

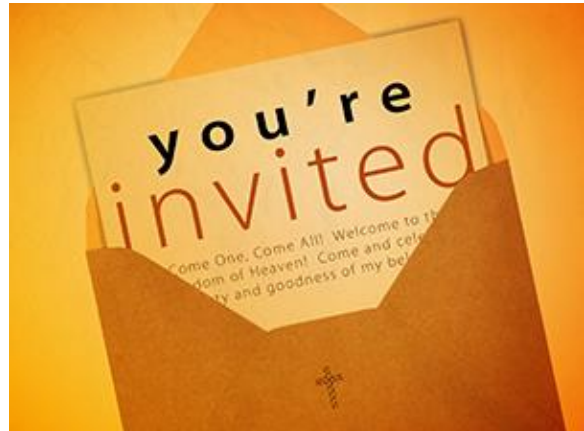
YOU'RE INVITED

Baptism Service

24th September 2017

Readings: Isaiah 25: 6-9; Matthew 22:1-10

This morning we continue our short series on praying, serving, giving and today - inviting. Just as Christians are called to pray, serve and give we are expected to - invite. So, what does this inviting look like? I mean, who is to offer the invitation whom and what are we inviting them too? Well, this is what we're going to answer this this morning. To get us started I've a short testimony from an Australian Anglican, Peter Adam. As he shares you'll hear a number of opportunities he had to be invited that are missed until finally someone gets it right. See if you can pick out the missed invitations as well as the successful.



Play audio clip (3min)

Now, as a teenager Peter attended church for a number of years and no one invited him. Now, yes... he was invited to sing in the choir, play the organ and attend church functions but no one invited him to what really counted - no one in the church invited him to Christ. You see, as Christians a core activity is to invite others to Jesus. As a church, we can do all sorts of helpful and worthy things but unless we invite people accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour we completely miss the boat. Jesus himself puts it like this...

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:18–20

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to (*who? that's Jesus*). Therefore go (*who's to go? you I*) and make disciples (*how? - by inviting them to Christ*), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now, Jesus expands on this inviting in the Parable of the Wedding Banquet that was read earlier. Let's explore this now. If you haven't already, turn to Matthew 22:1

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. Matthew 22:1–2

1. Jesus is the Focus

Two things we learn here about inviting. Firstly, Jesus is the focus of the invitation. Why do we invite a colleague at work to Alpha? So, they might meet Christ. Why do we invite a friend to watch the rugby on the big screen here in the church? To strengthen relationship so when they're invited to Christ they're more likely to accept. It's the same with the Light Party and The Marriage Course and other events. We don't invite people just because our events and programs are fun or helpful but to develop relationships and connections to help people come to, and then grow, in Christ. This then is the first thing we learn from the parable. We invite people to Christ. He is our focus - our end game.

2. The Invitation is Amazing

The second thing we learn is the invitation is amazing! It's an invitation to a celebration, a wedding feast where no expense is spared. In that time and culture most people would eat red meat only two or three times year. So, the many oxen and fattened cattle would feed truckloads of people with the best of the best. Also wedding celebrations in those times lasted a number of days and where as generous as the family could afford. Maybe you can think of an example. A couple of years ago Judy went to a wedding reception at the Langham. That was pretty impressive. Now, if you're a Tolkien fan then Frodo's extravagant coming of age birthday (33) is a great example of the extravagance and delight of the banquet. Everyone in Hobbiton and surrounds was invited - even people Frodo didn't particularly like - like spiteful relatives (Sackville Baggins). The food was, wonderful and exotic and endless. There was music, dancing, fireworks and gifts for everyone. And this - much more than this - is what we're inviting people too. When one person accepts Christ into their life they accept an invitation to the most wonderful of celebrations - the celebration of God's own Son who was dead but was raised again. He who defeated sin and death and distributes eternal life is the focus of the invitation. We experience this in part in the here and now and in its fullness in the age to come.

Let's read on to verse 3. Again, we learn two things

He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Matthew 22:3.

3. We Invite

What do we learn here? Well, we are God's servants. We invite. We're charged with inviting. Not the Father, who hosts the banquet. Not the son, who's the focus of the banquet - but us, his servants. Now we are not left to our own devices. We learn in other parts of the Bible that the Holy Spirit equips, empowers and sends us out to invite.

4. Not Everyone Accepts

The next thing we learn is most surprising - shocking really. Most people refuse the invitation. Despite who is the focus and the amazing banquet on offer most offer pitiful excuses. Now in the context of the parable this refers to the Jews. John describes this in his Gospel...

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. John 1:11

Jesus came to the Jews - who had received the promise through Abraham and the law through Moses – but would not receive Jesus. Their Messiah came and they rejected him. Now this is the context of the parable, but this refusal to accept reminds us that not everyone says “yes” when we invite them to Christ. The subject of religion may come up over coffee with a friend and we take the plunge and share about Jesus and ask if they’re interested - and they say no. Or we may ask a friend to Alpha for the third time - but they’re busy. That’s tough - but this parable reminds us that not everyone says yes. However as faithful servants we continue to invite. It’s called obedience and brings our Heavenly Father much pleasure.

But we’re not without hope for the passage in John goes onto say...

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12

And this is exactly what happens in our parable. The servants go to the most unlikely people - those who’d would never go to an upmarket, no expense spared wedding celebration.

Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So, the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests, Matthew 22:8–10

5. The Celebration Will Be Full

And this brings us to the last point I wish to draw from this parable. The wedding feast will be full. No matter how many people say no - the wedding feast will be full, complete and overflowing. In the context of the parable the rough and ready and the rejected who say “yes”, are the Gentiles. The non-Jews. You and I. Yes, and we’re to be encouraged. Despite how it looks from our point of view - God’s will is the great wedding feast will be full.

So, what’s our take home for today? Well, if you are a Christian. If you’ve invited Christ into your life to be Lord and Saviour as a faithful servant you invite. Invite people by sharing one on one with a friend, family member, fellow student, college - even a person on a train. Or invite someone to an Alpha, Marriage Course or rugby match. Invite - step outside your comfort zone. Be a faithful servant. Now, none of

us can do this in our own strength but only as we look to Christ, trusting that he'll lead and guide by the Holy Spirit.

If you're not a Christian what's your take home? Well, let me extend an invitation. Let me invite you to ask Jesus to be your Master, Saviour and Friend. Pay attention to the baptisms that follow. And as James Kerryn and Ben were invited and have accepted you to come to Jesus.

How? A simple prayer with profound implications will do it? And this prayer has three parts

1. Sorry! This means asking God to forgive us for all the things we've done wrong and turn from everything which you know is wrong in your life. This is what the Bible means by 'repentance.'

2. Thank you! We believe Jesus died for us on the cross. So, we need to thank him for dying for us and for the offer of his free gift of forgiveness, freedom, and his Spirit."

3. Please! God needs us to invite him into our life, he's been waiting for our 'yes.' When we do Jesus comes and lives within us by his Spirit."

I'm going to finish with a prayer that includes these three elements. We will bow our heads and I will say a sentence and pause and in your heart, you can repeat the prayer. The words aren't magic. There not a formula but give voice to a genuine desire to have Jesus in your life. If that's you then let's pray.

"Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life (*take a few moments to ask his forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience*). Please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong. Thank you that you died on the cross for me, so that I could be forgiven and set free. Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your Spirit. I now receive that gift. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever. Thank you, Lord Jesus, Amen."

If you prayed this prayer then well come to the family - God's family. Come and chat to me afterwards or maybe to a Christina you came with or know here. I'd love to hear from you. Amen