's a hospital for the broken. It's for those who are hurting. It's for those who have lost loved ones. It's for those whose life has not turned out the way that they expected it to turn out.

[4 : 03] Which means that the church is for those who are joyful, those who are praising. And it's for those who are sorrowing. It's for everyone. Because it's here in church that we meet the God who not only made us, but the God who understands us.

The God who knows us. And he knows everything that we're going through. And that he is there for us. If we will but turn to him for help.

But as those in church this morning, I want us to see from this passage that Jesus is issuing to us a promise. And it's a personal promise. And it's a promise to every home and to every family in this

community and beyond.

And the promise is there is yet room for you. There is yet room for you. There is room for you in church and you're invited to come.

Not only today, but every Sunday. Every Lord's Day. But in order to emphasize that this invitation to come to church and meet with God, in order to emphasize that it's an open invitation, Jesus told a parable.

[5 : 17] Now, a parable wasn't just a sermon illustration to make the teaching of Jesus easier to understand. And it wasn't just a little story to entertain his crowd and keep their attention.

The purpose of a parable was to get the listener deeply involved and cause them to see that when they're hearing the parable, the parable is actually about them.

And that they are being represented and portrayed in the parable. And that when they're listening, that is you and me, when we're listening, we see ourselves in this parable.

And it ought to compel us to make a personal decision about following Jesus. And so Jesus told this parable about a great banquet.

And by telling this parable, Jesus wants to emphasize to us just three things. He wants to emphasize to us a perfect provision, a pathetic pardon, and a powerful plea.

[6 : 17] A pathetic provision, sorry, a perfect provision, a pathetic pardon, and a powerful plea. So firstly, if we look at a perfect provision.

Perfect provision. If you read again at verse 15 with me. When one of those who reclining a table with him heard these things, he said to him, Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

But Jesus said to him, A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, come, for everything is now ready.

So when Jesus tells this parable, we find him sitting in the house of one of the chief Pharisees and he's eating bread with them on the Sabbath day. He's there for Sunday lunch.

And as Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees about their need for humility, this anonymous guest interrupts Jesus by praising God.

[7 : 19] Because he thought that one day he would be in heaven. He thought that he would be part of the kingdom of God. He thought that he was safe. He assumed that he was in the kingdom.

I mean, why not? He was a good person. He was a churchgoer. He went to all the services. He was, he knew a bit about the scriptures. He was good to his neighbor.

He was an upstanding member in the community. And he felt that he was in as good a position as anyone else to get to heaven. But as Jesus explains in this parable, being invited to the banquet is not the same as coming to the banquet.

Being in the place of privilege is not the same as being in the place of promise. Being close to the kingdom of God is not close enough. Because you have to come into the kingdom of God.

You have to come to the banquet. And that's why Jesus tells this parable about this great banquet and its perfect provision. Because he says that the only way to get to heaven is to come and embrace God's provision in the person of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 32] And Jesus says, everyone has been invited. Everyone has been invited to come to the banquet of the gospel. But it's up to us to respond.

And you know, I'm sure that we've all been invited to a wedding at some point in our life. And there's one thing about a wedding. And that is the amount of preparation which is needed for everything to take place on a particular day in the lives of the happy couple.

And it takes months of planning from choosing a date to selecting a venue to organizing who's doing the catering to picking dresses, choosing colors, organizing bridesmaids to hair and makeup appointments, to choosing a photographer.

The list is endless. And there's all this preparation that goes into this one day. But in the weeks leading up to the wedding, maybe two months before, all the invites are sent out.

All the invitations go out to their guests. And those who respond to the invitation, they are allocated seats at the wedding. and after months of planning, everything comes together on the wedding day.

[9 : 47] That one day, one day where everything is ready, everything is set. But in the ancient world, when you invited your guests to a banquet, you invited them on the morning of the banquet.

And it might seem strange to us that that's what they would do, but that was their custom. They would invite all their guests to the feast in the morning. but even though the guests were invited, they wouldn't know the exact hour of the meal until it was ready.

And so as far as we can see from the parable, all the guests have agreed to come. They've all agreed to come. And they have responded by saying that they had every intention of coming to this banquet.

And with all the food now prepared and it's ready to be served, all the tables are set, all the cutlery is out, done, the napkins are folded and the place names are put in order, everything is set, all is prepared, nothing else needs to be done.

And Jesus says in verse 17, at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, come, for everything is now ready.

[11 : 01] The host had done everything in his power to make sure that the banquet was set and prepared for the arrival of his guests. it was a perfect provision, a perfect provision.

And so what Jesus is telling us in the parable is that the message of the gospel is like a great banquet. The message of salvation through Jesus Christ, it's all prepared.

The way to get to heaven has been made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And there is nothing else that needs to be done. There is nothing missing from the work of our host Jesus.

There's nothing missing from what he's undertaken because the banquet he has prepared, it's a perfect provision. It's a full redemption. It's a full gospel. It's good news.

And Jesus is saying that the gospel, it's a great banquet, which contains a full supply of everything we need in order to be saved. Because naturally, by our very sinful nature, we are starving, empty, helpless, ready to perish.

[12 : 13] We are in great need. But God has granted to us this perfect provision in Jesus Christ. And he bids us to come to that provision.

And it was J.C. Ryle who said in his commentary, he said, forgiveness of sin, peace with God, grace by the way, and glory in the end. They are the gracious provision which God has prepared for the needs of our souls.

There is nothing that sin-laden hearts can wish or weary consciences require, which is not spread before us in rich abundance in Christ.

Christ, in one word, says Ryle, is the sum and substance of this great banquet. My friend, this great gospel banquet, it's been given to us and it's been given as a perfect provision, a full redemption.

That's what we were just singing in Psalm 130. There is plenteous redemption ever found with him.

Our host has prepared everything. He's made a perfect provision when he gave his life as a ransom for many on the cross.

[13 : 32] He made his perfect provision possible by offering himself. Where this Jesus, who we've heard of so often, he made himself sin.

He did no sin, but he became sin for us. And he took our sin upon himself at Calvary in order to offer to us at his gospel table a full and free gift of eternal life.

My friend, this Jesus, he endured the cross despising its shame. He was marred beyond recognition. Isaiah says that he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement and punishment that was due to us for our sin, he endured it. He endured it. He was the lamb that was led to the slaughter.

he was sacrificed in order to prepare a table for us. And now through his death, it's all prepared. It's all prepared for you and me.

[14 : 43] The gospel table is set. There's nothing more that needs to be done, nothing that needs to be added to it. Our good works are of no use for it. Our spotless efforts of trying to keep a good life, they're hopeless.

our attempts to be a good person, they're worthless in coming to this table. Because this is a perfect provision. You don't have to do anything.

You don't have to be any particular kind of person or perform some sort of ritual to be eligible to come to this table. No, all you have to do is accept the invitation and come.

All you have to do is accept the invitation and come. Because it's saying, come, for everything is now ready. The invitation which our host is setting before us today is come, for all things are now ready.

It's all prepared, it's all done, it's all set. It's a perfect provision. And you're invited to come and taste and see that God is good. You're invited to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to you in the gospel.

[15 : 57] You're invited to come to Jesus for your salvation by asking him to save you. But how will you respond to the invitation?

Will you accept the invitation or will you reject the invitation? Will you come to this great banquet or will you be like those in the parable who gave a pathetic pardon?

pardon? Which brings us secondly to consider that second point, a pathetic pardon. A pathetic pardon. If you read again in verse 16, a man once gave a great banquet and invited many.

At the time for the banquet he sent a servant to say to those who had been invited, come for everything is now ready. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him I bought a field and I must go out and see it.

Please excuse me. Another said I bought five yoke of oxen and I must go and examine them.

Please excuse me. And another said I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come.

[17 : 05] Everything had been prepared. The host had provided a great banquet and as far as the host was aware all his guests were coming. He knew how many guests to prepare for but what the host hadn't prepared for was that all his guests would make excuses.

He wasn't prepared that they would ask to be pardoned because of their busy lives. And there are many people who give that excuse for not coming to the table of the gospel. They're too busy. Life is too full. And there's too much going on in my life. And it's not that they don't like the gospel or that they have something against the church. It's just the fact that becoming a Christian would be an inconvenience in their life that they don't want right now.

And so they're uninterested. It's not for them. They have other things to attend to. And the majority of people who think like that will change the subject by talking about anything else but their soul.

They will give every excuse possible to avoid confrontation and following Jesus. us. But the truth is as Jesus is presenting to us there is no excuse good enough to refuse the free offer of the gospel.

[18 : 29] No excuse is good enough. And in this parable Jesus highlights to us that there are three people in particular who made empty excuses. And instead of coming to the feast they said what they would do.

They insulted the host by refusing to attend and they gave these pathetic excuses to defend their change of plan. And Jesus says the first pathetic request for pardon was that the invited guest had bought a piece of land and he had to go and see it.

But everyone knows that buying a piece of land is a lengthy process. It's not straightforward. There are many things that have to be seen to before a deal can go through and before the transaction is completed.

And if anyone bought a piece of land without seeing it first are they not taking a risk? Because would you not want to know the location of the land and see whether it's rocky or boggy or mountainous or flat?

Can you ask the questions about can I build on it? Do I have services of water and electricity beside me? Do I have easy access to it? Is it well drained? And there are only some of the questions that you would ask before going ahead and buying a plot of land.

[19 : 46] And yet this man who was offered to go to the banquet he could have easily gone to see his land the following morning. But the truth was he was too busy too preoccupied to go and see what the banquet was like.

Because he only wanted to see his land and tend to his material possessions. And Jesus is saying it was a pathetic excuse.

But there are many like him who put their busy lives with their land and their houses and their cars and their bigger and better barns. They put it all before coming to Jesus.

And that's not to say having land or houses or cars or barns is wrong. It's good to have these things. And it's good to be thankful for these blessings from the Lord.

But when these blessings from the Lord become idols and keep us from coming to Jesus then there is something wrong.

[20 : 50] And Jesus is saying no more excuses. No more excuses. But then you have the second pathetic reason for pardon. And he's the man who bought five yoke of oxen and he had to go and try them out.

He had also made a purchase. He bought five yoke of oxen without testing them or even seeing them first. And who would do that?

I mean would you go and buy a used car without taking it for a test drive? Would you not want to see what the car is like?

See if it's nice to drive? See if it's fast or slow? Does it handle well on the road? What's its mileage?

How many previous owners does it have? What's the service history of the car?

Did it even pass its MOT? And you check all these details before you even think of buying a car. But this man, he was offered to go to the banquet and he could have easily gone to see his oxen the following morning.

[21 : 54] But as it was with the first, the truth was he was also too busy and too preoccupied to go and see what the banquet was like. He didn't want to go because he only wanted to test his oxen and tend to his work.

And Jesus says that this was a man who let his job and his business take over his life because everything for him was about his work. It was all about work.

It was all about working hard and getting a bigger workforce and making a better living and earning more money. It was all about bettering yourself and climbing the ladder and being your own boss.

And again, nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with working hard in life and earning a living. But Jesus is saying, so long as it doesn't get in the way of following Jesus.

So long as Jesus takes first place in everything. So long as your work and your job and your income don't keep you from coming to the gospel banquet and following Jesus.

[23 : 02] Jesus is because when it comes to wealth, no one ever says that they have a problem spending money. Money is not a problem in the bank.

It's a good thing to have money in the bank. Money is only a problem in the heart. Because it's not money that's the root of all evil. It's the love of money. The love for wealth.

And again, Jesus is saying to us, no more excuses. No more excuses because no excuse is good enough. You're invited to come to this banquet and you must come.

You must come. But then there is this last person who just said, I've married a wife and I cannot come.

And you'll notice that there's no reason for pardon. There's no excuse given. He doesn't give an apology. The other men, they all gave this great apology and reasons of regret and even though they were sorry, they still didn't want to come.

[24 : 08] But this person, he had no interest whatsoever. He didn't even ask to be excused. He just hid behind the lie that his wife was keeping him back from coming to the banquet.

I've got married, therefore I cannot come. my friend, don't ever let your wife stop you from coming to Christ or coming to church.

Don't ever let your husband stop you coming to Christ or coming to church. Don't ever let anyone in your family stop you coming to Christ or coming to church.

The hardest people to tell when you want to go to church or go to the prayer meeting or when you want to become a Christian and follow Jesus, it'll be your family. But don't let that stop you.

Don't let that keep you back. Don't let that be your excuse. Don't let that be your reason for pardon. Because the only regret you'll ever have is that you made an excuse not to come.

[25 : 16] No more excuses. No more excuses. You're invited to come to this banquet and you must come. You must come. It's all prepared. It's all set for you.

You've been invited to the table of the gospel and to receive eternal life in Jesus Christ. So please don't make any more excuses. Just come.

Just come. But you know the sad thing about all these excuses that were given? what lay at the heart of them was that they were too busy.

They didn't have time. Their life was too busy. They didn't have time to come to the banquet. Didn't have time to embrace the gospel. Too busy.

I don't have time. And you know that's the excuse many people make with regard to the gospel. I don't have time. I don't have time for God.

[26 : 20] I don't have time for church. I don't have time to come. Time. There's one thing as a minister.

You're always reminded that we are all on borrowed time. We are all on borrowed time. And our time is short.

And our days are numbered. And Jesus is telling us today no more excuses. Because no excuse is good enough.

Come for all things are now ready. And so we've seen the perfect provision. A pathetic pardon. But lastly let's look at a powerful plea.

A powerful plea. if you read it verse 21. So the servant came and reported these things to his master. And the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.

[27 : 28] And the servant said, sir, what you commanded has been done and still there is room. And the master said to the servant, go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.

For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper. So those who were originally invited to the great banquet had excused themselves.

They had made pathetic excuses for being pardoned. But within the context of Jesus telling this parable, he's telling it to the Pharisees. And it's becoming more and more obvious as he goes on that those who were giving the pathetic excuses, were the Pharisees.

And Jesus is directing his warning towards them that none of them who have been invited will taste his supper. Now when it comes to the Pharisees, not all the Pharisees were self-righteous. Most of them desired to be faithful. And they were faithful. They were faithful church goers who had been attending church for many years and they'd been sitting under the teaching of God's word most of their life.

[28 : 38] And they knew all that went on in church, but their problem was that they didn't know the king and head of the church. They didn't know Jesus.

And my friend, does that sound familiar to you? Because Jesus is warning the faithful church goers here that if they don't accept the invitation to come to his great gospel banquet, he's saying that invitation will be given to others.

And it'll be given to those who don't know Jesus. It'll be given to those who have never been to church before. But here's the powerful plea. Because the invitation to come to this great banquet, it's going out again today.

Where the banquet has been set, our host has done everything on our behalf, and he doesn't want it to go to waste. He wants as many as possible to come to his banquet.

He wants everyone and anyone to come and enter the kingdom of God. For Jesus tells us that the host, he was angry with all these pathetic excuses, and yet he says to his servant, go out quickly.

[29 : 53] Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and the crippled and the lame and the blind. The servant was to go out and bring in everyone and anyone he could find.

He was to bring in everyone and anyone who didn't have an excuse. He was to bring in everyone and anyone who was willing to come. And what Jesus wants us to see from this parable is that God's love and God's compassion for sinners is being displayed to us.

He is bidding us to come. He is pleading with us to come. To come to his great banquet. But what the servant says next, it shows us the extent of his offer.

Because he says, Master, it has been done as you commanded. And yet, there is room. There is still room for you.

There are still places available at the banquet. The invitation, it's still an open invitation. And so we're told in verse 23, the master said to the servant, go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled.

[31 : 13] The host issued the command again, go. Go and compel them to come. The servant was to compel people to come in.

And I just love that word compel. Compel them to come in. It means to lovingly invite.

To lovingly invite. My friend, if you were invited to come to church today, please know the reason why you were lovingly invited.

You were lovingly invited. Because the people in this community love this community. And they want this community to know that Jesus loves them.

And that Jesus has made a perfect provision in the gospel for them. They want you to come to church and know Jesus and love Jesus and follow Jesus.

[32 : 28] Because there's no better person in all the world to follow than Jesus Christ. And you have been lovingly invited. You have been compelled to come in.

To come to the gospel table and embrace Jesus Christ offered to you. But what we must see is that Jesus is not only pleading with those on the outside to come in.

He's also pleading with those on the inside to go out. And to keep going out. And to keep compelling people to come in.

Because as we close I just want to share with you the reason for this Back to Church Sunday. As many of you know I love reading anything by J.C.

Ryle. I even have a daily reading that was written by him. And it's called Day by Day with J.C. Ryle. I advise it. It's warmly presented to you.

[33 : 34] It's a brilliant book which gives you a little to read every day from the Bible. But back in March and in April when I was initially thinking and praying about this Back to Church Sunday.

on April the 16th I opened the daily reading and it was this verse which we're looking at today.

Verse 23 The master said to the servant Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled.

And in that reading J.C. Ryle he was a bishop in the 19th century but he spoke about God's earnest desire for souls to be saved. And J.C.

Ryle says these words justify every preacher and teacher of the gospel in which they will use all possible means to awake sinners and to turn them from their sins.

[34 : 31] If they will not come to us in public we must visit them in private. If they will not attend our preaching in the congregation we must be ready to preach house to house.

And Ryle goes on to say we must press the gospel on their notice again and again. We must try to snatch them as a brand from the burning. We must say I cannot, I will not, I dare not let you go on ruining your own soul.

And Ryle says the world may not understand such earnest dealing. They may sneer at zeal and fervour in religion as fanaticism. but the man of God who desires to do the work of an evangelist will heed little what the world has to say.

He will remember the words of our parable. He will compel them to come in. My friend that's why you have been lovingly invited to come to church today.

To come to this great gospel banquet. God who will be saved. We want you to know Jesus. We want you to be saved.

[35 : 44] That goes for everyone in here. We want you to know Jesus. We want you to be saved. So will you not come and confess your need of Jesus and make him your Lord and Saviour.

He's made a perfect provision for you to come to the gospel table. He doesn't want a pathetic reason for pardon. All he wants you to see is that this is a powerful plea to come to him and receive in him eternal life.

There is yet room for you. So will you not come for all things are now ready.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord our gracious God, we give thanks that thou are one who is so loving, a God who loves us beyond our understanding and a God who offers to us this glorious gospel.

Help us Lord to see our need and help us to see our need of Jesus, to come to him and embrace him. bless us Lord, we ask. Bless the tea and coffee provided for us.

[37 : 06] Give thanks O Lord for thy goodness to us, even in these tokens, a reminder that every good and perfect gift comes from above. Bind us together, we ask, and go before us and do us good for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Amen. We shall conclude our service by singing to God's praise in Psalm 84.

Psalm 84 in the Scottish Psalter, page 338 in the blue book. Psalm 84. We're singing from the beginning down to the end of the double verse marked three.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Psalm 84 from the beginning. How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts to me, the tabernacles of thy grace, how pleasant Lord they be.

My thirsty soul longs vehemently, yea faints thy courts to see, my very heart and flesh cry out, O living God for thee. Shall stand to sing to God's praise.

[38 : 18] How lovely thee. He hears thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts to thee.

The tabernacles of thy grace, our blessed Lord they be.

My thirsty soul longs vehemently, it pains thy courts to see.

My very heart and flesh cry out, O living God for thee.

Behold the sparrow findeth heart, and love swear into rest.

[39 : 23] The swallow also for herself hath purchased it an end.

In my own altars where she stayed, her young once forth may bring, O thou almighty Lord of hosts, who art my God and King.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.