

Come Dine with Me

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Gospel according to Luke, Luke chapter 14.

Luke 14. I want us to look at the whole passage, but if we read again at verse 22, Luke 14 at verse 22, 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.

Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. As you know, over the past number of years, we've held a Back to Church Sunday around this time of year, around the month of May.

And as you know, it's very simply an opportunity to invite and to encourage those in our congregation, and those in our community, and those who are our work colleagues, to invite those who have maybe fallen out of the habit of coming to church, or those who have never been invited to church before.

[1 : 24] It's just an opportunity to invite them to come along. Because is it not the case that we want people? We want people to come to church. We want people in our homes, and in our families to come to church.

We want our neighbors and our friends to come to church. We want our work colleagues and our community to come to church. And we want them to see that church isn't a boring place to be on a Sunday morning, but that it's the best place to be on a Sunday morning.

Because it's in church that we gather to worship, as you know, we worship the greatest Savior, who has provided for us the greatest salvation in Jesus Christ.

And because back to Church Sunday is next Lord's Day, or next Sunday, we're turning this morning to a very famous and a very familiar parable, the parable of the great banquet.

And needless to say, we've looked at this parable many times before, and I make no apology for looking at it again. Because when I was a student in the Free Church College in Edinburgh, we were always encouraged to preach on either the parable of the sower or the parable of the great banquet at least once a year.

[2 : 43] And over the past nine years that I've been here, I've sought to follow that advice. Because both parables, the parable of the sower and the parable of the great banquet, both parables remind us that when it comes to evangelism, when it comes to outreach, when it comes to mission, there's God's sovereignty on the one hand, and there's human responsibility on the other.

There's God's sovereignty and human responsibility. The parable of the sower, as you know, it stresses God's sovereignty and salvation. Where the parable, it isn't actually about the personality of the sower, but the power of the seed.

And onto what type of seed, onto what type of soil the seed lands on. Because as the sower scatters his seed, the seed of God's Word, he scatters the seed as best as he can.

But some seed, as Jesus says, it falls by the wayside. Other seed, it falls among the thorns. Other seed, onto the rocky ground. And some seeds, he says, falls into the good ground that has been prepared.

And it's in the good ground that it germinates and grows and bears forth fruit. And the parable of the sower, when Jesus teaches it, he's stressing God's sovereignty in salvation.

[4 : 03] But this parable, the parable of the great banquet, it shows us the other side, where there is our human responsibility, as the church of Jesus Christ.

Because the Lord has chosen, he's called, he's commissioned his church to be the means by which people are invited to hear the message of the gospel.

And as our Bible assures us, Paul says it in Romans chapter 10, faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Therefore, says Jesus, we have a responsibility as the church in our community to compel them, to compel them to come in, that the master's house may be filled. And so I want us to consider this morning this well-known passage and parable under three headings. And it's all directed towards us as the church in our community. Three headings, the context of the church, the call for the church, and the command to the church. The context of the church, the call for the church, and the command to the church. So first of all, we see the context, the context of the church. We read that in verse 1 of Luke 14. [5 : 24] The context is, one Sabbath, when he, that is Jesus, went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.

You know, the context of this passage and parable is that the morning Sabbath service at the synagogue is now over. Jesus has been asked to dine for Sabbath dinner at the house of one of the chief church leaders.

But as Jesus mixed and mingled with all the religious elite of the day, you could say that it was an awkward dinner table to be sat at because there were probably long silences, nobody speaking. There were lots of stares and maybe even some snide comments. As you know, the Pharisees, they were this very strict and very serious sect in Israel. They were very stiff, very stern-looking men.

And that was ultimately because they were skeptical. They were very suspicious of Jesus. But there was an ulterior motive for inviting Jesus to dinner that day because the Pharisees, they had no intention of worshipping Jesus.

[6 : 30] Instead, their intention was to watch Jesus. And that's what they did. They watched Jesus. We read that there in verse 1. One Sabbath, when they went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.

They watched him because the Pharisees had this agenda to accuse Jesus for claiming to be the Son of God. And they watched him, especially when this unknown and unnamed and unwell man came into the Pharisee's house unannounced.

And Jesus asked all these stiff and stern-looking Pharisees, he asked them, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? And of course, the Pharisees would have said, no, you don't heal on the Sabbath.

And they would have said that because the Pharisees had invented and implemented all these extra and excessive laws about the Sabbath, where they turned the Sabbath from being a blessing that it actually is into being a burden upon all the people.

But instead, the Pharisees didn't open their mouths at all, we read. They stayed silent. And then Jesus, as he heals this unnamed, unknown, and unwell man. And after he's healed this unknown, unnamed, and unwell man, Jesus asks a second question.

[7 : 48] Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on the Sabbath, will not immediately pull him out? And immediately, the Pharisees said nothing.

They stayed silent. But the thing is, the Pharisees, as they watched Jesus, Jesus was watching them. Jesus was watching the Pharisees, and he was watching them as they sat around this Sabbath dinner table.

He was watching their table etiquette. And he watched how they elevated and exalted some Pharisees above others, and how they demoted and degraded and downgraded other Pharisees. So what does Jesus do? Well, Jesus is sitting there with them all. And he does what he always does. He tells a parable. And Jesus tells a parable emphasizing and explaining to what was the church of the day.

He emphasizes and explains to them the context that they're really portraying to everyone. That the kingdom of God, in their eyes, was all about position and promotion, and not people.

[9 : 00] and pastoring. But Jesus teaches through the parable the opposite. He says the kingdom of God is not about position and promotion. It's about people and pastoring.

It's not about status and significance. No, it's about service and serving. Which is why Jesus then turns to the host, the host of this dinner, the man who had invited him, and he says to him, when you give a dinner or a banquet, don't invite your friends.

Don't invite your brothers. Don't invite your relatives. No, and don't even invite your rich neighbors. No, says Jesus, don't invite them so that they'll repay you and invite you in return.

Now, most people would have thought that Jesus had crossed a line at that point because telling the host who to invite for dinner, imagine somebody telling you that. Don't invite them. Just invite these people. Imagine telling the host who he should invite for dinner. It would have caused these stiff and stern-looking Pharisees to think, well, Jesus is someone who is completely disrespectful and dishonoring, especially to this host.

[10:15] But as you know, Jesus was the humblest man that ever lived. He was the most loving man that ever lived. And Jesus knew these Pharisees better than they knew themselves.

Jesus knew that their motives were selfish. He knew that their moves were selfish. He knew the context of this church and the religious elite of the day, which is why Jesus addresses and even admonishes them by simply saying to them, your church is nothing but a club and a clique. Your church is nothing but a club and a clique. You know, the way Jesus admonishes this church, he says to them, the context of your church is that you are inward-focused and inward-facing. You're so self-consumed. You're almost, you're just completely selfish. You only invite those who usually come. You invite your relatives and your brothers and those who are your rich neighbors. You invite those you know will come. You only invite those you expect to come. But for some of you, you don't even invite anyone at all for fear that they might sit in your seat.

[11:33] You know, my friend, Jesus knew the context of the church of his day. And Jesus knows the context of our church in our day. And you know, it made me think as I went through this parable, what would Jesus say about Barba's Free Church?

What would Jesus say about our church, our congregation? Would Jesus say that we're a club and we're a clique? Would Jesus say that we're stiff and we're stern-looking?

Would Jesus say that we're inward-focused and inward-facing? Would Jesus say that we would only invite those to come to church who would usually come or those we know will come?

Or do we refuse to invite anyone at all for the fear that they might actually sit in our seat? What would Jesus say about Barba's Free Church?

What would he say about our church? What would he say about the context of our church? But then secondly, we see the call for the church. The call for the church.

[12:40] So the context of the church, then the call for the church. The call for the church. Look at verse 13. Jesus says, When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you.

For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. When one of those reclining at a table with him heard these things, he said to him, Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

And so having addressed and even admonished the church, the context of the church, where they're stern and stiff looking, Jesus now asserts and affirms the call for the church.

And the call for the church is simple. It's very straightforward. Jesus always speaks plainly and clearly. When you give a feast, invite the poor, invite the crippled, invite the blind, and invite the lame.

And notice Jesus says, when you give a feast. Not if, if you give a feast, but when you give a feast. More than that, Jesus says, when you invite.

[13:50] Not if you invite, but when you invite. So the call for the church is simple, it's straightforward. When you give a feast, and when you invite people to come to that feast, don't just invite those who usually come, or those you know will come, because they're always here.

Invite, no, says Jesus, invite the poor, invite the crippled, invite the lame, invite the blind, invite those who have never been invited before.

Invite those who don't expect an invitation. Invite those who don't see themselves as good enough to come into this great banquet.

Invite those who think that they're not worthy at all. Why? Because there's blessing in your invitation.

There's blessing in your invitation. Those who are invited, says Jesus, will be blessed by your invitation, and you yourself will be blessed by inviting them.

[14:55] That's what Jesus says. When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

So invite them, because they cannot repay you. And they can't repay you, because it's not your feast. It's not your feast that you're inviting them to.

It's not your banquet. This banquet has been prepared and made ready for all the guests who are invited, but it's not your banquet. It's not your feast.

It's the Lord's feast. It's the Lord's banquet. And the invitation, says Jesus, is to whosoever. Because as Jesus emphasizes and explains, he says, in the kingdom of God, the Lord has prepared a great banquet, a great gospel banquet.

And what's remarkable about this gospel banquet is that it's full and it's free. It's an all-you-can-eat banquet. You know, I was away in Edinburgh at the church development track this past week.

[16:07] It's something I've been part of for the last two years, where about 10 ministers would meet up and we have seminars every month or every couple of months. But when I was away this week, on Tuesday evening, we went out for dinner and we went to a restaurant on Leith Walk called Cosmo.

I don't know if you've ever been. Maybe some of you might not like it if you went, but Cosmo is an all-you-can-eat world buffet restaurant. It's a massive place, huge place.

It's like 11. You've all been to 11, I'm sure. 11 on steroids. It's huge. And on offer there in Cosmo is every type of food you can think of on the menu.

There's Italian, British, German, Indian, Mexican, Chinese, Cantonese, Japanese food. It's all there. It's all on offer. I was sitting there on Tuesday night.

I thought to myself, you know, this is what the great feast is like. This is what the great gospel banquet is like. The gospel banquet that Jesus invites us to.

[17:14] Because this gospel banquet, it's a full and a free banquet. It's an all-you-can-eat buffet. It's a perfect provision with perfect preparation.

And you know, the amazing thing about this gospel banquet is that what's offered on the table of this gospel banquet is full and free forgiveness of sin. It has been, and that full and free forgiveness of sin has been perfectly prepared through the cross of Jesus.

If you were to open your menu, you would see that on the menu is redemption. On the menu is reconciliation. On the menu is restoration. On the menu is righteousness before a holy God.

On the menu is a relationship with that holy God through Jesus Christ. All the blessings, all the benefits of the cross of Christ are there for the taking.

It's all there, all the affirmations, all the assurances of comfort and consolation, of help and healing, of peace and pardon, all the assurances of adoption and being accepted into the family.

[18:24] All these assurances of grace by the way and glory in the end. It's all there. It's all on the gospel table. It's all on offer. It's all available.

It's all for the taking. And you know, my friend, God has prepared this great gospel banquet through the perfect provision and preparation of his son, Jesus Christ.

And he invites us. He simply and clearly and plainly invites us and entreats us in the gospel saying to us, come dine with me.

Come dine with me. That's what he says. Come. For all things are now ready. And you know, that's the thing.

The gospel is an invitation. It's an imperative to come. It's an invitation and an imperative to come. And as you know, and I've said many times before, the gospel is full of imperatives.

[19:27] It never says, sit, do nothing, wait. No, no. The gospel is full of imperatives. It says, ask, seek, knock, repent, believe, look, live, love, come, call, confess, commit.

And that's what this great gospel banquet is. It's an invitation with an imperative where Jesus says to us, come and dine with me. Come, for all things are now ready.

Come. I don't know how many times that word is repeated throughout the Bible. Come. And the reason that word is there is because there's nothing that can be added to or subtracted from this great banquet.

Our righteousness is not required. Our sin is not restrictive because all that's asked of us is that we humbly come as we are to the gospel table of Jesus Christ.

And you know, that's the call of the church. The call of the church is to echo the words of Jesus.

The call of the church is to emphasize the words of Jesus.

[20:36] And the call of the church is to explain the words of Jesus to those who are needing to come. because as Jesus said, when you give a feast, not if you give, but when you give, when you give a feast, invite the poor, invite the crippled, invite the lame, invite the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you.

my friend, there's blessing in your invitation. There's blessing in your invitation. Those who are invited will be blessed by your invitation, and you will be blessed by inviting them.

So I'd encourage you to invite them to come. Compel them, says Jesus. Compel them to come in. Which brings us to consider, lastly, the command to the church. So the context of the church, the call for the church, and the command to the church.

The command to the church. Look at verse 16. Jesus said to him, A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.

[21 : 50] 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. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, I have bought a field and I must go out and see it.

Please excuse me. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am going to examine them. Please excuse me. And another said, I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come. Now as Jesus sat around the Sabbath dinner table with all these stiff and stern looking Pharisees, he not only taught and told them that there is blessing in our invitation to come to the gospel banquet, but also he teaches us that blessing comes when you share food and fellowship with other people.

Blessing comes when you invite people, when you invite the spiritually poor, crippled, lame, and blind to your dinner table and get to know them. Blessing comes when you see that the kingdom of God is not about religion.

It's about relationships. The kingdom of God is not about religion. It's about relationships. And you know, with this, Jesus teaches us here very simply, very clearly, the greatest form of evangelism because it's evangelism around the dinner table.

[23 : 16] Evangelism around the dinner table. Whether that evangelism is inviting them to the gospel banquet at church or even to stay for tea after church or to a congregational dinner or a curry night or a barbecue, even to our own home for a meal or for a coffee, Jesus is teaching us that we're to invite people to our table.

We're to invest in people. We're to invest time in people so that we get to know them and that we build a relationship with them because the kingdom of God is not about religion.

It's not about do's and don'ts and do this and don't do that. No, it's about a relationship. A relationship with the king of kings. And that it's through our relationship with the king of kings we show others that they need a relationship with this same king, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But you know, some people have this idea that, and I've met it many times before, they have this idea that drinking coffee or tea at church is wrong or having curry nights and Italian nights and Mexican nights and pudding nights.

They say it's unbiblical. But you know, the Pharisees thought that too. Which is why they often criticize Jesus. They complained against Jesus.

[24 : 33] They condemned Jesus. Saying that, Jesus, you are nothing but a glutton. All you do all the time is eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners.

But you know, the New Testament has this huge emphasis upon hospitality. It even teaches that hospitality is a spiritual gift. we're to invest and we're to invest in people.

We're to invest time in people. We're to invite people to come to our table. And this is what Jesus exemplifies here. He exemplifies that eating together is an effective form of evangelism.

Eating together is an effective form of evangelism. But as you know, the reason many people don't engage in evangelism or mission or outreach, whatever you want to call it, the reason people don't engage in it isn't because they don't see it as important.

I think everyone would see evangelism and mission as important. but the reason they don't engage in evangelism is for fear of rejection or refusal.

[25 : 47] We fear being rejected. We fear being refused. We're afraid that someone will come up with this empty excuse just like those who were invited in this parable where they came up with all the excuses.

I've bought a field. I need to go and see it. I've bought oxen. I need to go and test them. I've married. I've got married recently. I can't come. They're all empty excuses. And there are many empty excuses.

I hear them all the time. I'm too busy. I'm too tired. Too comfortable on my couch. Some are more direct with me. And I like it when people are direct.

It's not for me. I'm not interested. I'm an atheist. I'm a good person. I don't need to go to your church. But they're all empty excuses. Which is why Jesus says at the end of the parable he says I tell you none of those none of those who were invited and those who rejected and refused the invitation shall taste my banquet.

But you know the purpose of this parable is to show us that we're not to be inward looking and inward facing. We're not to be inward focused like the Pharisees.

[27 : 06] We're not to be so self-righteous and so self-consumed that we fail to invite people to come to the banquet. People will have their empty excuses.

People will have them. There's no doubt about that. But when it comes to evangelism we are not to have empty excuses. When it comes to evangelism we as the church are not to have empty excuses.

I'm too busy I'm too tired too comfortable can't do it. We're not to have empty excuses because Jesus teaches us there's blessing in our invitation. There's blessing in our invitation.

Those who are invited says Jesus they will be blessed by your invitation and you will be blessed by inviting them. Which is why Jesus exhorts us and encourages us not to give up when people give their empty excuses.

Don't give up on them. Do you know I know you're inviting people and I love that you're doing it in your own way with your own personality and some people don't know you're inviting them but don't give up.

[28 : 21] Don't give up even if they say no. Don't give up if they say not just now. Don't give up if they say I don't want to hear it. You don't give up. That's what Jesus is teaching us.

We need to keep inviting. Keep compelling them to come in. They might come with their empty excuses but we are to prayerfully invite and entreat and exhort people to come.

Compel them to come in that the master's house may be filled. Look at verse 21. Jesus says, so the servant came and reported these things to his master.

Then the master of the house came, 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. And the servant said, sir, what you commanded has been done and there is still 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. You know, I don't think I'll ever tire of hearing those words from Jesus because that's the command for the church.

[29 : 31] Go out quickly to the streets and the lanes, to the highways and to the hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled. And you know, I love that phrase, compel them.

Compel them. Spurgeon preached a sermon over a hundred years ago called compel them to come in. If you want something to do this afternoon, we did. It was the first thing Professor Donald McLeod gave us as ministers in the college.

He said, before I speak to you, read this about compelling people to come in. And I think everybody should read it. Compel them.

It literally means lovingly invite them because we're to have this urgency in our evangelism. An urgency because as we know only too well, sinners are going to hell.

Sinners are going to hell. That's the reality. Of course, we're not commanded to convince or convert anyone. That's not our business.

[30 : 32] Our business is to invest in people. Our business is to invite people. Our business is to call people to come to this great gospel banquet.

That's our mission. That's our mandate. That's our message. Compel them to come in. Just compel them to come in.

And so as we prayerfully prepare for back to church Sunday next week, and if one comes or nobody comes, it doesn't matter. We have to invite.

That's our responsibility. But as we prayerfully prepare for it, we see the context of the church, the call for the church, and the command to the church.

But I want to conclude by saying to those who are in church every week, it's great you're here. I love seeing you here. I love that you faithfully come every week to church.

[31 : 35] But I don't want you to just come to church. Because coming to church won't save you. It never saved anyone.

Coming to church never saved anyone. And it won't save you. It won't save you. Which is why you not only need to come to church, which is great, you need to come to Christ.

Because it's Christ who saves you. Not church. It's Christ who saves you. You need to come to Christ for salvation. You need to come to Christ confessing your sin.

You need to commit your whole soul, your entire being, to Jesus Christ for salvation. My friend, you could be sitting here for the next 20, 30, 40 years of your life and still be lost.

It's great you're here. But my friend, I want to speak to you lovingly. You need to come to Christ. It's not church that's on offer.

[32 : 39] It's Christ that's on offer. He has prepared this great provision of a gospel banquet and he says to you, come. He compels you to come.

Come to the banquet and taste and see that God is good. And when you trust in him, says the psalmist, you will know that blessing of life that shall never end.

So you come. You come to this Jesus for time and for eternity. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for the invitation that there is an invitation at all that we would see that we are undeserving of it, that there is nothing in us that is worthy of it and yet it is all because thou art a God who is gracious, who is loving, who is merciful, that he extends an invitation to the whosoever to come.

And Lord, we pray that thou wouldst enable us to come, encourage us to come, and that thou wouldst encourage us as thy people to encourage others to come, that we might invite them and entreat them to come to this great gospel banquet that the Master's house may be filled.

Bless us, Lord, together we pray as a congregation that thou wouldst give us a boldness for Jesus, realizing that it is not of ourselves, but it is all of him, that greater is he who is in us, says thy word, than he who is in the world.

[34 : 26] Lord, bless us together, then we pray. Go before us, lead us and guide us by thy Spirit, and do us good, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning, and we're going to sing the words of Psalm 84. Psalm 84, it's in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 84, we're singing, it's on page 338 in the Blue Psalm book, we're singing from verse 4 down to the verse mark 9.

Psalm 84 from verse 4. As I mentioned to you many times before, this is our elder, Ian Murray's, or John Murray's favourite Psalm. He loves verse 7, that's his favourite verse of his favourite Psalm. But you know, John Murray would love to be here, and so we should really see it as a privilege that we are here. He watches online every week, he knows the blessing of being gathered in God's house, and the longing that he has to be with God's people.

So remember those who are housebound, but also remember the fact that every time you come here, you are blessed. You are blessed. That's what the psalmist says in verse 4.

[35 : 48] Blessed are they in thy house that dwell, they ever give thee praise. Blessed is the man whose strength thou art, in whose heart are thy ways, who passing thorough baker's veil, therein do dig up wells, also the rain that falleth down the pools with water fills.

So we're seeing Psalm 84 from verse 4 down to the verse mark 9. We must stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. Blessed are they in thy house that dwell, they ever give thee praise.

Blessed is the man one whose strength thou art, in whose heart are thy ways, who passing thorough baker's veil, therein do dig up wells, also the rain that falleth down the pools with water fills.

so they from strength and weary it go, still forward unto strength, until in Zion man Seek God our shield.

Look on the face of thy anointed ear.

[38 : 49] 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.