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“And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled,” Luke 14:23.

Invite All

Lesson Aim: To encourage faithful witnessing

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Topic: Christ: Parables of; Witnessing.

It was the Sabbath day, a solemn day of rest for the Jews. Jesus had gone into the home of one of the chief Pharisees to eat with certain other invited guests. A man afflicted with dropsy was present. They watched to see what Jesus would do.

Jesus asked them, **“Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?”** (Luke 14:4). When they did not reply, Jesus healed the man and reminded them that they would rescue an ox or ass which had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day, so it was right to heal a man made in the image of God.

Time came for the dinner. There was an obvious effort by many to place themselves where they would be in the most important places about the table. It was so obvious that Jesus gave a parable about humility — about taking the lower seat so the host would invite one up higher rather than taking an upper seat and being embarrassed by being asked to move down. He gave another parable about whom to invite when giving a great dinner. It was in the midst of such discussion that someone at the table remarked, **“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God”** (Luke 14:15).

Will it be such a blessing to sit at the table in the kingdom of God? Jesus gave a third parable which stated that many would be invited to share the “great supper” of the kingdom, but would reject the invitation as if it were unimportant. That parable is the theme of the present study. Its central truth is that God's invitation is extended to all, but each must accept the

opportunity while it is available or it will be gone forever.

I. THE SETTING

The Jews looked forward to the great banquet which the Messiah would set when he had established His kingdom. The age of the Messiah was viewed as a time of great prosperity in which all would have plenty to eat with much to spare. Any person who could live in that blessed age was a fortunate person, indeed. That is the thought behind the statement of the man who sat at the table with Jesus: **“Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God”** (Luke 14:15).

The parable Jesus gave must be interpreted in the light of the common Jewish thought. It also follows the custom of that time in extending a dual invitation to dinner.

Two invitations are still sent out by a sheikh or emir who would give a great dinner. An invitation is sent several days in advance of the occasion. A second personal invitation is extended on the day of the banquet by a person going to each guest personally and repeating the formula, **“Come; for all things are now ready”** (Luke 14:17). The dual invitation indicates that the “certain man” of whom Jesus spoke was a member of the nobility, or perhaps even the aristocracy. Such was the custom of important men.

It would be a privilege to attend the dinner planned by a member of the nobility. Surely no one would refuse such an honorable invitation. But some did! Jesus told the parable in such a way to indicate that those first invited refused the honor for the slightest reasons, as if it were no honor at all.

II. THE INTERPRETATION

Jesus did not interpret the parable of Luke 14:16-24, as He did so many of His other parables. The interpretation is evident, however. The parable can almost be interpreted as an allegory since it matches the principles of the kingdom of God in so many points.

The host who gave the great supper represents God who extends the blessings of the kingdom to those who are saved. The supper is the blessing of fellowship with God established through union with Jesus Christ by faith. The invitation is extended to salvation.

There have been two invitations extended to God's great supper, just as to the supper of which Jesus spoke in parable. The prophets of the Old Testament gave the early invitation. The passover lamb in Egypt, the brass serpent in the wilderness, the promise of the virgin-born son, the new

covenant announced by Jeremiah, and like revelations foretold the new day when the kingdom of God would come. The first invitation was extended in the Old Testament revelation.

The second invitation is extended through the preaching of the gospel. As the first invitation announced the coming event, the second tells of its present availability. The first says, "And it shall come to pass in the last days," while the second says, "Now is the accepted time; today is the day of salvation." How blessed are those people who live in the day of the second invitation.

The glad announcement has been made: "**The kingdom of heaven is at hand**" (Matthew 3:2). How privileged are the citizens of that kingdom! How wonderful the invitation to become one of its citizens! How foolish to reject such a blessed announcement and the opportunity to share in the good of it!

III. THE EXCUSES

Jesus said that those who were first bidden to the "great supper" which was prepared were not willing to attend. "**They all with one consent began to make excuse**" (Luke 14:18). The excuses indicate the men invited could have attended but did not want to do so. The problem was in their will.

One man said his business was so important that he could not take the time to attend the supper. "**I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused**" (Luke 14:18). Consider that the banquet was commonly held at night. Would he buy land he had never seen and wait until night to go and inspect it? What foolishness! He supposed a mere "have me excused" would be sufficient.

He is not the first man who was so busy in his business that he took no time for important matters of the spirit. Let such a man know, however, that a mere statement of involvement elsewhere is not sufficient basis to be excused from the invitation of the king.

Another man said that his personal interests were elsewhere and he would not attend the dinner. "**I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused**" (Luke 14:19). Would a wise man buy five yoke of oxen without knowing whether they would work? Would he wait until night (or the Sabbath day) to go and test them? Hardly! The excuse represents all those whose interests are on personal affairs so there is no concern for invitations to share the honor of the banquet table of the king.

A third man said responsibilities to his new wife were such that

surely he would not be expected to attend. **“I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come”** (Luke 14:20). He represents those persons whose devotion to earthly relatives and friends keeps them from attending to the things of God. Jesus gave a solemn warning to such misguided people. **“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple,”** Luke 14:26.

The affairs of the kingdom of God are the most important affairs of life. The kingdom has come. An invitation is extended for people to enter that kingdom. How privileged are the invited. How wonderful is the invitation. How foolish would be a rejection. He who puts first things first will respond with glad acceptance to the invitation of the King.

Slighting an invitation and neglecting to attend a feast, such as the one of which Jesus spoke, was an insult to one who had prepared and invited the guests. If it is so among men, how much more serious an insult attends those who reject God's invitation. Jesus said the master of the house was angry when he heard the rejections expressed by his invited guests. The Bible says God is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11) because they reject His invitation. The rejection alone is serious, but to reject for such weak and inexcusable reasons is an insult.

IV. THE EXTENDED INVITATION

The great supper will be held. The house will be supplied with guests. Those who reject the honor of attending will not keep the feast from being held on schedule.

Even though some will not attend, others will. The master of the house instructed his servants to go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in guests. Those invited that time looked much different from those invited the first time. The first group were wealthy people who could afford to buy land, oxen, and get married. The second group invited were poor, maimed, halt, and blind.

The former were people who expected to get an invitation and may have been somewhat insulted if they had not been invited. The latter were people who never expected to be invited to such an occasion. They were not invited because they were worthy, but because the master of the house was gracious to extend the opportunity to them. The fact that others had spurned the invitation did not keep them from accepting it.

The invitation extended to the poor in the city did not fill the house with guests. The servants reported, **“Lord, it is done as thou hast**

commanded, and yet there is room” (Luke 14:22). The master of the house was determined to fill every place at his table. **“Go out into the highways and hedges,”** he commanded, **“and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled”** (Luke 14:23).

The servants extended their invitation from the poor which lived in the city to the poor which lived in the country. Those were the lowest of the “polite society” of the day. They never dreamed an invitation would be extended to them, even if they had heard the poor of the city had been invited. They were invited, they responded, and they joined the poor of the city in filling the banquet hall of the host.

Why the urgency? Why were the servants instructed to go out “quickly” with the invitation to the poor? (1) The master of the house had prepared the food. It was ready then. His purpose in the banquet must be realized. The occasion must not be spoiled. The food must not go to waste. (2) The rejection of some must not thwart the good intentions of the master of the house. Those who were first bidden were excluded because of their rejection, but the invitation was open for others to come. The urgency was due to the readiness of the banquet feast.

The parable had an application to the happenings in Jesus' day. God is represented by the man who made a great supper and invited guests to come. The Jewish people are represented as the men who gave excuses why they would not attend.

The rejection of Jesus by the Jews did not thwart God's plan. The invitation was extended to the Gentiles, looked upon by the Jews as the “trash” of human society. (Compare Paul's statement in Acts 13:46, 47, **“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”**)

The Gentiles responded to the gospel just as the poor responded to the invitation to attend the banquet. It was an invitation they never expected to hear in New Testament times. It was an invitation which they did not deserve to receive. It was an invitation of grace. The parable underscores the grace of God in the worldwide offer of the gospel.

The invitation for the undeserving to attend the feast was earnest. “Go quickly,” the master bade his servants, “and compel them to come in.” He was saying that the servants should hasten to the poor in city and in country and use every reasonable persuasion to urge them to come. They might feel unworthy, but they were pressed to accept the invitation. The master of the

house sincerely wanted the poor and needy to come and dine.

God is concerned with getting the good news of the gospel into the personal hearing of every person. He gave the commission to preach the gospel to “**every creature**” (Mark 16:15). The invitation is extended to “**whosoever will**” (Revelation 22:17). It is impossible to give the gospel to the wrong person.

Some will receive the gospel and be saved. Some will reject the gospel and be condemned. There is no way a Christian witness can know in advance who will receive and who will reject. Therefore, the gospel must be preached to every person that each one may have opportunity.

Jesus' parable is attended by a solemn warning. The invitation must be accepted when it is extended, or the opportunity may be forever gone. It is unwise to delay or to give excuses when the invitation is heard.

Do not stumble over the demanding statements of Luke 14:26, 27. Remember that Jesus is Lord of all or He is not Lord at all. The requirement is that Jesus must be supreme. He commands devotion to one's family, but He requires a place above devotion to relatives or friends. Make Jesus Lord and the requirement of Luke 14:26, 27 will be fully met.