THE PARABLES

The Great Banquet

Luke 15: 15-24

Introduction

This story demonstrates the unqualified offer of grace set forth in all its majesty.

Some background to eating in the Middle East

In this story at the banquet guests 'recline'. This word implies one of two things: it is either a meal out of doors or it is a banquet inside a large room. Here we have a banquet. Was there a table? In the Old Testament a table at a meal assumes wealth and rank. (2 Sam. 9:7; 1 Kings 13:20) The same was true in New Testament times. Eating meals is mentioned many times, but only four times is a table mentioned.

- The Canaanite woman and the crumbs under the table (Mt. 15:27)
- The rich man in the story of Lazarus (Lk. 16:21)
- The Upper Room meal (Lk. 22:21)
- The Great Messianic Banquet in heaven (Lk. 22:30)

Most meals Jesus had with His disciples were 'picnics' out of doors where there were no tables or in humble homes where you sit on the floor around a cloth with food on it in a one-room house.

Here the guests were in the house of "a ruler of the Pharisees". So the guests are probably reclining on couches around a low table. (Lk. 14:1) This was typical of the way relatively wealthy property owners ate in the Greco-Roman world – especially at banquets.

In the Middle East eating together with people is very important. It is a sign of acceptance by the host of friendship and of giving honour to the host. It isn't just a meal! "Table Fellowship" is a commitment to long-term loyalty and friendship.

The story opens with a religious outburst from a fellow diner who says, ***"Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God"***. (Lk. 14:15) So this fellow guest with the Lord Jesus introduces the subject of eating in the Kingdom. Here and elsewhere in the Bible "the banquet" is a symbol of salvation and salvation culminates at the end of history with the final Great Banquet – The Marriage Feast of The Lamb. This guest's outburst is a challenge to Jesus to say something on the topic of who would be at the banquet. The "correct" answer expected by the Pharisees would be something like, *"Oh that we might keep the Law in such a precise fashion so when that great day comes, we will all be counted worthy to sit with the Messiah at His Great Banquet!"* If Jesus had said such a thing He might have had a clap approval, but the Lord Jesus responded in a very different manner.

The idea of a holy meal with God is deeply embedded in the Old Testament. In Psalm 23:5 we read, ***"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies".***

Note especially Isaiah 25:6-9,

	Themes
"On this mountain, the Lord of Hosts will make for <u>all</u> peoples a feast of rich food – a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow of aged wine well refined.	Make a banquet for **<u>all</u>** peoples
***And He will swallow up on this mountain, the covering that is cast over <u>all</u> peoples the veil is spread over <u>all</u> nations*.**	Swallow/veil of **<u>all</u>** peoples

He will swallow up <u>death</u> for ever
and the Lord God will <u>wipe away tears</u>
from <u>all</u> faces.

Swallow/death
Of **<u>all</u>** peoples

And the reproach of His people He will
take away from <u>all</u> the earth
for the Lord has spoken.

Take away reproach from
All the earth

It will be said in <u>that</u> day,
behold, <u>this is our God</u>! We have
<u>waited</u> for Him that He might <u>save</u> us

God
Wait
Save

This is the Lord. We have <u>waited</u> for Him
let us be glad and rejoice in His <u>salvation</u>."

God
Wait
Save

So Isaiah is writing about the great end-time banquet that is for **all peoples**, including the Gentile nations. God will "swallow up death". The people will swallow up the banquet!" The veil is destroyed.

In the Old Testament Gentiles who come to the Lord must come bearing gifts (Is. 18:7, 60:4-7; Ps. 96:8). But now the banquet is pure grace! We Gentiles bring nothing! The food offered is the kind of food offered to kings. Notice the repetition of the word ***"<u>all</u>"***. So then as now we are waiting for God to come and save!

But in the Inter-testamental Period this emphasis on **<u>all</u>** was distorted. In 1 Enoch 62:1-16 (2nd century B.C.) the Gentile rulers will be compelled to fall down before the Son of Man who will drive them away and deliver them to the angels for punishment – *"His sword is drunk with their blood"*. So now only Jews will be saved. Gentiles were excluded.

Then in the Qumran Community again a Great Banquet is a result of the coming of the Messiah. But the Essenes taught that only the wise, the intelligent and the perfect men would be at the banquet. They sit with the Messiah according to rank – first judges and officers and then chiefs of thousands, fifties and tens and lastly the Levites. But Jews who were "smitten in the flesh or paralysed in the hands or feet or lame or blind or had any visible blemish" were excluded!

So when Jesus was teaching this parable, the great vision of Isaiah for "all peoples" had been reduced to perfect Jews – perfect both physically and morally only. So when the guest at this meal asked Jesus the question, he had quite a bit of background to the story that Jesus told.

In Luke 13:28-34 Jesus had already spoken about the Great Banquet with the patriarchs and the guests coming from the four corners of the earth. In that story no-one was excluded except those who made a conscious choice to exclude themselves.

So in <u>this</u> parable a "religious" banqueter says a blessing on those who will be accepted on the Great Banquet Day of God. What sort of response was he expecting? Perhaps something like, *"May God grant that we may be among the righteous, worthy to sit with the great patriarchs on that great day!"* But Jesus responds with a story!

The Structure of the Story

This story divides into seven speeches. Each speech is a verse with certain key ideas being repeated. The Master gives three speeches and each one begins with a command relating to the guests at the banquet. There are two invitations to two original guests at the beginning and two invitations to outsiders at the end. The climax of the story is near the centre where the Master chooses grace rather than vengeance.

The Introduction

"And he said to him,
a man once gave a Great Banquet
and he invited many …."

Themes

Great Banquet
Many Invited

Verse 1: a banquet prepared

"And he sent his servant at the hour of the banquet to say, 'Come for everything is now ready'. But they all alike began to make excuses."

Do this!
No! Excuse me!

The great banquet is hosted by a great man. His guests would be his peers and his associates. It is a serious invitation to an important occasion. An implication in the story in Middle East culture is, *"Yes, I will come, let me know when."* Meat is served at such banquets. The animal will be killed and cooked on the basis of the number of guests. So the host sends out the invitations and gets the acceptances. He then decides on killing the animal/s. It may be a couple of chickens (up to 4 guests) or a kid, goat or lamb (up to 8 guests) or a full-grown sheep (up to 30 guests) or a whole bull (up to 70 guests). The decision on the type of animal and how many is made based on the number of people who accept the invitation. Once the count is made, the plans can't change.

In the Middle East today, if you expect 10 people to come for dinner you don't prepare for 10 people. You provide for at least 20 people because your generosity is not seen on the basis of how much you have provided for your guests to eat, but how much is left over at the end. The animal is killed in the morning and eaten in the evening. There isn't any refrigeration for "leftovers". So if you have accepted the invitation, <u>you must come</u>. When? When the food is cooked and everything is ready a servant is sent round to the guests to tell them, *"Come, all is now ready."*

In the Arab World the exact same words that Jesus used in this story are used today! *"Come for the supper is ready!"* The Greek word "come" is in the present imperative – i.e. "continue coming". So the guest has <u>begun</u> "coming" by accepting the invitation and he is meant to <u>continue</u> coming by responding to the servant and going with him to the host's house.

Was the Lord Jesus saying that the original message to 'all peoples' was announced by Isaiah 700 years before and now "all is ready" – now, the Banquet of God is about to begin? I think Jesus was saying that very soon the Messianic Banquet will begin – respond now. All peoples who have already been invited to attend the feast should be on their way to respond to God.

But no! This is very shocking for, all at once, three of those invited refuse to come! This is a grave insult! Refusal to attend in such a way is bad manners in all cultures. In the Middle East people like to think of <u>conspiracy theories</u> and this sounds like a conspiracy not to attend the banquet on the part of those who are invited.

So the host had done everything. The invitations had been accepted, the animals had been butchered, the meat cooked, the guests summoned and all at once – excuses!

Imagine the host waiting at the banquet. The food is piled high, the servants are ready and nobody comes – how would you feel? Perhaps the guests were thinking, *"The host thinks he is important, but if we don't go, the banquet will be a flop. We are the important ones here! Let's put him in his place".*

Verse 2: the property expert

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

Theme

I did this – so I must do this.
Excuse me!

This is a bold-faced lie and everyone knows it. It really is a pathetic excuse. Why? No-one buys a field in the Middle East without knowing every square metre of it almost as well as the palm of his hand. He will have tested the quality of the soil and its drainage. He will be interested in whether or not it faces the sun (a field that doesn't face the sun gets poorer harvests.) Is it terraced? If so, he will have inspected the terraces. The springs or wells will have been measured, the trees counted, the anticipated rainfall will be well known, as well as what crops are best grown.

So this man must have known all this. It would all be in the contract with details about the walls, paths, rights of way etc. Usually land is bought and sold only in the extended family and tribe (remember what happened in the Year of Jubilee). Remember when Abraham bought a field from the Hittites **and** the cave that was in it **and** all the trees that were in the field (Gen. 23:8-18) **and** all the trees throughout the whole area around the field. It is clear that Abraham had inspected the cave and the field very carefully.

At least today in the area of Palestine/Jordan the owner of a piece of land will know its human history back for hundreds of years. He will know who owned it for generations and tell you about the profits the field or the trees have made for generations! Some pieces of land have their own name!

This guest was implying that the field had been bought very suddenly from a stranger – sight unseen! It is conceivable in these days that someone might say to you, *"I just bought a new house over the phone and I must go down and look at it and see where it is and what sort of neighbourhood it is in"*. But this would never happen in the Middle East.

What is the point of looking at a field <u>after</u> you have bought it? Everyone knows the process of buying a field is long and complicated. It sometimes stretches over years. Banquets start in the early evening when it is getting dark. So this "property expert" is preparing to leave his house and go into the country as it gets dark in order to see a field he has just bought and has never seen before. He would be more sensible to wait till the morning! The field will still be there!

No, the excuse is **intentionally** insulting to the host. At best he is saying to his host, *"My field is far more important to me than my relationship to you my host."* So his excuse was in the area of possessions/wealth and wealth gives power.

In the Middle East personal relationships are of supreme importance. This excuse is a very great insult.

Verse 3: the ploughing expert

"And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to test them. Please have me excused.' "	I did this – so I must do this. Excuse me!

This is a repeat of the excuse of the property expert. *"I did this, so I must do this – excuse me."* Again this is a ridiculous excuse!

Teams of oxen are sold in the Middle East village in two ways.

1. The team is taken to a marketplace, near which there will be a field where prospective buyers may test the oxen. If they can't pull together they are worthless as a team.
2. If there isn't a marketplace, a farmer owning a team of oxen he wants to sell will tell all his friends and relatives to spread the word that he is selling the team on a certain day and that prospective buyers can plough with them to try them out. The word will spread quickly. Prospective buyers will gather at the field – see the oxen working and try them themselves to see if they pull evenly and assure themselves of their health and strength. All this takes place before the buyer even begins to bargain over the price.

So here is another bare-faced lie. Can you imagine a husband saying his wife, *"I will be late for dinner tonight because I have just signed a cheque for five used cars I have just bought over the phone. I am going down to the garage to find out the age and model of the cars and to see if they will start and what shape they are in."* His wife will question her husband's sanity or think it is a stupid excuse for something worse!

Jesus emphasises five pairs of oxen and the purchaser is only now, in the evening, going to see them and test them out in the dark! Everyone knows that you test out teams of oxen and cars <u>before</u> you buy them – not after.

The first guest says, *"I must go and see a field"*. He is stating his intention. The second says literally, *"I am going to test them."* So he is announcing an action in progress.

The second guest is also insulting his host. He is saying, *"These animals are more important to me than my relationship with you"*. But at least he does offer an excuse. The third guest offers none. The excuse was in the realm of business.

If only one guest backs out, the banquet can proceed. But if there is collusion between the guests and they all withdraw, it is clear that the guests intend to shut down the banquet and this is a very great insult.

Verse 4: the passionate bridegroom

"And another said, 'I have married a bride and therefore I cannot come.' "

I did this
So I can't come
(no 'excuse me'!)

So the third guest says, (past tense) *"I married a bride"* – and so have most of us men! In my case it was over 50 years ago. Perhaps he meant to say, *"I have <u>just</u> married a bride"*. But this is highly unlikely. Had there just been a wedding in the village, the host wouldn't have arranged a banquet at the same time. No village can stand two grand occasions at once. The competition would be pointless. So let's give him the benefit of the doubt, maybe the wedding happened a month or so previously – i.e. the recent past. Still his little speech is crude and insulting.

Middle East culture maintains a formal restraint in talking about the women in your family. In a formal setting, men don't discuss their women. In Arabic words have a common root.

harim = women
haram = sacred
haraam = forbidden

So the guest is actually saying, *"Yesterday I said I would come, but this early evening I am busy with a woman, who is much more important to me that your banquet."* So the excuse was in the realm of natural affections.

These three things keep more people out of the Kingdom than any others: **possessions/wealth**, **business** and **natural affections**! To put it bluntly – money, sex and power. But the underlying refusal to enter the Kingdom of God is hostility against God.

In the Middle East this is an intensely rude and crude statement and almost unbelievable! He doesn't even ask to be excused. Such an answer would infuriate the kindest of hosts anywhere.

What does it all mean?

The listeners to this story would easily have understood the theological content of the parable.

- The Messianic Banquet has been announced.
- The 'hour' for the banquet to begin has come.
- Those invited (the leaders of the Jewish community) are told, ***"Come, all is now ready!"***

So in the person of the Lord Jesus, "The Kingdom had come". Those who seek to ***"eat bread in the Kingdom of God"*** have to seek to eat bread with the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus is clearly making a statement, "I am the Messiah".

But now comes a stream of excuses! Why would a thing like this ever happen? There is only one answer! They did not like their host! They (the leaders) complained that the Lord Jesus eats with and welcomes sinners and doesn't keep the Sabbath according to their rules. In fact, the Lord Jesus didn't fulfil their theological and nationalistic expectations of the Messiah at all!

The story says that in rejecting Jesus they are rejecting the Great Salvation Banquet promised by God in Isaiah. But not only do they reject salvation, they indicate that they prefer other things. If you accept the invitation to the Messianic Banquet it also means a rejection of other things. If you wish to enjoy the banquet, you must go in. You can't have portions sent out to you to enjoy while you busy yourself with other things.

Verse 5: the invitation to the outcasts

"So the servant came and reported this to his master.
Then the master of the house became angry
and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly
into the streets and lanes of the city.
Bring in the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame'."

Go
to the streets
Fill up

The host's anger is natural. He has been publicly insulted three times. But his response isn't vengeance, but rather grace! Middle Eastern men tend to get angry very easily if someone shames them. The only way to restore honour again is to take vengeance on the perpetrators of the shame. Anger at being shamed generates enormous energy. The master would be expected to retaliate with at least verbal insults. He could have instructed his servant to return to the three men and say, *"You are now my master's enemies after your insults and he has declared that he is going to take action against you."* But amazingly this didn't happen!

He invites the outcasts, the poor, the crippled, the disabled, the blind and the lame from the city. They are part of the community but they are ostracised because it is assumed that they were somehow being punished for sins they or their parents had committed.

But it was these outcasts who were attracted to Jesus and welcomed by Him. Remember that the Qumran Community rejected these people from any sort of participation in the Messianic Banquet. They were poor in this life – the maimed don't get married like the third invited guest. The blind don't go out to examine fields like the first invited guest and the lame don't try out a team of oxen like the second invited guest.

So the original guests (assumed to be worthy by those listening to the story) refused to attend the banquet when called. They are confident that the banquet can't go ahead without them and so the whole event will be a humiliating defeat for their host. But not so! Unworthy guests are invited! The host isn't socially indebted to the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame. They won't be able to respond in kind. His offer is an unexpected, visible demonstration of love as he absorbs the humiliation. The undeserving guests must have had a stunning surprise! Perhaps the host is also anticipating a backlash since the original guests will be infuriated that their attempt to abort the banquet failed. Perhaps they will mock the host as a person who is unable to have a banquet without bringing in all the 'riff raff'. In some ways this foreshadows the Cross and shows some of its meaning.

So the Lord Jesus says the offer of the Kingdom Banquet to 'the outcasts of Israel' is an offer of costly grace. And this offer is accepted in the story!

Verse 6

"And the servant said, 'Sir,
what you commanded has been done
and still there is room."

Servant
I went
Not full

Verse 7: the invitation to complete outsiders

"And the master said to the servant, 'Go out
into the highways and hedges
and compel them to enter that my house may be filled'."

Master – Go
Highways
Fill up

Now the servant has to go outside the community to the highways where the Gentiles are under hedges where robbers and other criminals lived. By implication these last people represent us – Gentiles. So the servant goes on an 'outreach' to Gentiles (like Luke who is writing the story)! So even before "the Great Commission", at the end of His ministry on earth with His disciples, the Lord Jesus was speaking of world-wide mission. Indeed the inclusion of Gentiles in the Great Banquet of God was clearly taught in Isaiah 25:6-9.

Notice that the story has no ending! Did the servant go out to the "highways and hedges"? We are not told. Certainly the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus was <u>primarily</u> to the outcasts and

not to the outsiders. But after His ascension, then the Gentiles were to be reached. Luke has a considerable interest in the Gentiles:

- Jesus is to be ***"a light for revelation to the Gentiles"***. (2:32)
- The genealogy of the Lord Jesus is traced back to Adam (3:38) not to Abraham. (Mt. 1:2)
- Luke quotes Isaiah 40:3-5, ***"And all people shall seek the salvation of God"***. (3:6)
- Luke specifically mentions the Gentiles in the Great Commission. (24:47)

The ministry of the Lord Jesus on earth was mainly focused on ***"the lost sheep of the house of Israel"***. (Mt. 15:23) But there was a **centripetal** force in His mission – let the Gentiles come in if they like. But after Pentecost this becomes **centrifugal** and the disciples go out to the Gentiles with a message that all are invited. This centrifugal force is seen in the Old Testament:

Is. 42, "***He will not fail or be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for his law."***

Is. 49, ***"I will make you as a light for the nations that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."***

This centrifugal force of mission permeates the entire story. "Compel" is a strong word. This story is an illustration of ***"To the Jew first and also to the Greek."*** (Rom. 1:16)

So the invitation goes out to the Gentiles, for there is still room in the banquet hall. The key word is **"compel"**. Sadly, this word has been very badly used. Augustine used it to try and compel Donatist believers in North Africa to come under the authority of the Catholic Church. They resisted this and were forced by Roman soldiers – under the direction of Augustine – to "recant" their beliefs. Many Donatists preferred death to this sort of compulsion. Augustine wrote a thesis on why some Christians can use violence, persecution and execution on other Christians on the basis of this word "compel". The Augustinian arguments were used in the Middle Ages and during the Reformation – for example the Spanish Inquisition – to justify torture and burning heretics with fire. Nothing is further from the truth!

In Middle East culture a sudden unexpected invitation must be refused. The refusal is all the more required if the guest is of low rank and the host is much higher. The invited person may be very hungry and really needing some food, but he will feel very deep cultural pressure to refuse. In Luke 24:28-29 you have an example of this. Jesus receives an 'unexpected' invitation. As a courteous Middle Easterner He ***"made as though He would go further"***. The two people ***"compel Him"*** to stay. He is not forced against His will! Rather, they know He must refuse for the first ten minutes or so as a matter of giving his hosts honour! In order to convince Him they really do want Him to stay with them and that they really do have food, they gently drag him into the house. They "compelled" Him to stay!

So in this story, a total stranger – and a foreigner at that – is suddenly invited to a great banquet. He isn't a relative of the host and not even a citizen of that country. The offer is generous and delightful, but the stranger knows the host cannot possibly mean it! So what will the servant do? He will take the startled guest by the arm and gently pull him along to the banqueting hall. There is no other way of convincing the guest that the invitation is true! **Grace is unbelievable**! How could it be true, asks the outsider? For me? Whatever have I done for him? I can't invite him back! The host can't be serious! It is a wonderful honour and I would really enjoy it, but considering who I am, he can't mean it!

The host knows that this kind of shock and unbelief will face the servant messenger all the time. So he instructs him to overcome his reserve, with a smile, grab them by the arm and gently pull them to the hall and so demonstrate to them that the invitation is genuine.

Finally, we are given the host's motive for all these invitations. It is ***"that my house may be filled"***. Perhaps that way he can prove that his banquet can be a huge success, even without the presence of the original guests. This noble host wants all the guests to feel total acceptance.

The Conclusion

"For I tell you (plural) none of these men who were invited shall taste my banquet."

This is the concluding remark of the Lord Jesus to those with Him at the banquet. ***"For I tell you …"*** is significant. The Lord Jesus is saying that those who hope to eat bread in the Kingdom of God had better hurry and accept His invitation to 'table fellowship' because they won't be able to participate at a distance.

The original guests in the story who refused the host's invitation will certainly not participate in the Great Banquet and this by their own choice. The guests reclining at the table with the Lord Jesus are in grave danger of excluding themselves from the banquet of salvation already being spread by the Lord Jesus who inaugurates the Kingdom. In effect, Jesus is saying *"My banquet"*. He identifies himself as the host. He extends the original invitation to the guests. He pleads with them to attend and he records their own self-exclusion as final.

Note here that the Lord Jesus is <u>not</u> teaching a sort of mechanically operating predestination that has been set from before all time of who will and who will not be in the Kingdom. Neither is He teaching that every man's entry into the Kingdom is purely his own affair. There are two essential points in His teaching.

- No-one can enter the Kingdom without the invitation of God.
- No-one can remain outside the Kingdom except by his own deliberate choice.

So we can't save ourselves, but we can damn ourselves! The Lord Jesus sees the deepest tragedy of our lives not in the many wrong and foolish things we do or the many good and wise things we fail to accomplish. Our greatest tragedy is our rejection of God's greatest gift!

So what is the Lord Jesus trying to evoke in His original listeners? His audience would have understood the symbols in the story:

- The banquet: the Messianic Banquet that ushers in the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.
- The original guests: the leaders of Israel, who, quite rightly, are the first to be invited.
- The lame and the poor from the city: the outcasts within the house of Israel.
- The guests from the highways and hedges = the Gentiles.

To this we should add the Lord Jesus. Is He the host or the servant? In the story there is a close identification between the host and the servant. The servant is his master's voice. I think the Lord Jesus is both! Jesus can say, "My banquet" and in Rev. 19:6-10 it is called ***"The Marriage Supper of the Lamb"***. ***"God was in Christ"*** and He is also the means by which God is acting to bring in the New Age of Salvation by offering invitations to different sorts of guests.

In effect, the Lord Jesus was saying to His audience, *"God's Messiah is here. He is inviting you to the Messianic Banquet of the Day of Salvation. The banquet is now ready! Do not refuse! If you refuse (by offering up ridiculous excuses) others will fill your places from the outcasts of Israel and the invitation will go out to the Gentiles. The banquet will proceed without you. It won't be cancelled or postponed. The Kingdom of God has come. Respond to the invitation or you can opt out of taking part in God's plan of salvation."*

Summary

There are some profound truths in this parable that give the story immense power.

1. The Lord Jesus is God – the host/servant calls for participation in the Messianic Banquet of salvation promised by Isaiah (25-69)
2. The Messianic Banquet is inaugurated in 'table fellowship' with the Lord Jesus. But the parable is left open-ended. All the guests are not yet present. The parable finishes with the house not yet full. So there is a future anticipated in the story. The banquet has started but the full vision of the Messianic Banquet still in the future. So the Messianic Banquet is both **<u>now</u>** and **<u>not yet</u>**.

3. The excuses people offer for their refusal to attend the banquet are stupid and insulting. These original guests have their counterpart in every age! But by rejecting Jesus the religious leadership were unable to shutdown “His banquet”. Jesus proceeds without them.
4. The invitation to ‘table fellowship’ with the Lord Jesus is extended to the unworthy who can never compensate the host for his grace. The unworthy may be within the Jewish community or from among the Gentiles.
5. Grace is unbelievable! This is so true and some special pleading is required for many of the “unworthy” to be convinced that the invitation is genuine. Anger, suffering humiliation and costly love are linked in the response of the master who takes the pain of his anger and turns it into grace. The theology of the Cross is indicated. The wrath of God has been transformed into grace.
6. The centrifugal force of mission is taught in this parable. The servant with his invitation is told to go out beyond his own community. If God’s salvation is to reach the ends of the earth (Is. 49:6), then someone must take the message out and present it with all the winsomeness possible. (Lk. 14:23)
7. There is a self-imposed concept of judgement. Those who, by their own choice, reject the invitation shut themselves off from the host and his other guests.
8. There is a warning given to the presumptuous in the believing community. God can get along without them! If they fail to respond to His invitation, He will proceed with outsiders.
9. Time runs out on the invitation. Places are not kept open indefinitely at the messianic table and those who assume there will always be room for them are likely to receive a shock.
10. Guests must be invited. No one storms the party. Attendance is by invitation only. Yet guests must respond and come in. There can be no participation at a distance.

The issue of believing guests continuing to have ‘table fellowship’ with Jesus is beyond what is taught in this parable. But part of this ‘fellowship’ must be in the Breaking of Bread celebration in anticipation of the marriage feast of the Lamb after the end of this present age. This service of remembrance is surely an extension of the banquet that has already begun.

There is an issue that arises from this and other parables. If grace is free, is it not also cheap? This parable is followed by three more parables – the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Sons. But sandwiched between them there is some teaching of the Lord Jesus about the high cost of discipleship in clear and demanding terms.

So the parable of the Great Messianic Banquet sets out very important themes in a brief but unforgettable story that continues to speak with power in every age and culture.