

THE GREAT BANQUET

What are you like at RSVPing to events? Are you the kind of person who is prompt, late or never RSVPs? Do you turn up to the events you RSVP for?

How have you found being on the other end and trying to get people to RSVP to a party or event? Do you find people often say they will come and then don't?

Read Luke 14:15-24

Why do you think the man says in verse 15 *"Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God"*?

Looking at the excuses given by the guests in the parable, do you think these are good or bad excuses? Why?

Why do you think Jesus told the parable? What message was he trying to teach?

Some people say that the host of the party cannot be representing God as he changes his mind about who to invite to his dinner. How you respond to this idea?

Why does the host have the poor, crippled, blind and lame brought in? How can that inform how we see God's kingdom today?

In telling this parable Jesus challenged his listeners not to take for granted their place in God's kingdom. Is this challenge still relevant for us today?

Leader's Notes Parable of the Great Banquet

What are you like at RSVPing to events? Are you the kind of person who is prompt, late or never RSVPs? Do you turn up to the events you RSVP for?

How have you found being on the other end and trying to get people to RSVP to a party or event? Do you find people say they will come and won't?

These two questions are designed to get the group talking about events, how they respond to them and how they feel organising them. It is merely to get the discussion on topic. Before embarking on the study it might be helpful to clarify how party invites worked in 1st Century Israel, so the group can understand the difference between how things work today and how things worked in Jesus' day.

At the time when Jesus taught the parable a host would announce that they were having a party and send invites out. At that point guests would indicate whether they could make it or not. It was like a save the date and an invite in one. This commitment was seen as binding. To refuse an invitation after accepting was a great dishonour to the host.

On the day of the event a servant would be sent out to announce that the party was ready and the guests should attend. This was seen as a mere formality, like an MC at a wedding announcing that guests can enter the reception hall and take their seats. It's formality of timing rather than a secondary invitation, this is why it is so significant that the guests refuse the hosts invite at such a late date.

Read Luke 14:15-24

Why do you think the man says in verse 15 "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."?

To answer this question, challenge the group to look at the preceding 14 verses.

Jesus tells this parable in the context of a Sabbath dinner party at a Pharisee's house. After controversially healing a man with abnormal swelling at the dinner party, he proceeds to discuss dinner party etiquette - probably getting many of the guests offside with his controversial views.

The man who announces, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God" seems to be trying to defuse the tension in the room. He seems to be saying "We may not agree on the best way to conduct yourself at a dinner party but isn't it great that we'll all be at the feast in God's new kingdom." He was probably hoping that Jesus would say a simply "Amen".

Unfortunately for the man, Jesus doesn't just take the bait and acquiesce to trite sayings, but tells a parable which essentially says "Be careful of thinking you're automatically going to be welcomed into God's kingdom. It may not be who you expect at God's kingdom feast." Jesus will not be forced into saying what is polite. He is much more interested in challenging people's salvation assumptions than only saying what is comfortable.

Looking at the excuses given by the guests in the parable, do you think these are good or bad excuses? Why?

The excuses given by those being invited seem particularly flimsy. While they may have been acceptable when the original invitation went out, they are not acceptable on the day of the feast. The guests should have done better forward planning.

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The man who bought the field should probably have inspected the field before buying it, but even if he didn't, the field will still be there when the feast is over. The man who bought five yoke of oxen should also have inspected his oxen before buying them, and they will also be there after the banquet. The man who just got married doesn't seem to understand that marriage doesn't prohibit someone attending a function. Even if he doesn't want to be separated from his wife, he should have thought about that before accepting the invitation.

The reasons given seem a lot more like excuses to get out of going to the feast rather than legitimate reasons for not attending the party.

Some people mention that the excuses seem to be a reflection of Deuteronomy where the men of Israel are allowed not to go to war if they have recently planted a vineyard, built a new house or been recently married. It may be that Jesus is implying that these people were using Deuteronomy as a way to escape their commitments. If he is, it is only to show the flimsiness of the excuses. The clauses in Deuteronomy 20 are designed for people who might die in battle without enjoying their fruit of their labour or their new marriage, going to a party is not a matter of life and death, and the Deuteronomy clause doesn't count. The guests were not offering legitimate excuses; they were merely snubbing the host on the day of his party.

Why do you think Jesus told the parable? What message was he trying to teach?

Jesus is teaching that while the people of Israel may assume that they are going to be guests in God's great banquet, now that the kingdom of God has arrived with Jesus, God's people are rejecting Jesus, and with him the kingdom of God. They have not recognised Jesus, and are snubbing the kingdom by snubbing the king. They are rejecting God's invitation by rejecting Jesus.

Jesus is showing them that any excuse is flimsy in light of God's invitation to take part in his kingdom. Jesus isn't what they wanted or expected, but he has brought the kingdom, and if they reject it, the invitation will move to those who are least expected to be invited into God's kingdom. We cannot take our acceptance into God's kingdom for granted. Our entry will be entirely dependent on how we respond to the son, who, like the servant announcing that the feast was ready, announced, "The Kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mark 1:15)

Jesus is also teaching that while God's people, the Jews, may reject God's kingdom in their rejection of Jesus, this will not stop God's kingdom plans. God will bring anyone into his kingdom that will accept his invitation in his son. Your eligibility for the kingdom is not based on your heritage or social status; it is based only on how you respond to Jesus.

Some people say that the host of the party cannot be representing God as he changes his mind about who to invite to his dinner. How you respond to this idea?

Parables do not contain a one to one correlation of different characters or events with the themes and ideas that Jesus is teaching about. While Jesus is teaching about God and how we respond to his invitation to the kingdom, he is not saying that the host of the party is an exact representation of God. While the host does change who he invites to the party, Jesus is not saying that God first invited the Jews but then when they rejected Jesus he invited the lesser people (the Gentiles). It was always God's plan to welcome the Gentiles into the kingdom. Jesus is not laying out an exact format for kingdom expansion but a challenge to the assumption of the Jews.

Why does the host have the poor, crippled, blind and lame brought in? How can that inform how we see God's kingdom today?

The Jews saw themselves as the privileged ones in the plan of God, while the poor, crippled, blind and lame represent those who were seen as being outside God's chosen people, they are not merely non-Jews. The ministry of Jesus extended to those who were often thought of as outsiders within the Israelite community. Jesus ministered to the poor, crippled, blind and lame

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- bringing God's good news of the kingdom to them. They eagerly accepted the good news that Jesus brought. Entry to the kingdom of God is not about your position in society but your response to Jesus.

The invitation to the kingdom extends to those outside the people of God even to those of us who are not Jews.

The challenge for us is to be looking around our kingdom communities to make sure that we are extending God's invitation to all people, no matter what their nationality, social status or physical ability. Our churches should be a reflection not merely of the kinds of people we are comfortable associating with, but of the diversity of God's kingdom invitation. Where this is not the case we should find ways to create a community where all people are welcomed.

In telling this parable Jesus challenged his listeners not to take for granted their place in God's kingdom. Is this challenge still relevant for us today?

We, like, the hearers of Jesus' parable, cannot take our salvation for granted. Our adherence to the norms of our Christian community's standards (our morality and religious practice) do not indicate that we are part of God's kingdom. Attending church, saying, doing, or even believing the right thing do not mean that God must accept us. The only way to accept God's kingdom invitation is to accept Jesus as both Lord and Saviour. To see and trust that God's salvation comes to us not by our achievements or our status, but by Jesus' work at the cross. This salvation demands a new way of living with Jesus as the centre of our being and doing. Only through accepting Jesus can we enter God's kingdom.

The challenge of the parable is to check our hearts, check our assumptions, and put our trust in Jesus. Even to those who have accepted Jesus, it challenges us to present God's kingdom invitation to all people no matter who they are, what they are like or where they come from. All people are eligible to be part of God's kingdom if they put their trust in Jesus.

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Spend some time in prayer seeking forgiveness for making assumptions about God's salvation. Pray for each other to trust in Jesus. Pray for friends and family who don't know Jesus that they too may accept God's invitation in Jesus.