

The Open Door

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[0 : 0 0] Please take a seat. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name's Mike. I'm part of the team that's been here this week.

And before I begin, can I add to Andrew's thank you and say thank you to all those who've invited us to be here this week and opened your doors to us. We've thoroughly enjoyed your generous hospitality. And as I remember your care, can I also say happy Mother's Day to all the mums here, and I hope your families show their appreciation to you today.

Well, let me begin. Have you ever been invited to a party or an event that you wouldn't want to miss out on? You know, a mate's wedding, or that special birthday, a 21st or 50th or 80th, depending on your wisdom and maturity, of course.

Or what about invitation to box seats at the AFL Grand Final? Well, today we're each invited to the most spectacular event.

And the event is life in God's eternal kingdom. Jesus likens it here to a great feast or a banquet. It's actually an Old Testament description of a great party atmosphere with God forever.

[1 : 1 0] You see, it's their way of describing the mother of all parties. It's a feast. Loads and loads of people enjoying God's hospitality forever. Well, God's party in heaven is so good, no one will want to miss out.

But the reality is that many people will miss out. Let me explain. You see, we're looking today at a passage from Luke's Gospel. And Luke's recognised to be a very reliable and trustworthy historical account of Jesus' life.

And in this account that we're looking at, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. So if you could take out your yellow outline and follow along with us today. You should all have this in your bulletin.

It says there at the top of the reading, Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. You see, Jesus has been teaching the people about how he's opened the way for us to get to heaven.

He's been teaching about how we're invited to the party because of what Jesus will do for us. We're invited to the feast in the kingdom of God instead of torment in hell.

[2 : 1 9] And he's teaching this as he travels to Jerusalem. And the reason he tells us is because he loves us. He loves us passionately and doesn't want us to miss out.

But notice there, someone then asked him a question. Lord, are only a few people going to be saved? What sort of question is that? Jesus has just invited him to the greatest party ever and he says, Lord Jesus, how many people are going to be there?

Jesus regards this rather like standing on the deck of the Titanic and wondering how many people are going to survive. Basically the answer for the rest of the passage is, don't be so stupid, just get in the lifeboat.

Accept the invitation before it's too late. You see, in other words, this man is asking questions that are really avoiding the issue.

Now some of the questions that we ask about Jesus are important questions. We need to research them and find answers to them. But some questions that we ask, we ask just to avoid the issue.

[3 : 26] The sort of questions that really have no answers. They're just pointless questions. They're just ways of having to avoid doing anything. You know, the questions like, well what about the Aborigines who live 4,000 years before Christ and haven't heard about Jesus?

Well what about them? Well I don't know about that actually. But what about you and me? We're not Aborigines living 4,000 years before Jesus. And the list of irrelevant questions goes on.

We can just keep asking questions that really avoid the central issue of, well what about us? I think if we're honest, some of us, and I don't know who are the regulars here and who are the visitors, who's been a Christian for years and who's still checking things out, because I'm a visitor too, but I reckon a lot of us ask those sort of evasive questions anything to avoid the issue.

So as Jesus is talking about this invitation to the feast, he gives three clear warnings here to us. They're pretty blunt warnings. I suppose that we could take offence at them unless we realise that he's asking these and giving us these warnings because he cares for us very much.

He doesn't want us to miss out on the feast. I remember a mum walking home from school one day with her son. The child stepped out onto the road. There was a screech of brakes.

[4 : 47] The mother leapt out and grabbed him back onto the pavement and wallop across the backside. And she started screaming at him. What do you think you're doing stepping off the pavement? Can you do that again on the way? And she kept going on like that.

You know how mothers do that. It's really embarrassing. But the reason she did it, of course, is because she loves him so much. She didn't want him to step out into the road.

So that's why Jesus gives us these blunt warnings. He cares for us very deeply. He doesn't want us to suffer the alternatives. That's why he's so blunt.

There are three clear warnings. The first is, There is an open door that will one day be closed. There is an open door that will one day be closed.

Follow along there in the reading from where it says, He said to them, He said to them, Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

[5 : 51] Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside, knocking and pleading, Sir, open the door for us. So Jesus is saying that there is an open door that will one day be closed.

Notice that the door is narrow. That is to say, you can't just stumble into this door accidentally. You don't just sort of drift in and find yourself in there with your family and friends because they're Christian.

You can't go in that door without it making a difference to your life. It's a massive change. You have to search for it because it's only a narrow door.

You have to leave everything behind. You don't go through with your own conditions. You just go through alone. And you have to do it for yourself. Nobody else can do it for you.

It's a narrow door. But the great news is that the door is open. At the moment, the way into the feast with God is completely open. Anyone in this building can go in because Jesus' death would remove all the problems between us and God.

[6 : 59] All the wrong things that we've done as we continue to ignore God well, Jesus suffered for them so they're dealt with. That means we can go in through the door and get to know God personally.

We can have personal friendship with him. So at the moment, we're all welcome. Whatever our background, whatever we've been doing, whatever the secrets we have in our hearts, we're all welcome.

But, says Jesus, the door won't always be open. Eventually, it will be closed. When the time comes for Jesus to come back and end the world to begin the eternal feast, everyone who's remained outside, and I imagine by that time, most of us will have died, but whether we're dead or alive, if we've remained outside, then we're going to stay outside the feast.

Left, outside. The door will be closed. Many of us will discover we just left it too late. Well, we have a syndrome in Australia, don't we?

It's called the she'll be right mate syndrome. You know, you don't like to catch a train until it's already moving. You don't turn up to a van until a minute after it's already started. I mean, why get there early?

[8 : 14] What's the point? Well, a lot of us live life like that. And a lot of us treat God like that. Well, she'll be right mate. I'll deal with it later.

I had an experience of this when I went to the Sydney Opera House once. Some friends and I decided to get in a taxi and go out for dinner beforehand. We didn't really pay much attention to the time because we had a she'll be right mate kind of attitude.

Anyway, eventually we got back in the taxi and went to the Opera House. The taxi screeched to a halt. We ran up the stairs and we were a minute late. I swear it was only a minute or two. Well, maybe five.

Anyway, we were just a bit too late and there was a bloke there standing at the top with his uniform and cap on. So we rushed up the stairs. Sorry, we're late. We'll just slip in the back. He said, I'm sorry sir, you can't.

The performance has already started. So I said, Don't worry, don't worry. We'll just go up those stairs around the back. No one even noticed. He said, I'm sorry sir, you can't.

[9 : 17] The performance has started. The doors are closed. Now, I don't know about you but this never happens to me so I had to try again. I can't watch you slip in quietly.

No one even noticed. At that point, he went all kind of serious. He said, Sir, this is the Sydney Opera House. The performance has started.

The doors are closed. You are too late. Well, Jesus is saying that a lot of us are going to arrive at the doors of heaven and I don't know who's going to be on the doors but we're going to arrive at the doors of heaven and we're going to say, Oh yes, you'll be right, mate.

We'll just slip in the back. No one even noticed. And whoever's there is going to say to us, Madam, Sir, this is heaven. The doors are closed.

You are too late. So the first warning that Jesus gives us is there is an open door that will one day be closed. The second thing he says is, Only Jesus' friends will be inside.

[10 : 26] Only Jesus' friends will be inside. Carrying on the reading there, you can follow along. But he will answer, I don't know you or where you come from. Then you will say, We ate and drank with you and you taught in our streets.

But he will reply, I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evil doers. See, only Jesus' friends will be inside. Clearly, last minute pleading, however persuasive it is, will not be sufficient.

A merely social acquaintance with Jesus is not going to be enough. These people are saying, We ate and drank with you. We enjoyed spending time with you, Christ.

Those church services we went to, we quite enjoyed them. And, you taught in our streets. We heard your sermons, we thought they were great. Oh, I like the book and that Mel Gibson movie.

Fantastic. But it's really only a social acquaintance with Jesus. It's a sort of vague awareness of Jesus. It's not actually a friendship.

[11 : 29] You see, only those who are Jesus' friends will be permitted to stay with him forever. If we spend our whole lives holding him at arm's length, saying, Yeah, yeah, later, then we won't be his friends.

It takes time to develop friendship with someone, doesn't it? You see, there's a huge difference, isn't there, between friendship and acquaintance.

I was reminded of this a few years ago now. The Australian rugby team were training for an upcoming tri-nation series. They were practising at the Sydney University Oval. And one of the then props, Phil Kearns, was the captain at the time.

So you guys, I imagine it would be like thinking of your favourite AFL captain. Anyway, I'd met him at the gym where I was working a couple of months earlier and we'd had a long conversation.

So when I saw him at the Oval, I thought, Phil, my old mate, great. So I walked over to the side of the Oval and I waited for him to come over to that side. I said, Phil, how are you going?

[12 : 32] He turned to me and said, oh, hi, and then went back to his training and disappeared off to the other side. I felt about that small. I suddenly thought to myself, you idiot.

He's famous. Everybody feels like they know Phil Kearns. He doesn't know me from Joe Boggs. You see, there's a big difference, isn't there, between being a real friend and just an acquaintance.

So the question is, how is your relationship to Jesus? If Jesus was to arrive right at this moment, you know, the blaze of glory, the whole building shaking, light pouring through the door there and he was to walk down the aisle here.

Well, I mean, I'd sit down, shut up and let him take over. But imagine he's coming down the aisle here and he's meeting people and it's, oh, Janet, great to see you.

How are you doing? Phil, how are you, mate? Although I have to say, he probably wouldn't do it in an Australian accent. Anyway, he's saying hello to his friend and it's, Paul, gee, you've made a few blunders but great to see you.

[13 : 37] And then he comes to you. What's he going to say? No, we don't know each other, do we? No, we're not friends, are we?

It's the difference between being an acquaintance and a real friend. Are you Jesus' friend or just an acquaintance? Are you going to be his friend or not?

Well, the third warning that Jesus gives us here is, it will be terrible to be left outside. it will be terrible to be left outside.

Look at the bottom of the reading there. There'll be weeping there and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves thrown out.

People will come from east and west and north and south and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are those who are last who will be first and first who will be last.

[14 : 42] Jesus is being really clear and blunt with us here. It will be terrible to be left outside. You see, the evil doers to whom Jesus says go away from me are actually ordinary people like you and me.

People who haven't had our evil behaviour and our evil attitudes forgiven because we continue to ignore God. But to be left outside because of that will be truly terrible.

Jesus says there will be weeping there. I don't know when the last time you saw an adult weeping was but these are the endless tears of regret. He also says there will be gnashing of teeth.

It's a funny phrase, isn't it? Gnashing of teeth. But it's not a funny feeling. It's describing the distress of anger and rage at a terribly lost opportunity.

what was I thinking of? Why didn't I go in before? And why is it feeling so terrible? Well, says Jesus, because when you're looking through the little window in the door, who do you see?

[15 : 51] Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God. Well, that's no surprise, is it? The people of God are going to be there. All the Christians who keep bothering us, they'll be there.

Some of them in their sandals or socks or whatever it is they're supposed to get up to wearing sometimes. But that will be part of the anguish. Oh my goodness, they were right. Why didn't I listen to them more carefully?

Well, not only that, but people from all nations will be there. People will come from east and west and north and south. And they will take their places at the feast. I mean, church attendance is declining in the hedonistic west at the moment, mainly because people have had to listen to something that isn't really Christianity.

But churches all over the world are growing rapidly. People from all different nations are turning to Christ constantly. There will be millions and millions of people from all over the world at this feast.

But there are going to be some big surprises as well. There are those who are last who will be first and first who will be last. You see, some of the people who are really first in line in this life, well, they're not going to be there.

[17 : 03] Some of the people who are rich or powerful or famous, well, they're not going to be there. But there will be ordinary people from all over the world who will be there. And some of us are going to be seeing people there through that door who we know are Christians, who are our friends.

Somebody who's been hassling us for years to come to church and finally we've come today to get them off our back. And we'll be looking through the door and there will be our friends or our kids or our parents or our partner.

And they're all smiles and it's champagne and hugs and party beginning and we're on the outside in the darkness. And some of them will be asking each other where we are.

Has anyone seen Mike? I was sure he'd be here. Mum, have you seen Dad? I can't see him anywhere. Oh, no, I haven't seen him yet but I thought he'd be here. Have you ever missed out on a wonderful opportunity?

A few weeks ago I was asked by friends to go to Aussie Stadium which is where they play rugby in Sydney to watch the Super 12 match between New South Wales and the Hurricanes. Again, for you guys it would be like imagining your two favourite AFL teams.

[18 : 21] Anyway, there were several messages on my answering machine but I didn't bother to reply. I didn't think the match would be very good. Anyway, I ended up watching the match on TV. It was absolutely brilliant.

I wished I could have been there. What a fool I was not to have accepted that invitation. But missing a rugby match doesn't really matter, does it? But missing out on an eternity at the feast in the Kingdom of God just because we can't be bothered to take it seriously seems to me to be really, really, really silly.

You see, if we can just lift our minds from what's going on today and look to the future it makes sense why it's worth being a Christian. Sometimes you look at Christians today and you think why would I want to go through what they go through?

The answer is it isn't always obvious now but when we look to the future it becomes crystal clear. You see, you can't get more different than an eternity at the feast or an eternity weeping.

So what does Jesus suggest that we do about it? Well, it's very simple. He says, look, make every effort to enter through the narrow door. make some effort.

[19 : 38] Try. Give it a go. Make every effort to enter through the narrow door. Why not put some effort into actually finding out whether there is that door, whether there's a feast beyond it and whether you could go in.

I mean, why not? What have you got to lose? And I don't think you can have it easier than here. This is a wonderful church where the Bible's taught faithfully week by week. They run these why courses that we were told about earlier where you can find out more about Christianity and ask your questions.

Why not give it a go? Well, it may also be that you've been asking questions for a while and you know that it's time to go in through the door and stop talking about it and stop asking irrelevant questions and actually go in and begin a friendship with Jesus.

Well, the way you do it is just to talk to Jesus directly yourself. You don't need to talk to me particularly. You just talk to him and then you can begin a friendship with him and all you need to say to him is three simple things.

Sorry, thank you and please. Sorry for my evil behaviour and attitudes as I've ignored you over all the years. I'm really sorry about that.

[20 : 55] Thank you for dying in my place on the cross. Thank you for doing that. Please let me come into the kingdom and begin a friendship with you.

It's pretty simple, isn't it? Well, let me tell you one last story before I pray that prayer. The story's told of three junior devils who were studying at St Lucifer's College.

They came to the end of their course and they had to front up before Satan. Their job, you see, was to graduate and to go out into all the world and stop people becoming Christians at all costs.

Anyway, the first junior devil comes before Satan and Satan says to him, right then, what's your plan? How are you going to stop people becoming Christians? And the first junior devil says, I'm just going to tell them that there's no God.

Idiot, roars Satan. Absolutely ridiculous. All they have to do is study the life of Jesus and they'll know that there's a God. You're banished to stoke in the coals.

[21 : 59] So the second junior devil approached Satan and he's trembling. Satan roared at him, what's your plan then? How are you going to stop people becoming Christians? So the second junior devil replied nervously, well, I'm just going to tell them there's no way into the kingdom.

Idiot, roars Satan. Absolutely ridiculous. Of course there is. Jesus died on the cross and then rose again. They all know that. You're banished to stoking the coals forever.

Finally, the third junior devil approached Satan with a quirky smile on his face. Satan shouted at him, well, what's your plan then? How are you going to stop people becoming Christians? And the third junior devil replied with a sly grin, I'm going to tell them that there's just no hurry.

There's plenty of time. She'll be right, mate. Brilliant, said Satan. You get out there and you go and do that right now. And you know what?

He's doing that right now here. He's here and he's putting that thought in your mind. There's no hurry. There's plenty of time. She'll be right, mate. Well, I'm going to pray that prayer that I mentioned before.

[23 : 14] And if you know that it's time for you to go in through the door, then I invite you to pray that sorry, thank you, please prayer as well and begin a friendship with Jesus. I'll pray it slowly, phrase by phrase.

And if you want to pray it, then just repeat it in your mind in the space that I'll provide. And I promise you that God will be listening very carefully. Let's bow our heads and pray that prayer together.

Dear Jesus, sorry for my evil attitudes and behaviour over all the years as I've ignored you. Thank you for dying on the cross in my place.

Please let me come in through the door, the narrow door, and begin a friendship with you. Amen.

Amen.