

MAKE NO EXCUSES—REPENT AND REJOICE

An excuse is no confession of sin -- A true confession rejoices in God's gracious invitation.

Luke 14:16-24

TEXT: *Jesus said to him, "A certain man made a great banquet and invited many people. When it was time for the banquet, he sent out his servant to tell those who were invited, 'Come, because everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. "The first one told him, 'I bought a field, and I need to go and see it. I ask you to excuse me.' "Another one said, 'I bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out. I ask you to excuse me.' "Still another said, 'I just got married, and so I am unable to attend.' "The servant arrived and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house was angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' "The servant said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and there is still room.' "Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and urge them to come in, so that my house may be filled. Yes, I tell you that none of those men who were invited will taste my banquet.'"*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Jesus often used parables to teach. Parables are "true-to-life" situations that Jesus made up to teach a spiritual truth. Since they are "true-to-life" in nature, people easily identified with the circumstances. But the parables often surpassed reality in such a way that many people could not understand what Jesus was teaching, unless the Holy Spirit enabled them.

For example: everyone could visualize a rich man having a great banquet and sending out special invitations. And it certainly could happen that there might be people with whom the invitation conflicted with other important things in their lives so that they had to excuse themselves. But what didn't make sense was that the master of the banquet would get so very angry and intolerant of their excuses. Who would not excuse a man who had just gotten married and was on his honeymoon? Who would not understand a man whose livelihood depended on a land purchase or the equipment, or oxen, needed to do his work? Are these not legitimate reasons to set priorities that are more important than a social event?

But the Holy Spirit has graciously given us the wisdom to understand. That this man who throws the banquet is a great and very important man is obvious in that he would expect that those who are invited would set aside all other earthly things to eagerly attend his banquet. In fact, we who know Jesus will also understand that this great man symbolizes God himself. That the Lord be angry with anyone who would offer an excuse for not accepting his invitation teaches us that we are dealing with nothing less than the Lord's invitation to eternal life in heaven. It also shows us how the arrogant despise the Lord's promise of eternal life while the humble repent of their sins and rejoice in the Lord's gracious invitation.

The meaning of Jesus' parable is this: MAKE NO EXCUSES—REPENT AND REJOICE. An excuse is no confession of sin. A true confession rejoices in God's gracious invitation.

The Old Testament says: *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.* Ps 51 The New Testament says: *...we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.* Ro 3 Both Old and New Testaments of the Bible say the same thing. The Judge is the Almighty God who sees all, and by his Law judges all things. God himself holds all accountable to him. There can be no excuses, for sin and evil. Anyone who blames another, or something else, anyone who whines and cries and claims to be a victim, anyone sets before God and his law an effort to justify himself will be silenced by God with a terrifying "Shut your mouth!"

Our only hope is that God might set aside his anger and hatred of sin and love us anyway. And he has! Paul also writes: *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ... we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.* Ro 5 And so the party, the great banquet celebrating God's reconciliation of the world through Jesus begins!

Jesus' parable portrays God as great man who has prepared an awesome banquet and as the parable says: *he sent out his servant to tell those who were invited, 'Come, because everything is now ready.'* There

were special invitations prepared for some whom he wanted to attend his banquet. But when the servant went out to those who were invited to tell them *'Come, because everything is now ready...'* they all had excuses.

Why? Why would anyone excuse himself from the banquet of a great king? Obviously, it was that they had other priorities in their lives. As mentioned earlier, there is nothing wrong with the things that they had to do. But what they had to do was a greater priority than to what the great king had invited them. For whatever reason, they did not value the king's invitation to the banquet. So they lost out, forever.

And so, we must ask ourselves: what is the most important thing in this world? Is it not the Lord's invitation to attend the eternal banquet of heaven? And this eternal banquet is for all who confess their sins, repent and believe in Jesus, as Scripture says: *For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."* Re 19 Paul writes concerning our baptism: *... all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* Ga 3

So there, there is your invitation. It is your baptism. Don't lose it by making excuses. Repent of your sins and rejoice in the invitation to be in heaven!

Jesus' parable says that when the servant returned with all the rejections and excuses by those who had been invited, *the master of the house was angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.'* *The servant said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and there is still room.'* *Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and urge them to come in, so that my house may be filled.* We can imagine the fear and hesitation that filled this servant's heart as he related the list of excuses to his master. We can imagine the sadness that the servant felt for his generous master, and we can imagine the feelings of anger he shared with his good master. These people would rather go to hell than to share in the gracious blessings his good master wanted them to enjoy.

But then, suddenly, the master did an amazing thing. He invites anyone and all: *Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. ... Go out into the highways and hedges, and urge them to come...* Go! Bring them in! Urge them to come! We can imagine the joy in that servant's heart as he went about this joyous task!

Mission work is not a moral command by God. That is, mission work is not a command for all people for all time. Rather it is a blessed privilege God has given to believers, to us to proclaim what God has done, to urge others to pay attention to God's word and to believe it. The writer to the Hebrews turns us loose as the grand master's urgent instructions: *... let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* He 10

Jesus' parable concerning those who had been invited but gave every excuse to skip the banquet could easily be a picture of the Jews of Jesus' day who had the invitation of God given into their hands through by Moses. And the new command to *Go out into the highways and hedges, and urge them to come in, so that my house may be filled...* is a beautiful picture of the New Testament church commanded to go out into all the world to proclaim the Gospel to all creation. But the contrast between those who smugly reject God's invitation and those whose sins are so overwhelming to them that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the sweetest story ever told, heard and believed, is evident even today. For who are they who love to worship and who long to be in the house of the Lord? Who are they who do not look for excuses to skip church, and whose hearts ache when things happen that keep them from attending? And who are they whose lives are so full of earthly things worship is always on the "back burner" of life's priorities? It's a matter of the heart, isn't it?

They say it and it is true, that if you want to do something you will always find a way. But if you don't want to do something, it's easy to manufacture an excuse. Make no excuses! Excuses are not a confession of sin. Repent and rejoice in what God has done for us through Jesus. And by the power of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit will prepare you for life's greatest blessing: eternal life at the table of God's great banquet in heaven! Amen