

Once upon a time, an important man called James planned a big, big party and invited loads of people. They were pleased to be invited to such a grand occasion and were excited to go. Everyone who was invited had said, “Yes please” to the invitation. Preparations were made, the food was bought and the tables were set. When it was time to eat, James sent his servant to tell the guests, ‘Come. The food is ready. It’s time to enjoy yourselves.’

The servant got a terrible shock. All of the guests began to make really silly and lame excuses as to why they couldn’t go to the party. “I’ve just bought a house off Eastboro Way and need to go and have a look at it.” Someone else said, “I’ve just bought a new computer. It’s going to help my career so much, so I need to go and learn how to use it.” Another person exclaimed, “Didn’t you know I’ve just got married? I can’t possibly go as I’m pretty busy now!” All of the other guests made similar ridiculous excuses. Not *one* would come!

The servant took a deep breath and went back to James. He knew that he wouldn’t be happy. He would be severely offended and insulted by their rudeness and lack of social etiquette. James had spent several weeks organising the food, the decorations and entertainment. A lot of effort had been put into it. Now no one was going to attend. Oh no!

James didn't take it so well at first. He got quite angry, but almost straight away he told his servant to go out to the surrounding streets and invite more people. It didn't matter who they were or whether they would be able to invite James back to a meal at their own house. It didn't matter if they were sick or poor. It didn't matter if they wore new clothes or old. It didn't matter if they were 17, 50 or 93. It didn't matter if they had several serious illnesses or none. It didn't matter if they spoke with a different accent to most people or had bad breath. What mattered was that people knew they were invited because James wanted to meet them, spend time with them and to get to know them. James wanted them to really enjoy themselves. He wanted it to be a life changing experience.

The servant and his friends spread the news about what James had said. Within an hour a fair-sized crowd had arrived at James' house. There were all kinds of people there – old, young, men with big beards, ladies with long plaited hair, some people with grubby clothes and some with the latest pair of sandals.

James saw them gathering together and was *really* heartened. He noticed there was still room for more to come. He wanted His home filled with people, so he didn't stop there. He didn't give up. He called his servant again and strongly conveyed that he and his friends should go throughout the town and to the fields beyond, compelling people to come. It was going to be a superb party and he didn't want anyone to miss it. The party

was free for everyone to come to. He expected that his house would be full of joy, with people buzzing and bursting because of the generosity and extravagance that he had shown.

A small group of people went out and told everyone they met in the streets, as well as knocking quite a few doors. They went beyond the town boundaries to the fields and small lanes too. Further people weren't just invited, they were compelled and strongly urged to attend. James knew that if an Invitation was given out many people wouldn't believe it was truly right for them to go. These people knew they didn't *deserve* to be invited to the party. They didn't know James the host. They didn't mix in the same circles. They couldn't repay his kindness. James was wealthy, yet these last people to be invited were very poor, had chronic diseases and were outcasts. They were *still* given an Invitation but had to be cajoled and persuaded to come. Men, women and children came in their droves and had a great time. The sort of people that would *not* be normally welcomed at a top shindig had come. It was quite a party! However, no one who had refused their invitation a few hours earlier *did* go to the party. It was too late for them to change their minds.

Luke 14:16-24 [PGNV]

It's wonderful to be invited to a party and we have all been invited to the best party ever! God has done the inviting and He is also the host.

God has shown great mercy to humans through sending Jesus to die for us. We are accepted and forgiven by God. He freely gives us His love, peace and salvation. As we listen to and follow His promptings, so we find freedom, strength, hope and purpose in life.

The amazing thing is that even though none of us *deserve* to be invited to God's great party, we have all been given an Invitation. Not one of us are good enough to go, yet we can go if we wish.

Unfortunately, instead of turning up to this great party, at different times in our lives we can make ridiculous excuses as to why we don't want to go to God's brilliant party. We try to justify what we're doing, but this isn't great. We lose out and the people around us lose out when we decide to avoid God's plan for us. We insult God by not saying "Yes" to His invitation. Perhaps we can make excuses for not coming to church regularly or for not reading our Bible or praying.

Just as we must accept the invitation to a party and then go, so we need to say "Yes" to God and then live our lives accordingly. We must take the gifts God gives us and then use them to bless and encourage others. It is an urgent invitation and yet we can remain complacent to what God is saying and doing around us.

God's hospitality and love is breath-taking. It is impossible for us to repay the complement back to God. What we can do is say "Thank You God. I give my life to You and am open to being used by You. Help me in all kinds of ways to honour You and allow You to be Lord in my life."

Recently we've been reminded that it's time to celebrate. What an honour it is to be invited to God's party! Let's go to it and let's be thankful.

In our lives we can have special days for different reasons. A wedding, doing well in exams, a birthday. SeungJin.