
THE GREAT BANQUET

Invitation

Did you know that you and I are invited to a great wedding banquet? It is a great wedding banquet that God the Father is inviting people to where those who are in relationship with Him through Jesus celebrate the coming together of the church and Jesus in an eternal union.

John in Revelation describes it like this.

Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!
Revelation 19:9 (NIV)

And the prophet Isaiah described it like this.

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.
Isaiah 25:6 (NIV)

Today we start a five-part series, entitled *The Great Banquet*, to prepare us for and enter into the week of Easter. Through the recent Deeper Waters messages, we talked about going into deeper waters of sharing the love of God. The first disciples were called to follow Jesus and that He would make them fishers of people – nothing has changed, the call is still the same.

Re-prioritising Easter

We want to prepare you with the opportunity to reach out and make the invitation to your friends and family to come and celebrate Easter together. We feel like God is asking us to push back against the notion that Easter is better known for a four-day long weekend and bring Jesus and the gospel message front and centre.

Easter Holy Weekend

- + Good Friday Service – 9am @ Riverlife
- + Hallelujah Saturday – 24 hour prayer gathering starting 5am Saturday 8 April @ Riverlife Prayer Room
- + Sunday Sunrise Service @ Mt Coot-tha Lookout at 5.30am
- + Followed by an extended Sunday gathering around the banquet table for our service on Sunday morning @ Riverlife

The Parable of the Great Banquet - Luke 14:15-24

The Invitation

An invitation to a banquet in Jesus' day was the place to be seen, depending on who the invitation was from and who was going to be there.

The unstated question that lies behind is, "What sort of person will be in the kingdom of God?" and "What sort of people will be excluded from the kingdom?"

Jesus challenges the Pharisees self-righteous assumptions by telling this parable.

Understanding the Characters

The rich man here stands for God, who has invited Israel, the invited guests to partake of the eschatological or end time banquet.

The kingdom was prepared for them, but when Jesus came preaching that "the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17), He was rejected. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11).

The servant could therefore represent Jesus who called Israel to come to the party; His eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners anticipates the heavenly banquet guest list (Luke 5:17-32).

Lame Excuses

The guests who accepted the invitation were honour bound to attend when they are informed by the servant that the meal is ready.

The excuses for skipping the banquet are really lame. All three excuses in the parable reveal insincerity on the part of those invited.

Jesus is questioning the value they have of the banquet and the one who invited them. Possession and land and family are being prioritised over the banquet.

Portraying the kingdom of God as a festive meal is common in the Bible. We receive the invitation, "Come, for everything is ready now".

- + What is our response?
- + The meal may be ready, but are we?
- + Where are our priorities?
- + Do we want to enter the kingdom where God reigns, or do we prefer to follow our own self-centred agenda?
- + Do we humbly value the invitation?
- + Do we consider it a great honour to be invited into God's kingdom or have we taken it for granted? Worse still, have we lost sight of its incredible value and placed less valuable things in its place?

How we view the invitation will determine our response. It will also determine if we are ready to extend the invitation to others.

This is a timely reminder for us as we head into Easter to not take the invitation for granted. It should remind us of what Easter is really all about and inspire us to reclaim Easter weekend for Jesus by the priority we make it in our own lives, and our desire to invite others to celebrate with us.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the general perception of Easter long-weekend among your friends and family?
2. God is always inviting us to His table, He loves to spend time with us. Still, sometimes we are distracted by lots of things. They are not necessarily bad things but are given the wrong priority in our lives. Is there something in your life that has become an “excuse” for not accepting God’s invitation to His banquet?
3. Read the passage out loud and listen to Jesus tell this story. God wants you to be a guest at this banquet. What's it like to be there? Banquets are for important people; you may not consider yourself important, but God does. What reaction does this cause in you?
4. Notice how the invitation becomes more and more inclusive as the story develops. We may be surprised at who we find beside us when we are seated at the heavenly feast. Is our own hospitality so inclusive?
5. Can you cast your mind back to when you last declined an invitation from Jesus? Do you recall when you were too busy to visit that old friend living alone? Or that single Mum who needed help? Or that old neighbour who was ill in hospital? Did you say ‘I am too busy right now; I will call another day.’ How easy it is to put off something that puts extra pressure on our busy day?
6. Who will you invite to celebrate Easter with you?