

Invitation and excuses

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to that passage that we read in Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 14, and words that you'll find at the end of verse 17 and the beginning of verse 18.

Come, for everything is now ready. But they all alike began to make excuses. The message of the Gospel contains many things, but it is primarily an invitation.

There is, of course, doctrine and theology in the Gospel. It is, after all, good news, and news is information. News gives answers to questions, and the good news of the Gospel gives the answers to the great questions of life.

Questions like, why are we here? Is there real meaning to life? Is there hope? Is there life beyond death itself? And is there a way in which my sense of shame and guilt can be dealt with?

All these great questions are answered by the Gospel in a positive way. But the Gospel isn't just answers to these questions.

[1 : 22] It isn't just information. It is also an invitation. And I would like to look with you this morning at the invitation that we have set forth here by the Lord Jesus himself, and some of the background to that invitation, the basis of it that he gives, and then the response which we see to it.

So first, then, the invitation and the basis for the invitation. The basis for the invitation is, for everything is now ready.

Come, for everything is now ready. Now, of course, we know that today, if we think about it, we are beset by all kinds of invitations to consider this, that, and the next thing.

And I don't just refer to invitations to functions or parties or whatever. I'm meaning invitations to adopt a certain outlook or to adopt a certain way of life.

It has been said recently that Scotland is on the fence spiritually. And I think that's largely true. But it's not true in the sense in which Scotland or anyone or anywhere else can remain on the fence, because on the fence is a rather painful position to be.

[2 : 47] You've got to come down on one side or the other. And there are many forces and many people appealing, inviting, so that people would come off the fence, as it were, spiritually, and adopt a certain kind of philosophy or outlook or spiritual way of thinking.

There are, of course, various forms of Eastern religion that have become popular since at least the 60s in the West. But perhaps people haven't gone wholesale for that kind of thing.

It may be adopted certain aspects of it, like yoga or meditation. But these are firmly based in Eastern religious thinking. Perhaps also there is the growing New Age movement, as it's called, which is really a blend, an amalgam of East and West, a blend of materialism and mysticism.

And that's really what makes it so powerful and what makes it so attractive and so popular with so many people. But then on the fringes of that and moving even further away, there is a growing, developing interest in the occult, in the reviving of the old, cold, blind idols of ancient gods and of ancient witchcraft and all these things.

These things are all rising again in our society because, you see, there is a spiritual hunger in man. Man cannot be satisfied with atheism.

[4 : 24] The fall of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe has testified to that. Man cannot be satisfied with atheism. There is this resurgence of religion throughout the world.

And there's a resurgence of religious interest again in the West. So we are being invited in all these directions. But all these invitations, these invitations to whatever way of life and outlook you wish to think of, they say, come and do this.

They say, come and adopt this program that we have. Or they say, come and start working according to our rules. And that's the way in which you're going to get peace of mind, you're going to get success, you're going to get happiness.

Now, of course, that is all very attractive because it appeals to something basic in the natural man, in ourselves as sinners. It says to us, it's up to you.

It all depends on you. If you do this, then you'll be happy. Your happiness depends upon yourself. But, of course, although it is attractive, there is also a great problem with it.

[5 : 46] What if you have tried to be happy yourself? What if you have tried these ways or other ways, or in one way or another, you've tried to take charge of your own life and you've found that ultimately you cannot do it.

You cannot achieve your own happiness. And no matter which of these schemes of good works or of self-made religion you try, it's going to fail.

And you have that belief in your bones because you know that you have this sense of failure about trying to sort things out yourself. That's where the gospel comes to you as something totally different.

Jesus presents the gospel here to us in terms, not come and do this, come and adopt my program. He presents it in this parable of being invited to a banquet, to a feast.

And he puts it this way, come for everything is now ready. You see, the basis of his invitation is not based on our own efforts.

[6 : 54] It's not saying you've got to try to reform yourself, you've got to try to change yourself, and then everything will work out. No, he says, come, for all is now ready.

He presents it as an invitation to a banquet, to a feast. It's all prepared, he says. So that tells us that we are not asked to contribute anything to this great transformation that God can work in us.

If you like, as we'll put it later, the only thing you're asked to contribute is yourself. You're not asked to come contributing anything to this great work of the gospel for what the gospel can do for you.

And the reason for that is that we cannot contribute anything worthwhile to our own transformation. God knows our position.

God knows that we are alienated from himself by our own sin, our own self-centered rebellion against him. And once we have put ourselves into that position, and that is the position the whole human race is in, we cannot get ourselves out of it.

[8 : 06] Now that's not just the Bible, not just God's word that says that. That is confirmed by history. It's confirmed by the experience of the human race. No matter how man has progressed materially or technologically, he's still not able to perfect himself.

He's still not able to control even his own temper. And he certainly is unable to control all the wars on his own planet. So you see, man is unable to deal with this thing that is radically wrong with him.

So God doesn't ask us to come and to make yourself better. To come and to do this, that, or the next thing. He says, come, all is now ready. You see, God makes the provision for us, the provision that we can't make ourselves.

God does not ask the impossible of us. And isn't that the great tragedy about all the many invitations that go out to people today to consider spiritual realities or to consider a spiritual way of life or to consider a certain lifestyle.

It is asking the impossible. Asking us to reform ourselves and to make us perfect or to make us happy and to give us perfect peace of mind according to our own efforts.

[9 : 28] It will not work. It has never worked. And it still does not work today. So, the Lord Jesus puts his invitation this way. Come, for everything is ready.

Now, what does he mean by that in the context of this parable? He's saying that the gospel invitation comes to us, the invitation of the kingdom of God as it is in this context.

It comes to us saying that God has prepared everything. In the parable told here, the man who was giving the banquet, he didn't expect the people to come along and bring their own food or anything.

He said, all is now ready. And it looked as if this had been prepared for some time because these guests had already been told about it. They'd already had notice of it that they were invited some time before.

And now they were being told, come, all is now ready. A tremendous preparation had been made. A tremendous feast laid on. The host did it. The guests weren't expected to bring anything.

[10 : 35] So Jesus is teaching us there, that's what the kingdom of God is like. That's what entry into the kingdom of heaven is like. That is what the gospel invitation is. Come, for all is now ready.

So that's telling us that God provides what we need. Now that expression God provides is one that is rooted deep in the Old Testament.

Because there was a time you remember when Abraham spoke those words in great faith to his son Isaac. Because God had told him to go up to the mountain and to sacrifice his son.

And the son Isaac asked, well here are all the other bits and pieces we need for the sacrifice, the wood and the fire and all the rest of it. But where is the lamb? And Abraham in great faith answers, the Lord will provide a lamb.

The Lord will provide. Now Abraham didn't know how it would be done. But Abraham knew his God. He didn't understand what God was about in asking him to sacrifice his own son.

[11 : 45] He may have recognized, yes, as all human beings, Isaac was sinful and guilty and worthy of death. But he also knew that God had promised him that through Isaac not only his seed would be continued on the face of the earth, but that through him all nations on earth would be blessed.

Abraham didn't know how to reconcile it all, but he knew his God. And he said, God will provide a lamb. And we know, of course, that God in that situation did provide a lamb. And a lamb was sacrificed in the place of Isaac.

But all down through the Old Testament that cry echoes. Where is the lamb? The cry of Isaac. Where is the lamb? Until eventually it is answered by John the Baptist who on the shores of the Jordan points to Jesus and says, Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

God has provided the lamb. God has provided the way by which our sin may be taken away. God has provided the substitute who turns aside the wrath of God against our sin.

God provides. You don't provide. I don't provide. We cannot provide that. But God has provided it. God has made this great provision for this great banquet of salvation and eternal life that he's giving to us.

[13 : 06] And it is a total and a complete salvation. salvation. All or everything is now ready. It's not that well, most things were ready but you've got to bring along a little yourself.

No. Everything is now ready. You've just to come. The great provision of God in Jesus Christ. God loved us and gave himself for us.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. It is all out of God's love that it comes. And then the very work of Jesus Christ itself is provided for us on our behalf.

He by his death on the cross has removed the guilt of sin and therefore saves us from death and hell. And by that same death offering up his own perfect manhood there is the gift of perfect righteousness given to all who will receive it which leads to eternal life.

A total and a complete salvation achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ dealing with what's wrong with us and giving to us that which we don't have righteousness peace with God eternal life.

[14 : 27] And then all of that applied to us by the Holy Spirit you see it's not just that the Bible says to us God loves you so you need to do something to put yourself right with God.

No God loves us and he has put sinners right with himself through Jesus Christ but it's not only that it's not just that you say oh well Jesus died therefore I've got to do something so that I can get some benefit from what Jesus did.

No God also has provided his Holy Spirit for Jesus when he completed his work and returned to the right hand of the majesty on high he poured out from there the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit applies to us the life the peace and the hope that the Lord Jesus work achieved for so that it is all of grace it is all of God's giving all is now ready everything everything is now ready that is the message of the gospel that's the message to us today come all is now ready so we see the basis for the invitation and it's a very different basis from the kind of basis that we have and many other invitations but then let's look at the invitation itself we can do that very simply because it's a very simple word we've seen the basis of it everything is now ready but then there's the invitation come everything is now ready there's the pure simplicity of that word come

I don't think the gospel is put in any simpler way than this in the whole Bible and it's repeated so many different times in so many different ways come see come is a word that a child can understand you hold out your arms and you say come even to the littlest child and they understand and they come to you it's a word that we understand from our earliest days come and God condescends to us and he says this word come now that's all that we have to do that's why I'm saying it is so simple yes there are great things and deep things in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ but here at this point at the point where God addresses us as to how we are to enter into life he uses this very simple word describing a very simple act come all is now ready in other words we just have to accept what God has done for us and we just come to him on that basis as I said earlier all we have to bring is ourselves not ourselves cleansed or changed or in any way us making ourselves into people that we think

God would accept no we come as we are simply coming clinging to what God has done for us that's all and that's described in the New Testament as faith but notice too the necessity of this response not only the simplicity of it but the necessity of it it's not just that the servant came along and said well everything's ready now and off he went no he said come for everything is now ready now you see a lot of us may know all the things I've said already about what the gospel is that God has done all these things for the sinner maybe your head is full of those things you would be able to quote anyone chapter and verse from the Bible or from the shorter catechism perhaps even to say this is what the gospel is this is what God has done in Christ you know all these things but there is one thing that you do not know because you have never responded to this word come you do not know the reality of it in your own life you know it all in your head but you have not obeyed the command to come so there is the absolute necessity of a response to this invitation the invitation is come and when an invitation says come you must respond or you must reject one or the other and if you haven't responded then you're rejecting there is the absolute necessity of the response to accept if you are going to benefit from what you've been told you see the gospel is not just information it's not just enough that you know those things you must respond to this invitation and then of course there is the urgency is there not of the invitation come all is now ready you see there was a time of preparation if you look at it in different ways you can see that there was a time of great preparation down through the years throughout

[19 : 40] Old Testament history for the coming of Christ and Christ could now say to these Jews living at that moment he could say to them come for all is now ready that great cry of Isaac where is the lamb is now answered John the Baptist has said behold the lamb of God all is now ready so come they were being given that opportunity to come but that's true of ourselves also at every moment when the gospel is proclaimed it comes to us not only simply and not only with the necessity of a response but it comes to us urgently because all is now ready and the invitation here stands come for there came the time as we know in the parable when people had rejected the invitation they said I got something else to do and the moment was passed the opportunity was passed these people did not come to that feast so Jesus is stressing to us here when we hear the gospel there is the absolute necessity of our taking it urgently and responding to it he has given us the information he has told us all is now ready he said what preparation he has made there comes the time the crucial time when we must bite the bullet when we must say this is the time that I must accept

I must respond to this invitation and so today the invitation comes to you come all is now ready will you not respond to that invitation so graciously given by the Lord Jesus and then finally I want to look with you at the response the response given to this gracious invitation in the parable Jesus told and first there were those who made excuse they all alike began to make excuses now we're told earlier that these are the people who had already been invited they had already been notified that this great feast this great banquet was to take place they knew of such a thing and they knew who it was who was inviting them and now the time came for the specific invitation the time had come all was ready now come now can we see any relevance of that to ourselves today well yes

I think we can because Jesus here in the context is speaking that parable to people who knew all about the preparation for the coming of the Messiah they were if you like already invited they were all already prepared they were the Jewish people whom God had schooled and taught and educated in the things of God in the law of God in the sacrifices provided by God to teach about the Lamb of God who would come they were already invited they were all prepared for it they knew who it was who was asking it was God they knew all the preparation he had made now they were being told the time has come everything's ready come well that applies to ourselves today too because if we think of ourselves as a nation the nation of Scotland we too have in our heritage this knowledge of what

God has done we have through the great influence of the gospel at various times in the past we have still even in this day of decline of understanding of Christianity we still have basic knowledge concerning God and concerning what he has done in Christ maybe there are many people in our society who don't even have that and I'm sure that's true but to the people I'm speaking here to today from your background you know that knowledge so many of you you have been prepared you're already invited and now the invitation comes to you what do you have to say well what did these people have to say they all alike began to make excuses what were their excuses one said I've just bought a field I must go and see it please excuse me quite polite he had a reason another had a reason

I've just bought five yoke of oxen and I'm on my way to try them out please excuse me I've got something else to do I'm busy again quite polite still another said I've just got married so I can't come can't see anybody asking me to a banquet you should know that I can't do that just now another reason they all had reasons they all had excuses as to why they couldn't respond to this invitation notice all these things that Jesus mentions they are all legitimate things there's nothing wrong with buying a field there's nothing wrong with owning property there's nothing wrong with buying a house there's nothing wrong with being involved in work nothing wrong with buying a car all these things whatever they may be nothing wrong with getting married very much the reverse nothing wrong with so many of these things but these are the things that these people use as excuses why they could not come they were all legitimate things now isn't that so often the way with ourselves it's not so often that perhaps we say well there's some really terrible sin and I'm not going to give up so I won't come to accept the gospel invitation it can be that it may be that there may be someone here this morning of which that is true that thing has become a god in your life and you will not give it up to respond to this invitation but you see so often they are just ordinary things our work we're too busy too busy to get involved in the church we think well if we become a

[26 : 15] Christian maybe we've got to get too much involved in the church I don't want to get that too busy got a concern perhaps for your property or your financial situation you can't be bothered to think about spiritual things at the moment or maybe it's your relationship with your husband or your wife think well they're not interested in that kind of thing I don't want to cause trouble in the home by me sort of going out on a limb spiritually perhaps the wider family or your friends it can be anything legitimate relationships with other people legitimate interests that you have but those things have become a barrier you see it's not just things that are directly sinful in themselves that can stop us coming from Christ coming to Christ think of the rich young ruler it was his possession now there's nothing wrong with possessions but it was his love of his possession his possessions had become a god to him and that's it isn't it with all these people it was that something else was more important than accepting the invitation that's why they said thank you but no thank you you see something else was more important to one man it was his field he had just got it he wanted to see it to another it was his team of oxen he hadn't tried them out yet he was desperate to try them out like if you just bought a new car he said well I would like to try this out today instead of going to church and someone else he just got married all these legitimate things but those are the things that stop people from coming to accept the invitation these things were considered more important so you see it is quite possible for legitimate things to become gods to us for some people it's their work we talk about people being workaholics maybe that's making a god of work you become so involved in it you have no time for anything else perhaps no proper time even for your family and certainly no time to consider spiritual things and so you consider these things perhaps too 80-30 altogether not really dealing with the realities of life that you're dealing with you're just not prepared to look into you're not prepared to accept this invitation because perhaps you know deep down that this invitation is going to change the way in which you look at life it's going to change the way you look at work it's going to change the way you relate to other people and you're not prepared for that something in your life has become a god to you it may be all kinds of things your home your house your property your possessions whatever these things take up your time and you're not prepared to change your lifestyle to accept this invitation it may be people as I've said already as I said here

I've married just got married I can't come perhaps you think more of the person that you're interested in as a boyfriend girlfriend or when you're married your husband or your wife than in this great question of responding to the gospel invitation perhaps because you think well it's going to create trouble perhaps I may lose that boyfriend or that girlfriend if I accept Christ because they're not interested in spiritual things and so something becomes more important than this great invitation that God extends to us and so we're prepared to pass by this invitation the invitation that gives to us eternal life offering to us now eternal life through Jesus Christ but something else is more important I'm too busy they all alike began to make excuse now notice that also to do with this group who refused the invitation were told that they all alike began to make excuses now I think that's very thought provoking all these people were different and maybe they regarded themselves as being very different from one another and there are many people you see who are not interested in the gospel invitation but maybe they all regard themselves as being very different and they look down on one another they look down on one another because they belong to different races or different backgrounds or cultures they look down on one another they're from different classes or their different jobs or occupations or professions they look down on one another because they're different personalities they look down on one another because they look at one another sins and faults and failures and they see there something they don't like and they look down on one another we do that but all those people no matter what their excuse all those people were alike in one way and all those people stood together in one way they stood together in refusing the invitation and the solemn thing of the gospel is this that all those who reject that gospel stand finally together as those who reject the

Lord Jesus Christ oh maybe you wouldn't like to be considered with all those who be there in that place of condemnation and separation from God but if you reject the Lord Jesus that is your place because you all alike began to make excuse but then there were those who accepted this invitation it's just taken for granted of these people that they accepted the invitation because the man said the host of the feast he said go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor the crippled the blind and the lame sir the servant said what you have ordered has been done but there is still room and so he said go out again and fill the house there were those who accepted this invitation and Jesus calls them the poor the crippled the blind and the lame in other words there were those whose lives were full of so many things they were taken up with all the things of this world they had made gods of all those things and they had no time for the invitation and there are those today especially in our society so filled up with the things of this world no time to consider this invitation this greatest invitation they'll ever hear come for all is now ready but there are those who will listen as there were those who listened to this invitation they had never heard anything like it they were poor they hadn't enough for their daily food there were those who were crippled nobody was interested in them they couldn't work they had to beg on the street likewise the blind and the lame but this invitation came to them come for all is now ready same invitation no different it wasn't saying well you can come if you can sort of brighten yourselves up a little bit if you can change if you can become acceptable to me no come all is now ready

I want my house to be filled he said come and these people came now we know why they came in the parable they didn't have anything this was a great feast to them this was a banquet they weren't going to turn this down and you see isn't that the only way in which anybody accepts the gospel invitation you see yourself in the same position as these people saw themselves you see they had no pretensions about themselves they knew that they were poor they were crippled they were blind they were lame they knew that nobody cared about them and here was a great offer they weren't going to refuse it and the person who comes accepting the gospel invitation knows what he is and who he is he knows he's a sinner who doesn't deserve this he knows that spiritually speaking he is poor and crippled and blind and lame he knows that there is nothing in himself in his own power that can make him acceptable even in his own sight not even in other people's sight but certainly not in the sight of

God and he hears this invitation come for all is now ready you don't have to change yourself you don't have to try to wash yourself and clean away all those stains of sin you need to come to that place where it will be done you need to come to the Lord Jesus you need to come to his cross where there your sin will be cleansed where there you will be renewed where there the crippled and the blind and the lame will be healed and the poor will be enriched by his great gift of eternal life so the invitation comes to us still today come for all is now ready are you going to be among those who all alike begin to make excuse or are you going to be like those poor crippled blind lame who accepted that invitation and they enjoyed that peace or the other who should have been there who you might have thought would have been there were outside and were excluded because they didn't see their need they saw only the things that they were concerned about the things that took up all their minds and their lives and they didn't see this glory of what was being offered to them today that invitation is given to you still and it's been given to you now come all is now ready let us pray our gracious and loving heavenly father we thank you for that glorious provision you have made in the gospel because you looked at us in our poverty and in our sin and you took pity on us so that you would provide for us what was necessary enable us to come enable us to come to the

[36 : 57] Lord Jesus and be cleansed and renewed and healed and enabled to live as we would like to live in our better moments enable us to recognize it is all of your power and grace not of our own so we pray that you would bless your own word to us today and we pray that you would remember those who are indeed struggling with a sense of their own guilt and shame and they feel that they could not come to you O Lord enable them to know that they are the very ones who are being invited for there is in the Lord Jesus the power to cleanse away all sin O Lord remember those who are still caught up and entrapped with the things of this world that perish and pass away the things that we cannot rely on even for a moment O gracious Lord turn them from their foolish ways to consider the eternal things in Jesus

Christ that they too may come and accept him we ask these things in Jesus name and for his sake Amen