

Luke 14:16-24

Trinity 2, June 9, 2024
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But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many." ¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' ¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' ²⁰ And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' ²² And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' ²³ And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.' ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

I know someone who's pretty good at making excuses. This person, who can come up with excuses for everything at the drop of a hat, just so happens to be here in church this morning. Maybe you know someone like that too. I'm thinking of the type of person who will avoid doing something, or will do it improperly, but will always have *seemingly* reasonable explanations for their failings. The type of person who seems to be very good at wiggling out of ever receiving any blame. The type of person who is very good at putting off odd jobs around the house because there's never enough time.

But as I was saying, the biggest excuse maker that I know *personally* happens to be in church here this morning, and I don't mind at all pointing him out for you—it's me! I've come to realize that, if I don't keep a careful eye on myself, I will start making excuses for anything and everything to save myself from any sort of blame. Maybe you know someone else like that too—maybe even yourselves.

In today's text, Jesus tells the parable about the Great Supper. And in that parable, we read, "***But they all alike began to make excuses.***" People were turning down God's offer of eternal life by coming up with some pretty flimsy excuses. So that we don't fall into the same trap, let's look at:

God's Great Invitation: "Supper Is Ready!"

- I. There's no excuse for rejecting it
- II. There's every reason to attend

In our text, we find Jesus at the home of some Pharisees. Supper was about to be served. They were at a long table, and the religious leaders were reclining along each side. But Jesus had noticed something interesting about these men; those who had arrived first took the seats of *highest* honor, the ones closest to the host. They were very proud men; they scrambled over each other to seat themselves a little higher up the table than the next guy. And Jesus taught them a lesson about their mistake of putting themselves ahead of others. And then someone at the table blurted out, "***Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!***" (Luke 14:15) Evidently, this fellow was thinking about how nice it would be to go to heaven and to be seated with the Lord Himself.

Little did he realize that at that very moment, the Son of God was seated at the same table with him! The Pharisees didn't know that, though. To them, Jesus was a painful irritant—a Man who kept pointing out their hypocrisy. They thought He was an interesting teacher at times, but not a very *good*

rabbi, and certainly not the promised Messiah. By their unbelief, the Pharisees had already excused themselves from God's eternal banquet. And so, what *Christ* wanted them to see is that **There's no excuse for rejecting God's Invitation.**

So, Jesus told them a parable about excuses—the parable of the Great Supper, which is our sermon text this morning. The master of a certain house had sent out invitations to his guests, announcing that the feast was ready. But, one by one, each came up with an excuse to stay away. ***“The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’”*** And one after another, they had their names removed from the master's list. Now, notice—Jesus doesn't call these statements *reasons* for rejecting the invitation, but *excuses*. ***“But they all alike began to make excuses.”***

Now, you might have noticed, none of those excuses seem to be very *good* excuses at all for rejecting an invitation to a feast. What does a new field or five yoke of oxen have to do with not being able to attend? They'll still be there tomorrow! You got married? Great, bring your wife! But the *feebleness* of the excuses is a big point of the parable. You've probably already figured it out, but the Master in the Parable is God, and the feast which He sends out invitations for is eternal life in heaven. But there so many excuses that people use to completely ignore God's invitation. Sports and vacation and entertainment and family and friends—so many things come in between God and the people God wants to save. But in reality, there are no good excuses for rejecting God's invitation.

Notice the common theme in each excuse of the parable: “I've got something more important to do.” The master's invitation was ranked on a lower rung than their own interests. You know, Jesus once said, ***“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*** (Luke 12:34) And here is the proof. The man with the new land investment decided that business was more important than God. The man with the oxen felt that person property outranked personal salvation. And the man who had been married decided that his love-life came first, God second.

Does that strike a chord with you at all? The Excuse Syndrome is very much alive and well in our day, too, isn't it? That's one reason we never have the pews filled here on a Sunday—because the excuses are so easy to come by! And it's the same all over—God's invitation goes out to every human being: ***“Supper Is Ready!”*** “Come to my feast of forgiveness!” But one by one, people quietly excuse themselves. Other things seem more important. And that doesn't just go for people who don't go to church, no—we're all guilty. So often, the things of this life hold a higher priority for us than the things of the next life. And so, personal Bible reading is something “we'll start next year.” Family devotions “will have to wait till tomorrow night, it's too late tonight.” Church “will be here next week, I'm too tired today.”

But, as Jesus indicates, these are not legitimate *reasons* for staying away—they are feeble excuses; excuses that will not hold up on the day of Judgment. There simply is *no* legitimate excuse for rejecting God's offer.

So, God has sent out a **Great Invitation: “Supper Is Ready!”** And rather than excusing yourself in favor of something else, you ought to think it over—**There's every reason to attend.**

You've probably been inundated with some incredible offers in your time. Through the mail, in your email inbox, or via advertisements online, we're used to seeing some *incredible* offers of free this, free that, or unbelievably low prices. And we also are used to ignoring those, because we know that there's always a catch. Unbelievable offers are often just that—unbelievable. There's always *something* hidden in the fine print.

But when *God* says that the feast of salvation is being served and that it is absolutely *free* for all people, *there's no fine print in that offer!* Nothing is required on our part before God will forgive our sins. No minimum standards of righteousness or goodness have to be met before God will apply Christ's perfect righteousness to us. The phrase "no purchase necessary" really is true about God's offer of salvation. We don't have to "purchase" eternal life by *being* good or by *doing* good; in fact, we couldn't do that even if we wanted to. Rather, God *gives* us eternal life as a free gift in our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Prophet Isaiah spoke about that offer when he proclaimed to the people, ***"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price."*** (Isaiah 55:1) The message is clear: Salvation is there! It's free, and it's for you. **There's every reason to attend.**

If you've ever gone to visit a friend or a relative in another state, you've probably had this happen to you: You tell them you're hoping to visit for a few days, but that they shouldn't go to a lot of trouble. You tell them that just a bed, or even a couch to sleep on will be enough, you really don't want them to fuss. But when you arrive, you find that, of course, your advice was ignored. Your hosts clearly spent a lot of time making sure everything was just right. The house is clean, food has been prepared, and as you fall asleep in a comfortable bed with freshly-laundered sheets, it just makes you feel very *honored*, doesn't it? All that work was done *just for you*.

Well, our God has gone to a lot of trouble preparing this feast of forgiveness for us. In this parable, God is the Master, and in this great feast He has spared no expense to make everything just right for those who attend. In fact, God planned this feast already in eternity. He looked ahead and saw man's fall into sin, and then He framed His plans for sending Jesus to be our Savior. And the fact that Jesus was here on earth speaking to these Pharisees showed that the feast was now ready. Jesus was doing and had done all that was necessary to free sinners of their guilt and to bring them into the mansions of heaven. The Savior said, ***"I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."*** (John 6:35) "The feast is ready!" God says. "The feast is My Son. Come to Him, and you will live."

And there is every reason to attend this feast and receive this salvation, because *no one* is excluded from the invitation—no one! Notice that the master in the parable wasn't too particular about who shared his feast with him. When the original guests refused to come, the master was not content to leave the banquet hall empty. He sent his servants to the streets and lanes and then to the highways and hedges to look for the poor and needy—people who would be *thrilled* at the prospect of attending this feast. No one was left out, regardless of who they were or what they'd done.

And that is what God is doing today. Looking at our own lives and the daily sins we commit, considering the guilt we still feel for sins of our past—we can only conclude that we don't deserve to

attend such a wonderful celebration. But that's the point Jesus is trying to make. No matter what your guilt is, no matter how frightful it may seem to you, God doesn't leave you out. The Master reaches down and pulls you from the gutter of sin and shame and treats you like royalty. God's love in Christ seats *you* at the banquet table. And He furnishes you with the very best that can be had. Who could turn down an offer like that? Not me! And not you either!

So, let's watch out for the excuses, all those things that we so readily turn to which can only get in the way of our eternal salvation. No matter how valid they might seem to us, let's remember, they're just excuses. And when you compare those trivial matters with the very big, important things that God offers to you—like full forgiveness and everlasting peace—perhaps we can realize that the important things are where our attention ought to lie.

I read somewhere that this parable is called the Great Supper and not the Great Dinner, because supper is the last meal of the day. For those who reject God's invitation, there will not be another chance. This is it. But for those of us who gratefully receive the invitation, we know that nothing more has to be done for our salvation. It is finished in Christ. Today, with a sure confidence, we can enjoy the blessings that even now our Lord bestows on us. And then we can wait, with joyful anticipation, for the ultimate celebration to begin. ***"Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"*** (Revelation 22:20) Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.