

We all have those dinner parties that we'll never forget?

- *Like when Grandpa repeated a funny joke that he'd heard, but he was completely naïve as to how rude/offensive it was; or*
- *when you called your son's girlfriend by the name of his ex-girlfriend; or*
- *when a discussion on politics/environment descended into a full-blown argument; or*
- *the mother-in-law "complimented" her son's wife for being adventurous in trying to cook his favourite dish...*

Some dinner parties can be ... memorable...

Like this dinner party with Jesus. It's never boring, when Jesus comes for a feed. And He never misses an opportunity to teach. And especially when He's being "set up" – He always has a way of turning the tables on His opponent, and they're the ones left with egg on their face.

And at this dinner party, there are 3 notable interactions, all set within a feast/banquet setting.

1. The first interaction, is to do with the Law;
2. is to do with how we behave socially; and
3. is a spiritual lesson,

But by the time that we get to the 3rd lesson, we realise He's been giving us a "spiritual lesson" all along.

So, let's set the scene:

We're in a section of Luke, where Jesus has been teaching about the Kingdom of God. And the Jewish religious leaders

were fully anticipating that the Kingdom of God would come, and that they'd be right there, in the midst of it. (guests of honour, in their mind)

But Jesus has been pretty blunt in telling them, that they are in great danger of **missing** the Kingdom of God, entirely. And the parable last week, was that the door is currently open, but it will be shut. And once the door is shut, they will not be able to enter the Kingdom of God.

Now, in hindsight, you and I know very well, what He was telling them: The Son of God, was right there in their midst, and they were rejecting the Son of God.... ... And how could they possibly enter the Kingdom of God, if they reject the One Whose Kingdom it is....

And more than **rejecting** King Jesus: In the reading today, they're "setting Him up" – a defence lawyer would call what they are doing here, "entrapment".

You see, they knew Jesus had a history of healing people on the Sabbath. And by their interpretation of the religious Law, that was illegal (working on the Sabbath). And so they set Him up, to see if He'd do it again.

And this is how it unfolds:

One of the Head Pharisees (a very important man), invites Jesus to dinner (at his own home), on a Sabbath Day. And when Jesus arrives, there just happens to be, (right there; right at that moment), a man with a medical condition called "Dropsy". "Dropsy" is swelling due to the retention of fluid. Today we would call it "Oedema". (fluid tablets; compression stockings)

And the fact that this man is here, is no coincidence. We're told that **they were watching [Jesus] carefully**. And we're told that ...**Jesus [answered] responded to the lawyers and Pharisees** – they were looking to catch Him out, but Jesus put the ball in their court: He said to them: **"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"**

You see, in the Old Testament, the Law says: "You shall do no work on the Sabbath". (6 days you shall work, but on the 7th, do no work. Rest)... And what a wonderful law that is. Isn't it amazing, that way back then, our Lord cared enough, to make sure that every single person – It doesn't matter what level of society one came from – every person, and even every beast of burden, had a regular day of rest, one day out of seven.... Whether you were:

- rich/poor;
- young/old;
- boss/employee;
- slave/free
- went out to work / kept the house...

you were not only entitled to rest – it was normalised for the whole of society, so you could not have an expectation/threat put upon you, to forgo that God-given rest.

And sometimes I reckon we need to take this more seriously... Have you ever heard of the thing called the "Protestant work ethic"??? It means as Christians, we're not laggards – we work hard; and we work long... And that's important. God

said “For 6 days you shall work”... And gainful, productive employment, is a gift of God...

But some of us may be at risk of making “work” into our God. How do you know if work is taking you away from God?

That’s easy:

- If this is a pride thing for you, and you compare the hours **you** work per week, to what somebody **else** does you’ve got a problem; and

If you feel you have underachieved, because you did less hours than somebody else, you’ve got a problem.; or

- If you find it difficult, to arrange things so you can set aside at least one day (every week) to have off, then you have a problem; or
- If you’re having trouble, finding time within your week to pray and to worship, then you have a problem...

Out of all of the addictions, being a work-a-holic, that’s the only one that we tend to think, is admirable... But let’s not call it an “addiction” – let’s call it what it is – “Sin”.

Anyway:

In the Book of the Law, a few examples of “work” are given, but mostly it’s left open to simple “reason”: “Is this something that should be considered as “work”, when God has commanded that we should have one day of rest every week?” – an opportunity for rest, prayer and worship...

And “healing” isn’t specifically mentioned, and so it was their interpretation that prohibited “healing” on a Saturday...

So Jesus asked them the question: **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?”** And the Lawyers and the Pharisees said,,, nothing.... And so He healed the bloke, and sent him on his way.

And then He said to the Pharisees: If your son fell into a well on the Sabbath; or even if an ox fell into that well on the Sabbath, wouldn’t you pull him out immediately???

I mean, how ludicrous would it be, to leave your ox in the well until the next day, or to leave your child in the well. You see, Jesus was tapping into a truth that we all know, well: Deeds of mercy, are acceptable on the Sabbath.

And it goes without saying: If it is right to do the really hard work of winching an ox out of a well on the Sabbath, then surely it’s right to heal a child of God...

And they were left speechless – what is there to say....

So, that was the question of “Law”.

The 2nd interaction, was a social point.

As the guests arrived, Jesus noticed that they were trying to get the best seats – the places of honour (presumably at the

head of the table), near the host, where they could “rub shoulders” with the dignitaries.

And Jesus reminded them of:

Proverbs 25: (ESV)

⁶ Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence
or stand in the place of the great,

⁷ for it is better to be told, “Come up here,”

than to be put lower in the presence of a noble....

And Jesus used the wisdom of that Proverb, for everyday life: When you get invited to a feast (He uses the example of a wedding feast), don't presume to claim (for yourself) a seat in a place of honour, (*bridal/parents table*) because somebody more distinguished than you might turn up, and then you'll have to do the walk-of-shame as you go to the worst seat at the table, because the host will give your seat, to the more distinguished guest.

And so, it's better to be humble. Go to the bottom of the table.

I reckon, if Jesus was saying this today, He'd probably say, “sit at the kids table”. And then the host will say to you, “Move higher”; “Come up here”. And that way, you will be honoured before all the other guests.

And V11 is the key point that Jesus is making: ¹¹ **For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Now, is Jesus teaching us how to ‘game the system’, so that we can climb the social ladder... And we’re just putting it on – it’s a strategy for us to get recognition and climb the tree and rub shoulders with the higher-up’s???

Of course not. He’s teaching us the way of the Kingdom of God. We do **not** exalt ourselves. This is **not** what we seek. We humble ourselves.

And we humble ourselves, because this is the way of Christ.

Jesus humbled Himself:

The creator of the universe, was born, as the most fragile of God’s creatures. And Jesus didn’t come to be served, but to serve. He was a servant. He took the position of a slave, and He would even wash His Disciples feet.

But now He’s been exalted, and He sits at the right hand of God.

And when we humble ourselves before men, in this life, we will be exalted in the Kingdom of God, at the coming of Jesus.

And that, is what Jesus is getting at here: Living with an eternal perspective.

I’m **not** going to pretend that I know, how the Heavenly reward system works. What I **do** know, is that we are saved by grace, and there is no great work that I could ever do, to gain my salvation – that price has already been paid at the cross. And we thank God for that...

But many times, Jesus talks about a heavenly reward (for those who **are** saved), as we put others first in this life.

And so we come to the 3rd lesson:

He said to the man (this very important man) – the chief Pharisee, who was the host:

"When you give a dinner or a banquet, don't invite those who are closest – don't invite:

- your friends (mates/besties);
- your brothers (church family/sporting club mates);
- relatives;
- rich neighbours

because they're likely to return the invitation... When you are putting on a dinner, invite those whom you know, could never repay you (because they have nothing):

- the poor;
- the crippled;
- the lame;
- the blind...

Alright, in their culture, those who were unfortunate enough to be disabled, didn't have welfare to live off of – most of them were beggars on the street...

And Jesus is saying, "When you give to others (even people you are not close to), expecting nothing in return, there is a heavenly reward."

For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

What is “**the resurrection of the just**”? No one is just... But in Christ, through the forgiveness of sins, His justice and His righteousness becomes ours.

We were talking about this at Men’s Bible Study during the week. We were in Ephesians 4, where Paul describes how when we become a Christian, it’s like taking off a coat (you put off your old-self). But it’s not just like making a fresh-start, and starting with a blank slate, trying to do it better... We don’t just put off our **old-self** – we put on the new-self, **created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness...**

He's talking about the Holy Spirit. When you become a Christian, the Holy Spirit moves in. And as the Holy Spirit lives in you, you will become more and more like Christ...

And being like Christ, when you put on a dinner party, you won’t just invite your friends – you’ll start reaching out and inviting those who have nothing to give in return... That, is what justice looks like.

You know, when we think of “justice”, we tend to think of “punishing the wicked” / “locking up the crims” / “pay-back”... But when the Scriptures talk about “justice”, it’s much deeper than that. To live justly, is to give to those who have nothing. And it’s not about criticising the Government and telling them they have to do it. It’s what we do.

Now, for most of us, we might think, “Oh yeah, I give my used clothes to lifeline”. *That’s code for, “I’ve got so much*

stuff cluttering up my cupboard, I've found a spot where I can get rid of it without feeling guilty... ” Or maybe that's just me... Or you might do what I do – keep a loaf of bread in the freezer for those who come knocking, asking for food...

But do you understand: Jesus is lifting this to a whole new level... He's talking about bringing the outliers into times of celebration in our lives – to share our joy/bounty... It's not so much about giving handouts – it's about “invitation”, and enveloping them with welcome and love...

You can see how that would draw people to the Kingdom of God, hey...

Anyway, there was a bloke there at the table, who, when Jesus mentioned “**the resurrection of the just**”, that really struck a chord with him... And I'm not surprised, because the Pharisees, that was one of their core beliefs: the resurrection of the dead, to dwell in the Kingdom of God...

And this bloke calls out: “**Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!**”

And it sorta comes across as “He's pretty sure he's going to be one of them...”

But Jesus tells a parable, that should give this man pause, to rethink his sureness of his eternal destiny.

“A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.

And I'm going to explain this as we go. God's chosen people / His covenant people of Israel, are invited into His Kingdom... The prophets of old, had made that invitation.

17 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.'

The time to enter the Kingdom of God has arrived. The door is open. Come; Repent of sin; Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; Receive Jesus your Messiah... The prophets were the invitation. Jesus has now arrived.

18 But they all alike began to make excuses.

And excuses are exactly what they are.

The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it.'

Seriously... I don't know about you, but whenever I buy real estate, I inspect it **before** I buy it... **I must go out and see it.** Was it a hand-over inspection? He was probably more likely wanting to 'get the feel' of his new farm... Relish the moment... (picnic down the paddock)

It was just an excuse.

The second one said: **'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.'**

Let's be clear here: This bloke's just bought a new tractor. And it's a big one... But once again: Surely he would have inspected his bullocks before he bought them...

Now, as somebody who loves operating machinery, I'm pretty sure I know exactly what's going on with this bloke – he's wanting to try his new tractor out. I mean, when you get a new bit of gear, it's all very exciting for a while, but after a few weeks, it tends to get a bit old... I mean, when you're working 5 yoke of oxen, you've got 10 bums as a view... It's not going to be exciting for that long...

And the third one, he had an excuse too. “I just got married **and therefore I cannot come.**”. I mean, how does that work? You get invited to a great banquet, and because you've got a wife, you can't go... I mean, it's not a fishing trip we're talking about – it's a banquet. Most wives are happy to go with you to a banquet...

they all alike began to make excuses.

What excuses did they give for not believing Jesus?

- He's a law-breaker – He heals people on the Sabbath;
- He's a friend of tax-collectors and sinners.
What Godly man would do that?;
- He mixes with the impure;
- He blasphemes – claims to be the Son of God;
- He's having too good of a time;

- He drinks alcohol
- He's a glutton – He doesn't fast enough;
- He has a demon.
He does the miracles by the power of Satan...

Jesus had been demonstrating His power and authority, and His fulfilment of prophecy, and they came up with all these excuses.

Do you know why they make excuses? Not because they don't want to go to a party... They don't want to go to **his** party...

Let's come back to the parable:

²¹ **So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then 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.'**

And that's exactly what Jesus has been doing. Jesus didn't come, only for the "elite" of Israel – His invitation to the Kingdom of God, is for **all** of Israel. And that is precisely why He went to **the poor and crippled and blind and lame.**

And some of these did respond to the Gospel. They were certainly more open to Jesus, than the religious hierarchy were.

But there was still room! Remember, this is a “**great**” banquet. The Greek word is “mega” – this is quite literally, “a mega-banquet”...

There’s still room. Bring in some more. , **'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.**

And what Jesus has been teaching us over the last few weeks, is even though Israel would reject Him, the door is open for the Gentiles... And that’s exactly what happened.

After the resurrection, as Jesus ascended into Heaven, Jesus' final word to His Apostles, was to start here. Preach the Gospel here. And then take the Gospel out, to all of the world. And when the Disciples of Jesus were persecuted, they were forced to flee. And everywhere they went (out into Gentile territory) they took the Gospel with them. And I am so pleased they did, otherwise we wouldn't have heard it.

So, this is a parable of a great welcoming mega-banquet – the story of an invitation to the Kingdom of God... But the parable ends on an ominous note:

Remember in V21, when the master of the banquet heard the excuses, he became angry. Well, in V24, we see what that anger means: ²⁴ **For I tell you, none of those men who were invited** [meaning those who were invited but didn't come] – none of them, **shall taste my banquet.'**

You see, when it comes to being saved into the Kingdom of God, I cannot save myself, but I can damn myself, by refusing the invitation.

And the important thing for us to grasp, is: The invitation is **not** for when Jesus returns. The invitation, is now. Just like last week, the parable was about “the narrow door that is now open”, but it will be shut.

You see, we enter the Kingdom of God now, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The invitation is now.

A number of years ago, we were camping at 1770. And we weren't far from another family who had kids the same age as ours, so we spent a bit of time together. Anyway, each day, I'd enviously watch our neighbour hook up his really nice boat, and drive off, to take it out on the reef. And each day, he'd bring back these magnificent reef fish.

Anyway, I suffer from seasickness really badly, but I love fishing where there's good fish to be had. So, I went to the chemist and bought some “Travacalm” (just in case).

And I said to Robyn, “If old mate invites me to go fishing with him, I'll take one of these about 4 hours before we leave, and I'll be good to go.

I think it might've been the next day, the neighbour hooks up his boat and pulls up in front of our camp, and says “Do you

want to come with me?” And I said “Oh, how about tomorrow?”, because I hadn’t had my tablet (you see).

And he said, “The offer is for now” ... And I didn’t want to miss out, and so I quickly swallowed a tablet, and away we went.

And it was the best fishing I’ve ever had. I was as sick as a dog, but man did we catch some fish... And I still don’t know if it was worth it. I was so sick, I just wanted to cease to exist... But the joy of pulling in those fish...

Alright, maybe that was a bad example. There is no downside to the Kingdom of God... You’re not going to be as sick as a dog in the Kingdom of God.

The point is, “The invitation is now”. Respond to Jesus’ invitation. He doesn’t want to hear our excuses.

When we think about the excuses that the men made in the parable:

The first one was an investment... And for some today, their excuse for not committing to Jesus, is they are seeking assets, or they’ve got too many assets and investments to manage... They are so fixed on the present, they have no mind for eternity.

The second man turned down the invitation for work or business reasons. And for some, their excuse for not committing to Jesus, is “I’m just a bit busy right now”.

- Too busy at school;
- Too busy at university; or
- I’m putting my all into getting my apprenticeship done;
- Too busy at work; or
- The business is just starting out – once it gets up and running it will be easier; but then
- The business is going gang-busters at the moment. We’re victims of our own success.

But when things get back to normal, then we will have time.

- When I retire, then I’ll have time for Jesus; And then when they retire:
- Oh, I’m busier now than ever...

Excuses, excuses, excuses...

And the 3rd man turned down the invitation for family reasons:

And for some, their excuse is: “I’ve got family commitments – I haven’t got time for Jesus”

What excuses do we use???

The good news is, “The door is open”. You are invited to the Kingdom of God. And the further good news is, “The only

one who can stop you from coming to faith in Jesus, and entering the Kingdom of God, is you.”

Believe; Trust; Commit.

And welcome to the mega-banquet! With Christ, in His Kingdom.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,
we've had way too many excuses.

We thank You, that You are the God of grace,
Who invites us to Your mega-feast.

We thank You, that in Your mercy,
You have been giving time.

We thank You for the gift of Salvation.
We know that now is the time,
and so we turn to You.

And Lord,
we pray that You would fill us with Your Spirit.
That we would put on the new-self,
**created after the likeness of God
in true righteousness and holiness**

That we would be a people who invite the lowly;
welcoming, into our times of celebration,
those who have nothing to give in return.

And I pray that we as a church,
would be a welcoming, inviting church,
sharing the Good News of Jesus,
to all in our community,
and inviting them to Your Kingdom,

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.