

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶ 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.'"

Have you ever thrown a party like the one described in our text? A great gala, with wonderful food, wines aplenty, a nice warm house, with comfortable seating? Just waiting for people to arrive? We've done this for years at Christmastime – we've had our open house for the members of the congregation, with cookies, coffee and cider. But, there's always the time just before you've announced that it's time to come that you wonder – is anyone going to show up? Did we make all of this stuff for nothing; what are we going to do with 22 dozen cookies (besides eat them ourselves – but that isn't a

good idea, either!). We had a similar situation to this happen one year, but it wasn't because people had something else to do – rather, the weather was a bit treacherous. We had just had an ice storm the day before, and temperatures had fallen into the freezer as well. It was a tough day, but we proceeded with the plans for the party because it had taken so long just to hammer out a date that didn't conflict with something else. So there we were – the invited guests largely weren't able to come, and all was ready for them. What to do?

In this case, a few congregation members came, braving the winds and the ice – but I think it was still less than a dozen people. They were able to eat, drink and be merry; however, the subject on everyone's mind was what were we going to do with all of the supplies? Thankfully, we had an idea – let's invite those that are close by, in the neighborhood, to come and partake. Some of them were young families with children, and although they didn't have a church background, fellowship and being together isn't just reserved for LCMS Lutherans! It turned out to be different than we had planned, but it was still a successful Christmas party nonetheless.

In our text, the master that invited everyone to his party was certainly of a higher status than we were at that Christmas. He issued invitations to many folks; it would have been rude to decline such an invitation. It would be the same in that time as saying that something else was more important than the party that the master was throwing for the people. They came up with various excuses, one more outlandish and lame than the rest. We'll talk about these in a minute. But, the point is that those whom the master wanted to come wouldn't deign themselves to darken his doorstep. What to do? The last thing that the master wanted was the embarrassment that would come from having this big gala, and no one attended it and made it notorious. It would be like a Hollywood award ceremony, where the award winners one and all decided that they had better things to do, and there were no live acceptance speeches – very awkward indeed!

The question remains – why did Jesus tell this parable? Why did He explain the kingdom of heaven like this? After all, that’s what His parables were all about – to explain how things are in the kingdom of God to come in heaven, because we all have questions about how things are going to be. We don’t know, and we want to know. Unusually, this parable wasn’t prompted by a question from one of the listeners, but rather a statement. Jesus wanted to make sure that people understood that the kingdom of heaven wasn’t as described, open only to the elite and rich and famous, but to all. God desires that all men be saved, and be brought into the glorious banquet of heaven. However, some will dis-invite themselves, and that’s what we’re going to talk about this morning.

Excuses, excuses, excuses – everyone has them. Jesus uses these three excuses to show just how distracted people can be with the world we live in, that we don’t have time for the world to come, which is surpassingly greater. “I’ve bought a new field, and I have to go and look at it.” We might be tempted to give this guy a pass – after all, checking out a huge purchase like a field could be considered to be important. After all, such a large expenditure could be fraudulent, or be riddled with imperfections. It’s said that the most expensive purchase that people make is their home, followed by their automobile, today – certainly land would qualify as somewhere in there for importance. Think about the problem with this order of importance for this man, however. He’s turning his back on the banquet of the Master, the eternal feast of being in the unveiled presence of God, for something else – Lord have mercy. But, in this instance, he compounds his error by focusing on land and real estate in this world, rather than on the things in the world to come. We’re only going to be here on earth for a short time; the things of this world will mold and rust, and thieves will break in and steal them. However, the heavenly feast, which Jesus certainly alludes to in this parable, will never fade away, or be destroyed, no matter what. Thus, the man that wanted to check out his worldly field was allowing what he could see (this earth and its bounty) to outrank the banquet of the Master

“I’ve purchased five yoke of oxen, and I need to examine them.” There’s a legitimate purpose here, too – the oxen were needed to do most labor in the days before tractors and trucks – this was a very important purchase, one which could affect the man’s entire livelihood. Left out of the discussion, both of the field and the oxen, is why today? Couldn’t it wait until tomorrow? Often I’ve heard it said that I’m too busy today to come to church and receive the things of God – I’ll make sure to be there next week. But, we don’t know when our life will be demanded of us, or when the Last Day will come – it could be right now! Even though we think that we have time at the end of our lives to make things right between us and God, we don’t know how long we have. Every day we hear about people that die suddenly, even at young ages. The COVID-19 Pandemic, you would think, would remind us of our own mortality and our susceptibility to not knowing when our end will come. But, it hasn’t had the “revival” tendency that many thought it would. Instead, it’s made many become ingrained in their habit of doing whatever else filled their time that church services, Bible studies, and daily devotions used to occupy. Why would someone go and examine a yoke of oxen, rather than going to the major banquet of the Master? Once again, the devil, the world, and our sinful nature get in the way, and cause us to value the things of this world over and above the things of the world to come.

“I just got married, and I obviously cannot come to the banquet.” With weddings being a community-wide ceremony, taking up to a week to celebrate, I find it hard to believe that the Master didn’t already know about this when he invited the man to come to the banquet – it just doesn’t add up. More likely, this was an excuse invented out of whole cloth; however, if the master didn’t know about it, maybe this was an elopement or something else that was not quite up to par. Whatever the case, this reminds us that even devotion to the people of this world shouldn’t compare to devotion to the things of the world to come. Jesus tells us that we are to “hate” our father, mother, wife, children, etc. This doesn’t mean that we should despise or mistreat them; rather, that we should “love them less”. We

know that things will be different in heaven – people will not be given in marriage, that our relationships with people will be totally different, just like everything else in the kingdom to come

Jesus reminds us here that the kingdom of heaven will be like this banquet thrown by the master. It's not a great stretch to think that the master is indeed God Almighty; that the banquet is the glories of heaven to come; and that those who come up with excuses not to attend the banquet are those who let the worries and cares and temptations of this present world to get in the way of trust and hope and the promise of heaven to come.

At this point, we're probably wondering – is there any Good News in this passage? Those who write themselves out of heaven are in the starring role; does Jesus have any hope to present here? Even though we aren't of the people of Israel, the chosen ones of God, we are still grafted into the vine of Jesus and His salvation; we are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, even though we have sinned greatly in other and various ways. Remember Paul was the apostle that was sent to the nations, to bring people into the faith. What did he do when he entered a town? He first went to the synagogue, and recruited those who would listen to him. However, this was usually a small number – most folks weren't willing to see that a man that they thought was a notorious criminal, who was guilty of blasphemy, was indeed the Savior of the nations. Then, Paul went to those of the other nations, the Gentiles, and brought those who would listen into the assembly – he didn't care whether they were Jew, Gentile, or anyone else. The same was true of Peter – in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, there were some Jews that listened, but there were folks from a host of other nations, some of which were Jews and some of which were not

In our text, Jesus indicated that the Master told the servant to reach out to those that he found on the wide streets (main streets, those who were willing to walk boldly through the city) and those who were in the back alleys (women of ill repute, tax collectors, those employed in more seedy occupations) and bring them into the banquet. The master was less concerned with status at this point, or who

attended – the fact was that there was food aplenty there, and if it wasn't consumed, it was going to spoil. He widened his focus to include those who wouldn't normally get a second glance – you know, not the “movers and shakers” of the community, but the “blue collar” workers. This was remarkable, and shows how the kingdom of heaven is much different than the kingdom of this earth – status doesn't matter; all that matters is that they were given the gift of not refusing the invitation when they were called in

Also, the Master instructed the servant to go out to the highway, and to the country lanes, and bring in the crippled, the blind, the lame – those who were complete outcasts from society – and have them come to the banquet as well. The folks believed in Jesus' time that those who were ill had done something to deserve it – some notorious sin – and if they hadn't, then maybe their parents were guilty of something that no one knew about. This legalistic tendency was very apparent when Jesus healed the man born blind – we'll talk about that some other time. The Master didn't care – he wanted all that the servant could find to come and partake of the banquet. We see that he is very gracious as a host here – and gives privilege to come in – much more than we'd think he would. This is the same with our heavenly Father – we deserve to be considered with the outcasts because of our sin and our sinful nature. However, we are included with those who are admitted to the banquet, solely because of His love, His grace, and His mercy

The Good News is that God, our heavenly Father, desires that all of us be saved from our sins. He has prepared His heavenly banquet for all that He invites. Even though the invited guests decided that they were enamored with the earthly things, and declined the Master's invitation, the desire for the Master to have a houseful of people wasn't deterred. He brought in the lame, the blind, the weak, the disabled, the outcasts, even those who normally travelled by the back roads (read: those who were up to no good, and didn't want to be discovered). Their presence at the banquet didn't have anything to do with their elite status; rather, it had to do with the Master's will that they be there.

Something that we should learn from this passage is that it's easy to be distracted by the things of this world, especially when we are blessed with a lot of them. We forget that everything that we have and everything that we are comes from our gracious heavenly Father – He causes us to have whatever we do in this life. Even the ability to get out of bed in the morning, the ability to work, to learn, to move and have our being – all of this comes from His gracious and loving hand. And, the privilege to approach Him and receive His gifts is not something that we deserve, but something that He chooses to give to us, out of His abundant love and mercy and grace.

The comment that initiated Jesus' parable assumed that those who were already invited, and ate of the Bread of Life, were blessed. Jesus just wanted to make sure that people understood that it was not just the rich and famous, the jet set elite, that were part of the kingdom of God; standing in the kingdom to come relies totally upon faith in Jesus Christ the Savior, and an unwillingness to let the cares of this world stand in the way of receiving the gifts of God. This world is a training ground for the kingdom of heaven to come. We're called to drink of the river of God's mercy, and receive His gifts without thinking that we've done anything to deserve them. Let's remember this as we live our daily lives, not being committed to this world, but to the kingdom of heaven. Christ has truly done everything for our salvation. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.