

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sunday after Ascension, May 12, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 279, 237:1, 384, 509, 644.
Lessons: Isaiah 55:1-13, Romans 2:5-13, Luke 14:1-15.
Sermon Text: Luke 14:15-24.
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus had been invited to the home of one of the Pharisees for a banquet. Though the Pharisees hypocritically intended this occasion to be a fault-finding session with Jesus, he turned it into a time of rebuke and instruction for them.

One of the guests at the feast was deeply impressed by the words of Jesus which you heard in our Gospel lesson today. In his enthusiasm he made this remark: ***"Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."*** (Luke 14:15) He meant blessed would all the righteous be in heaven where they will eat of the eternal pleasures and drink of the water of life forever. This remark prompted Jesus to speak this Parable of the Great Supper. By means of this parable Jesus wants to teach all of us about the blessedness of partaking of the great Gospel Supper while we are on earth. Only by partaking of the Gospel Supper here can anyone enjoy the true blessings in heaven. Let us now meditate on

GOD'S INVITATION TO THE GREAT GOSPEL SUPPER.

1. The invitation extended.
- 2 The invitation rejected.
- 3 The invitation accepted.

"Jesus replied: 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'" The man who prepared this supper was a man of means and of great influence. The supper which he prepared was a great feast. It was great because of the abundance of refreshing foods which were served and also because so many guests were invited. When the time for the feast had come, the master of the house sent out his faithful and trusted servant to remind the guests of the invitation which had been extended to them. It was an urgent call to come to the feast. The servant said ***"Come, for everything is now ready"*** and the guests were to come at once.

The meaning of the Parable is clear: the master of the house who extends the invitation is God himself, the almighty, the gracious and merciful Lord. The great supper which he has prepared is the preaching of the Gospel, the preaching of Jesus the Crucified Savior. To this Gospel feast the Lord has invited the guests in order to make and keep them Christians. The Gospel feast is the means of Grace, the Gospel in word and sacrament. The Lord has provided these things in his feast so that his guests will be in need of nothing. There is great plenty and every one will be fully satisfied. Think of the great delicacies provided in this Gospel feast! There is complete justification for the sinner, full forgiveness of all sins, life, and eternal salvation!

The Lord extended the invitation to his great Gospel feast to the people of the Old Testament centuries before Jesus came into the world. The promises of the Gospel were made to Adam and Eve-immediately after they fell into sin. To the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the promises were repeated many times. And throughout the Old Testament times the Lord renewed the promises of a Savior through the prophets whom he sent. You heard one of many such beautiful invitations in our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 55.

Then, when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son Jesus to redeem mankind. All the promises of the Old Testament were fulfilled. Jesus won forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation for all men by his perfect obedience to God's Holy Law, and by his sacrifice on the cross. Because our salvation was complete, God

could extend the invitation: ***“Come, for everything is now ready.”*** All the guests had to do was to accept the invitation and partake of the wonderful things offered in the Gospel.

This invitation was first extended to the Jews, the Children of Israel, God’s chosen people. John the Baptist proclaimed to the Jews the coming Savior. Then Jesus himself began his public ministry of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation. Christ traveled the length and breadth of the land of the Jews to make known to them that he was their Savior and the only hope of salvation. The Apostles followed up the work of Jesus proclaiming the Gospel to the Jews after the ascension of Jesus into heaven. The invitation is still extended to us. We have greater opportunity right now than ever to hear the Gospel, and these words are also a warning to us today not to despise or reject the Gospel call.

We learn from the parable how the invitation was rejected by those who were first invited.

2.

Jesus said ***“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’”*** According to the parable the invited guests all with one consent excused themselves from attending the great supper. It was as though all the invited guests had made an agreement together to make excuses. They were courteous enough in making their excuses, but they stated in no uncertain terms that they would not come to the feast.

And what were their excuses? Three are mentioned in Scripture. The first one had bought a piece of ground and he simply had to go out and inspect it. We ask: could he not have waited with this until after the banquet? Could he not have made other arrangements? There is no doubt that he could have arranged his affairs so as to be present for the great supper. But he did not. He simply did not want to attend. His excuse was foolish. The second man’s excuse that he had to go to test five yoke of oxen which he had bought certainly was a foolish excuse. He also could have made other arrangements. But he did not want to come to the feast. The third man did not even ask to be excused. He simply stated that he had married and therefore could not come to the feast.

When Jesus spoke of these men making excuses for not attending the great supper, he had in mind first of all the Jews who rejected the Gospel. Israel, the nation of the Jews, as a whole, rejected their Messiah and the Gospel of salvation. They refused the invitation so graciously extended to them by God. They had every opportunity to learn about their Savior and the way to salvation. They were the first ones to receive the promise of a Savior. Jesus himself lived and preached among them. The prophets and apostles labored among them before going to other nations. And yet they flatly refused to accept Jesus as their Savior. They were more interested in earthly things than in spiritual things. They wanted a Messiah who would build a great earthly kingdom instead of a Messiah who would save them from their sins. They despised and rejected God’s grace in Christ.

Jesus said of the Jews: ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”*** (Luke 13:34) It was a case of stubborn unbelief.

It is no different among people today. In a way, our text is illustrated by our Sunday morning services. How many are absent without a valid reason? And if you were to speak to these people many would offer some lame excuse just like the men in the parable.

Let us stop a moment to think about excuses people offer for not hearing the Gospel. Weather. Friends. Prepare a meal. “I was up too late.” “I just didn’t feel like it.” “Well, I just had to go and do ... whatever.” Are they really valid reasons for not coming to church to hear the Gospel? Do you think for a minute that you could stand in God’s presence and offer such an excuse? Remember, this invitation is from the all-gracious, all-wise, all-powerful God!

What possible gain is there in making an excuse for not hearing the Gospel? The Gospel brings peace, joy, forgiveness of sins, a new life, a sure and certain hope of eternal life in heaven. Could there possibly be any gain in refusing such blessings? Sometimes Christians make excuses for not attending church faithfully, for not going regularly to the Lord’s Supper, for not bringing their children to the Word of God. Is there any possible gain in it? Certainly not.

But there is much to be lost if the invitation to the Gospel feast is rejected. It is an outrageous and shocking thing when people refuse the grace of God. We sinners in no way deserve the grace and love of God, and yet God has shown us supreme love in sending a Savior to save us from eternal damnation. If men then refuse to accept this

only way to salvation, they by their own fault are lost eternally. Jesus said in the parable: ***“I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”***

When the Jews rejected the Gospel, God left them and withdrew his grace from them. When the Jews refused to hear the Apostles preach, the Apostles went to the Gentiles. The Jews were left without the Gospel. To this day the Jewish nation as a whole refuses to hear the Gospel. What more tragic thing could happen to a nation? Many people today are following this example of the Jews. God can and God will also withdraw from them. We have the Word of God now yet, but if people continue to reject the Word, God can and will take his precious Word from us. It has happened in other countries, it can happen here also. Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, Germany are some examples of countries that once had the truth of God’s word in their midst and no longer have it. The fate of these countries is a warning to us. Let us take it to heart.

Jesus also shows us in the parable of the great Supper how some accept the invitation to the great Gospel Supper.

3.

After the excuses had been offered by the invited guests, ***“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.’”*** The Parable shows us that God certainly did not make his great Gospel Supper in vain. When the haughty, self-righteous among the Jews, the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes, rejected the invitation, others were invited who did accept. When God in his anger turned from these Jews, Jesus sought the poor and unknown among the Jewish people, those who were spiritually sick, crippled and blind and knew it, or learned it from the preaching of the Law of God. For example, publicans and sinners and prostitutes were called to the Gospel Supper and were assured of salvation. Who were the members of Christ's little flock when he was on earth? Who were the disciples of Jesus? They were not the haughty Pharisees. Some were poor, unlearned fishermen. Some were former tax collectors and all were penitent sinners. In general it is as St. Paul says: ***“Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are,”*** (1 Corinthians 1:26-28) When the servant had called the poor, the crippled, the blind, that is, the poor, humble sinners among the Jews, there still was room in the master’s house. So the command was given to out into the highways and byways to bring in guests for the great supper, in order that the master’s house might be filled. So Jesus commanded his apostles and other messengers to go to the Gentiles and invite them to the great Gospel feast. Many Gentiles accepted the invitation by the grace of God and also received the blessings of the Gospel.

But, there still is room. God today is still calling people from all nations to come to the great Gospel Supper. He is calling urgently and with a pleading voice. He prepares the way for the sinners to accept the Gospel call by the preaching of the Law so that men may learn to know of their sin and helplessness and their need of a Savior. Then the sweet Gospel call is extended to these broken and contrite sinners and they are assured that Jesus died for their sins and has justified them before God. The merciful call of God through the Gospel is effective. The Holy Spirit through the Gospel creates faith in the hearts of men, women, and children and they in true faith then also receive the blessings of the Gospel.

God still calls to us today saying: ***“Come, for everything is now ready.”*** Christ has purchased full salvation for us with his precious blood. The Lord now sincerely extends his gracious invitation to us to hear the Gospel and believe on our Savior. Those who despise his gracious call and make all manner of miserable excuses shall not receive the joys of salvation. They will be excluded from the eternal banquet of bliss in heaven. Let us, dear friends, make no excuses for not hearing the Gospel. Let no one, and let nothing keep us away from God’s House. Rather, let us come, and let us bring others with us. ***“The gracious call is still extended’ The day of grace is not yet ended. There still is time! There still is time!”*** (The Lutheran Hymnal, 509:2) The blessings offered are beyond compare! Let us hear the Word of God! Amen.

First preached June 3, 1951, Edited by Pastor Robert Mehlretter