

Luke 4:15-24

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[0 : 0 0] Turn again with me to Luke chapter 14, the passage that we read together from that chapter, especially the words from verses 15 to 24, where Jesus says in verse 17, Come, for everything is now ready.

I wonder if you've ever had a dream where you're convinced that you're late for something.

Maybe you're late for an exam or for your job, or if you're me, maybe you're late for church on a Sunday, and you wake up with a kind of fever, and you frantically race about, knowing that you're too late, and that by the time you get there, the doors will be closed, you won't be able to set your exam, and all you've worked for, and all you've laboured for will be gone.

You wake up in a cold sweat, and you have that, even if you know that it's just a dream, you have that unsettled feeling of being late all day long. And in a sense, this is a parable of Jesus which is designed to evoke that feeling within every one of us, that maybe we're too late, that time is limited, and that haste and urgency are required.

The time which is limited is the time that we have left here on earth to respond to the gospel before Jesus comes again.

[1 : 3 2] Before Jesus takes us to be with him, either through our death or through his second coming. That time is limited. And haste is required. Urgency is required from us in the light of the brevity and temperativeness of time to respond to that gospel.

You see, this is the parable, which is the too late parable. It's the parable of the great banquet, where a sweating man wakes up from a dream, and he realises that the door to heaven really is shut, and that he can't get in.

And even though his whole life he's been camped at the gates of heaven, he can't get in. So listen carefully to what Jesus tells you about entering the kingdom of God now, before it's too late, whilst the door is still fully open to us.

There are four things I want to say from this parable. The first is in verses 16 and 17, where Jesus says, Come now. Come now.

And the overwhelming, or the overriding message of the first few verses of this parable are really the generosity of the householder, the generosity of the one who's throwing this party.

[2 : 5 0] The one in whose house all things are made ready. You see, first of all here, a great supper. A great supper. Literally, a man was preparing a mega supper.

A mega banquet. This man is, in verses 21, 22 and 23, called Lord. And it's clearly a picture of God. You see, throughout the Bible, in the Old Testament, and in the New, a great banquet, a great supper, is used as an image of heaven.

An image of eternity, where the chosen King of God will sit down around the banqueting table with all God's people, and they'll feast on a great banquet. For example, Revelation 19, verse 9.

The end times feast is proclaimed by the heavenly angels, crying out, Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. And the point is, you see, that the Jewish teachers and leaders, to whom Jesus is immediately delivering this parable, would have known precisely what Jesus meant when he was talking about great banquets.

They would have known that he was talking about the end of days, when God's Messiah, God's King, would sit down around this banqueting table, in heaven, with all of his people.

[4 : 13] And his people, having lived and suffered lifetimes of self-denial, and pain and agony, would, through death or his second coming, be taken from where they are now, into the very presence of the King, and they would gorge themselves upon this heavenly banquet, in the company of the heavenly King.

And that's you and me. And I'm asking this morning, are you living in the light of that great supper? It's been a few years since I've lived in Aberdeen, so I don't know its restaurants anymore.

But in Glasgow, for example, if you knew that you were going to have dinner at one Devonshire Gardens, at four o'clock that afternoon, you wouldn't go and buy a packet of crisps.

You wouldn't go and gorge yourself in chocolate, because you would know you were getting the best meal in town. You'd lose your appetite for it, wouldn't you? And that's the question for us as Christians.

Are you losing your appetite for heaven, and for the heavenly banquet, by gorging, and by feasting yourself on the rubbish and trash of this world?

[5 : 22] And that's why self-denial is required. Self-denial is required in order that we may eat much of the heavenly banquet. And you know, if you're not a Christian today, are you not just a weeby envious of those of us who are Christians, and the future that we look forward to?

Isn't this a future that you would like to have? The knowledge that when you die, or when Jesus comes again, you'll be taken into the very presence of a banquet.

And the king of that banquet, sitting with you. So, come now. The first thing is about that, is the great supper. And then here you see many invitations. Many invitations.

The householder, he sends many invitations to many guests. He summons many. Now remember again who he's talking to Jesus.

His immediate audience are Pharisees. They're Jews. They know the Old Testament. And they know what Jesus is talking about here. Because he's using Old Testament language again. It would immediately have brought up in these Jewish minds, the way in which God called Israel to be his people.

[6 : 37] The way that God had called this nation of Israel to be his people. He'd called them through the desert. He'd called them to the land of Canaan. They knew what Jesus was talking about here.

Israel had been called to be the people of God who at the end of days would sit down as a nation around the banqueting table of the Lord in heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were the called people of God. And in a sense, Luke could not have been more direct with his readers when in verse 7, he uses the word guests.

And in verse 16, he uses the word guests. He's using exactly the same words to talk about those who God had invited to the end time banquet as those who were sitting around that table that day.

In other words, Jesus is saying to people here, look, you're the ones whom God's called. You're the ones whom God has invited to sit around this banqueting table at the end of days.

[7 : 46] But they rejected. Later we'll see how Israel rejected the message of Jesus and the summons of God.

But you know, God's still calling people. No longer, I believe, is he calling Israel as a nation as such, as once he did. But he is calling people from the Gentiles, from us, from we, from we who are here this morning.

He is summoning you, inviting you, to be at this heavenly banquet with Jesus. Every time the gospel is preached from this pulpit, every time you hear it from the lips of another Christian, the summons is going out to you to repent and to believe the gospel.

I love Horatius' Boner's hymn. I heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest. Lay down, thou weary one, and lay down thy head.

Upon my breast. And I'm asking, are you hearing the voice of Jesus today? Are you hearing him summoning you to come to rest in him?

[8 : 54] And I know in our culture that there are many who are waiting for a blinding flash of light. And only then will they believe. Just like Saul of Tarsus on the way to Damascus.

Blinding flash of light. That's what you want in order to believe that God is calling you. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred you will not receive it. You are hearing God's voice today because the preaching of the word of God is the word of God.

You are hearing God's word summoning you into relationship with Christ. So come. Today. Now. And then the third thing here is you see a servant who's been sent.

A servant. You see the invitation system back in the ancient Middle East was a bit different from what it is today. Back then the host of the banquet would inform and he would summon all those that he wanted to invite that he was preparing a party to which those who were invited would say well yes I'll come or no I will not come.

And then and then he would send a servant out when he had everything ready he would send a servant out to those who said yes we'll come to tell them that everything was now ready and that they should come to the party.

[10 : 11] And that's what Jesus is talking about here. The lord of this house he had a servant a slave whom he sent around the houses of those that he summoned to the feast.

And not only then did those who who were invited to this supper not only did they have an invite not only did they have an invite on paper as it were from the host of the party they had a verbal summons from this servant.

They had the piece of paper that they could look at which told them there will be a party at this house but they also had the servant coming to them and saying the table is now ready the party is now ready come and enjoy.

And again the Jews must have understood that Jesus was here referring again to the people of Israel. From Samuel through to John the Baptist all of these men had summoned the people of Israel to return to the lord and to enjoy their marriage with God.

They'd warned they'd encouraged they'd invited they'd commanded they'd done everything they could but over and over again the response with which these prophets were met was stoning and execution and rejection.

[11 : 30] God's people of old whom he'd invited to enjoy the feast of blessing with him had rejected him. They'd rejected his servants. And now in Jesus the king of prophets the prophet of prophets is with them.

And this parable in a sense is the ultimate invitation to listen and to accept the gospel. God himself is the slave who's going forth with the summons.

And the question for these Jewish leaders is are they going to listen? And Lord's day by Lord's day you will have one of the Lord's servants one of the Lord's slaves going forth with the summons to come.

Whoever is preaching God's word is carrying with him the authority of the king to invite every sinner to enjoy the beauty of relationship with God.

There's some people here who were not Christians in my day here and you're still not Christians. And you've maybe heard hundreds thousands of servants summoning you to come to the banquet and yet you still have not come.

[12 : 51] And then lastly in this point the supper is ready. Everything is now ready. Everything's now ready verse 17. The Lord of the house he's readied everything.

He's invited his friends he's invited his guests into this great banqueting hall. In theological language the Old Testament shadows of the Messiah they've all come to fruition in Jesus Christ.

Jesus had now come. Everything's now ready. The kingdom had come because the king had come. And again the Jewish teachers here they must have understood what Jesus was saying here.

They must have understood that Jesus was pointing to himself as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises of God. And now the question is being posed today.

God has readied his house the Messiah has come so what are you going to do? Are you going to come?

[13 : 51] And you know nothing's changed in a sense for 2000 years. The feast of the Lord is still ready. The table is still ready. Jesus has died on the cross at Calvary to buy our forgiveness.

He's been raised from the dead and he now reigns in glory. And he's gone there to prepare a place for you. Nothing more needs done. Nothing. Everything's ready.

Everything is fully prepared. All that is needful is for you to come. For you to feast on the bounty of the Lord's provision in Christ.

The supper is ready. Everything's ready. Are you ready? And so you're seeing here in this title, Come Now, you're seeing here the generosity of the Lord, the generosity of the Lord of this house.

He lays on this mega feast and he invites many to join him. That's our God. He's so generous, so abundant in his generosity, so kind in his love.

[14 : 52] There are many places at this table. There's space enough for everyone here. Everyone. And he calls all of us, without exception, to come.

So will you come. Then from verses 18 to 21, we see what those who are invited say. The Lord says, Come Now, but they say, Not Now.

Not Now. All's ready. God's prepared the table. Christ has come to save. Now Jesus turns from what God is doing to how men respond to the summon God gives them.

And what you see is excuses. Excuses. I don't think this parable should really be called the parable of the great banquet. It should be called the parable of the great excuses.

I cannot come. Please excuse me. That's what it all boils down to. The first man, it's all about property. He's bought a field.

[15 : 56] He wishes to go and inspect what he's got. His property is more important to him than the summons from the Lord of the house. You see what he's doing? By saying this property is more important to me than you, he is rating the dust of the earth higher than the Lord of the house.

Now, we can do this with our houses and what we've got in our possessions. We think that, oh, I don't do that. But we rate our wallets and our bank accounts, and I don't know, we rate them higher than God.

Not now, the man of property cries, come later. Little does he know, perhaps little does he care, that for him there will be no later, because the summons has come and gone.

It's too late. For him, he can keep his field. He can be buried in his field. And the mega feast will be given to someone else. But then there's, then the next man, it's not about property this time, it's about employment.

This guy's bought Stone Age Kubota, five pairs of oxen, and he wishes to go and try them out. Large landowner, these five pairs of oxen, are the means by which he's going to plough his ground and work the land or his mode of employment.

[17 : 21] What this man does in life is more important to him than the summons he receives from God to come. Or he can spend his days with these dirty oxen, these beasts of burden, and they mean more to him than the love of the Lord.

Is that the way it is with you today? You go to work on a Monday morning and your pencils and your keyboard and your management profiles, they mean more to you than God?

Not now, the man says. Come later. Little does he know, little does he care, that perhaps there will be no later. Someone says, come and it's gone, it's too late for him, he can keep his dirty oxen and the mega feast will be tasted by others.

And then the third one is pleasure. Pleasure. The third man's just been married. Isn't that nice? Just been married. And he wants to spend time with his wife. Now in ancient times only men were invited to banquets.

And this man didn't want to leave his young wife alone. Isn't that nice? Didn't want to leave his young wife alone. Even though it was just for a day. He didn't want to forgo his marital privileges with her.

[18 : 43] He didn't want to forgo the pleasures of marriage. His pleasure. is more important to him than his friend. Now I suppose as a married man this is probably the most plausible of the three excuses.

But when you see that this man wasn't so interested in his wife as what she could give him, then you begin to understand where his true love lay.

I'm just asking the question of all of us. is that where we are? Whatever gives us kicks in life, whatever turns you on, whether it's skiing or football or whatever it is, whatever makes your adrenaline rush, whatever is your pleasure, do you value that higher than your relationship to God?

We want to live life to the max. We want to enjoy every experience to the full. And for us that's more important than the summons to repent and to believe the gospel. From the style-cramping God who invites his servants to come.

Not now, this married man cries, come later. Little does he know, little does he care, that for him there's going to be no later.

[20 : 02] The summons is too late for him. He can keep his wife, and the mega feast will be tasted by others. But you know, behind these excuses, I think there's a deeper reason for these rejections.

And the first is that, you notice there's common themes in the three excuses. And the first is that they're all lame. They're all lame. I mean, imagine, imagine that you bought a field.

You would never buy a field without first of seeing it. You would never buy a house without first seeing the house. So what's the great need for this man to go and inspect the field again?

He's already seen it. The field's still going to be there tomorrow. No man goes and buys five yoke of oxen without first trying them out. It's still going to be there tomorrow.

No man in his right mind marries a wife, and then decides to drop all his friends. He fulfills all the obligations he had to them, prior to his marriage.

[21 : 11] His wife's still going to be there tomorrow. You see, every excuse we throw up to God to excuse ourselves from obeying his summons, at the end of the day is lame, feeble.

Whether it's property, employment, or pleasure, it's feeble. And it will be shown to be so on the last day. Because when you see the beauty of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ as the sky is ripped apart, and you see him as he is, everything in this earth will be pathetic by comparison.

We may give our excuses to God today, why we don't become Christians, but every single one of them is by default pathetic. And then you see also that these excuses, they're contemptuous.

Contemptuous. Because at the end of the day, it's not the servant who's slighted by the rejection to this banquet. It's the master. The servant goes and says, come, and the people say, not now, but it's not really the servant, it's the master who's been slighted.

Underneath the surface of this story, there is a real indifference, at best, hatred at worst, to God. Behind the religious respectability of the Pharisees lies this apathy towards God, this hatred towards God, and to the countless prophets who had summoned them to come to this banquet.

[22 : 40] In verse 15, one of the Pharisees says, blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. At the same time, this very Pharisee was rejecting the one who was calling him to enjoy the feast in the kingdom of God.

And furthermore, they're going to go from this place, and they're going to take God's son himself, the lord of the banquet, and they're going to kill him.

They're going to nail him to a tree. You see, behind all this religious flipperiness and on the outside religious respectability lies a hatred for God. Now that comes back to us, because if we have not come to Jesus, if you have not come to Jesus today, it can only be because you've got no desire for him.

If you reject the gospel as it comes forth to you, you're not rejecting me. You're not rejecting a man. You're rejecting God.

Again and again. And whatever excuses, whatever excuses that you're giving for not bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ, if it's family, if it's property, whatever it is, whatever excuse, they're straw men.

[24 : 03] Just giving the excuse a degree of respectability, whilst underneath it's just pathetic and it shows a hatred for God. Underneath it all, there's a distrust of God and a contempt for Christ.

Not now. Then thirdly and more briefly in verses 21 to 23. Go now. Master of the house says, go now. Because he's angry.

And he now commands his servant to invite a whole new clientele to the banquet. No longer will it be the called of Israel, the religious nation of Israel. Rather he sends his servants out to seek out the poor, and to seek out the crippled, and to seek out the blind, and to seek out the lame.

And he tells the servant, go. See who the new guests are going to be. They're going to be the man with dropsy that we read of in the beginning of the chapter.

They're going to be poor and crippled and lame. They're going to be those who would never originally have been invited to the banquet of the Lord.

[25 : 14] But they're those who are coming because the banquet, the summons of the banquet of the Lord has been rejected. And so they're found in the streets, and in the inner cities, and in the highways, and in the walls of the outer city.

They've got no fixed abode. They're the homeless ones. They're the rejects of society. God has always had a heart for people like that. God has always been interested in people like that.

The Lord's house will be filled. The banquet will go ahead. It will be the undeserving who receive the bounty. The so-called deserving people, although there is in reality no such thing as deserving, those deserving people who so contemptuously brushed aside the summons of the Lord, the God of all grace, they will not be there.

But that God of all grace will now turn his attention to the helpless and to the outcast. And you know, whoever finds in himself a wretched and abandoned condition is taught that God invites him to the table.

It's what Marcus Dodds, a 19th century free churchman wrote. Whoever finds himself in a wretched and abandoned condition is taught here that God invites him to his table.

[26 : 37] You might have reached rock bottom. Whether it's in mind or body or spirit, you may be in utter despair for the future and you're only too aware of your own helplessness.

it's you that God turns to now. It's you that he turns to and says come. The table is set.

The place waits for you. Your summons is complete. Come. That's what he says to you today. And then you see the servant, what the servant's activity is.

He's going forth with the invitation of the banquet to all those who were invited. But now he's doing something different. He's going out and he's finding people. He's going forth with the invitation to anybody.

To the crippled, to the lame, to the poor, to the blind. And he's a bit like those who go forth with the invitation to eternal life. Whether they're preachers or evangelists or all of us Christians who are just gossiping the gospel with our friends and our neighbours.

[27 : 45] We're those who are commanded by the Lord to go forth and to invite people to come to know him, to perform certain functions. See there, first of all, the servant is told to lead them here.

Lead them here. That's what he's told. Bring in the poor. Verse 21. God's God's going to reach this lost world, this lost city.

He's going to do it through us as his people. We've got to bring them here. I'm not talking about bringing them here to church, literally. I'm talking about bringing them to Christ.

God doesn't need us, but his word teaches us that it's through us that the summons to the banquet is heard by the watching world. God's love. We're not to lead them to ourselves.

We're not to lead them to a particular institution, free church per se. We're to lead them to the Lord Jesus Christ. And we're to take them by the hand. And we're to lead them there.

[28 : 50] Because if you're blind, you need lead. So you take the blind man by the hand and you lead him there. You take the spiritually blind man by the hand and you lead him to Christ. You support the lame man.

You take the person who's helpless and body, mind or soul and you take them not to a place but to a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's our duty. Listen, that's our duty from the youngest to the oldest, whoever you are here, that is your duty to go and to bring them into Christ.

That's the command that you've received from the mouth of the master. Go and bring in the poor. Are you obeying that command today?

You witnessed for the Lord Jesus Christ? Or are you like these contemptuous people, turns down God's gracious invitation, treat your master with scorn, you don't believe his intention that these poor people should be seated at the table with you?

Go and find the poor. Go and find the needy, the spiritually bankrupt. Bring them here. Bring them to Christ. And then the second thing is, he says, go and compel them, make them come in, in verse 23.

[30 : 10] Because the man goes out and he finds poor people and blind people and lame people, but there's still room and so the master goes and says, make them come in. It doesn't mean to physically force them into the kingdom.

them. This is not an imprimatur for us to go out with machine guns and bombs and to force people to become Christians.

We don't fight with the weapons of this world. The servant would go out. This is what the situation is. The servant would go out and he would speak to people but they would find it difficult to believe that the master was genuine in his invitation.

They would say, I don't believe that the master of that great house could possibly be interested in a blind man like me. And so this servant was to go out and to convince people that the invitation of the master was genuine.

And that servant was not to take no for an answer. He was to keep on persuading them of God's good will toward them. The servant was not to be satisfied with the promise of attendance.

[31 : 18] Oh yes, I'll come. I'll be there. I don't know how many times I've heard non-Christians say, I'll come. I'll be there. He was to take them by the hand and to lead them to Christ.

Similarly, he wasn't to let them delay on the pretext that somehow they must ready themselves for the presence of the king. He wasn't to say to them, look, come to the king but tell you what, you've got to change your clothes because you're not looking good.

He wasn't to allow them to delay. He was to take them to Christ, take them to the king rather, as they were immediately. We mustn't also allow people to delay before they come to Christ.

We mustn't let them think that they have to start living good lives or they can't come to Christ. Come as you are. That's what the message here is. Come as you are. Make them come as you are.

And as Christian gospelers, as those who are evangelists, we can't take no for an answer. someone says to us, no I'm not interested. What are you going to do? Stop speaking to them about the gospel?

[32 : 26] Well, maybe. Initially. But one thing you can do is you keep praying. You keep praying to God. You keep persuading. Because it's the Lord's will that the summons goes out to everyone, every creature.

We mustn't allow those who have been summoned to ready themselves to come. As if to say, I've got to stop this bad behaviour that I'm indulging in.

I've got to stop that before I come to Christ. We can't allow people to be deceived into thinking that way. They have to come. God wants them to come as they are.

And therefore we've got to compel them to come in. You leave no stone unturned in your pursuit of your friends and your family for Christ. Give them no peace until they've made their peace with God.

we've got to be lazy in our duties sleeping whilst the Lord's banquet table stands ready and the Lord's halls are empty.

[33 : 29] We mustn't dilly-dally on the way. We must be purposeful. We must be deliberate in going about the duty enjoined upon us by our Lord and Master when He says, make them come in.

Make them come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and their Lord. And now lastly, very briefly, we see in verse 24, Jesus' message to us today, respond now.

Respond now. See, we're going back to where we went at the beginning. The message of this parable is that of opportunity missed. The Lord of the feast, He's now filled His house with the poor people and the lame people, and He now closes His door, slams it shut, and He swears that none of those He called will ever taste of His banquet.

Can you not hear the slamming of the doors? It shuts in the face of those who were once called but would not come because they valued their oxen, their smelly oxen, and their dusty fields, and their wives, ahead of God.

The message of this parable is it may be too late. On the day when Jesus Christ returns, we don't know when that will be, the door to heaven will be closed and tightly locked.

[35 : 02] Those who were called but said not now, and I know there are some sitting here who say not now, those who were called but say not now, will be left outside where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, whilst on the inside those who did not deserve the summons will be feasting on the great banquet of the Lamb and enjoying everlasting pleasure.

If you are one who as yet are not numbered amongst those who have obeyed God's command to camp, then take two incentives from this parable.

The first is this, take the incentive of being left outside in the cold and the dark. The door of the king's hall is to be forever shut.

And you'll be left on the outside. And I don't care how close you were to God's people on earth. How close you come to the gate of heaven whilst you lived here on earth.

However close you were, no matter how close you were, just like this group of Pharisees were close, unless you yourself obey God's summons to come, for eternity you will be on the outside when Jesus returns.

[36 : 30] But secondly, there is this incentive of the great feast. Because you see, this is going to be a banquet with much joy, much happiness.

Everything's going to be well in the banqueting hall of the king. Why? Because the king himself will be there. It's going to be light.

It's going to be laughter. It's going to be joy. It's going to be happiness. Do you not want to be there? Well, today God invites you through his word to respond to his summons and invitation.

To respond to his command to come for everything is ready. Let's pray together.

Lord, through your word we are challenged first, as you speak to us and as you tell us of the danger of not responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ, as you point us again to the cross on which he died for our sins, and Lord, we pray that every one of us here today would accept this banquet so that on that great day when the banqueting hall doors are shut, every one of us here may be seated around this banqueting table with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[38 : 10] Lord, we thank you that you're so gracious, that not many of us here are noble, out of pure birth, not many of us here are wise according to the ways of this world, but we're the poor ones, the crippled ones, the lame ones, the blind ones, that because of your grace we come.

Accept all our praise and all our thanks both now and eternally. Amen. Now, we are going to sing to God's praise in Psalm 128.

Psalm 128. This is from the 1650 version of the Psalter.

You'll find this on page number 420. Blessed is each one that fears the Lord, walketh in his ways. For of thy labor thou shalt eat, and happy be ye always.

Thy wife shall as a fruitful vine by thy house sides be found. Thy children like to olive plants about thy table round. We're going to sing this Psalm and afterwards we're going to perform the celebration of the sacrament of Christian baptism.

[39 : 34] So Psalm 128, the whole Psalm we're going to sing to the tune Timberton to God's praise.