

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. Amen.

<sup>15</sup> 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!" <sup>16</sup> But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. <sup>17</sup> 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.' <sup>18</sup> 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.' <sup>19</sup> And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' <sup>20</sup> And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' <sup>21</sup> 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.' <sup>22</sup> And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

Have you ever planned a big party, a festive meal, a holiday celebration? With the 4<sup>th</sup> of July coming up, there are barbecues galore; folks light off fireworks when dusk comes; everyone wants to be with family and friends and neighbors on this day of national celebration. Whether it's through written invitation, email summons, or word of mouth, we all have a way of making sure that those we want to be in attendance are there for the festivities. We have a predetermined amount of food planned, we have a certain number of chairs for folks to be comfortably seated. We know who will get along with

each other, and who the “party animals” are that we’d just as soon wouldn’t come to the banquet. But, can you imagine what would happen if, for whatever reason, everyone who was invited came up with reasons to decline to attend – at the last minute? The meat is on the fire and almost cooked, the salads are ready to serve, the desserts are succulently prepared and on the plates, and suddenly the phone starts ringing off the hook, with cancellations. And, just imagine that the excuses are pretty lame! One person has to clean their basement; another realized that they were “triple booked” for parties, and chose another party over this one; a third picked this day off of the calendar to wash their hair. You know the drill – any excuse will do! Such is the situation in which we find the owner of the house, the master of the feast, just minutes before the celebration is about to get underway. Can you imagine the burning anger? He would be justified in never inviting those folks again to any event, wouldn’t he?

In our text, Jesus tells this parable for a good reason. He’s trying to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like, and gives dozens of these examples throughout His earthly ministry. The Jewish leaders believed that they were the chief of the chosen people of God, that they had gotten their invitation long in advance, that God has promised, all the way back to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, that they would be His people forever and ever. As such, they took it for granted that they would be invited year after year to the banquet of the King. They didn’t think that it would matter too much if they skipped just one year’s bash; they could always attend next year. But, what if next year never came? What if the end of time came unawares, and their last act here on earth was to decline the invitation of the Savior? Jesus reminds them here that they needed to have their priorities straight; that the things of God were the most important, and that worldly concerns must take a backseat to being made right in the sight of God. They needed to partake from the well of Jesus’ ministry, look forward to His impending sacrifice for the sins of the world, and believe that He would rise again on the Third Day. Unfortunately, they trusted in their own merits, their own fitness for God’s blessings, their own status as the children of God to save them, rather than the promised Messiah right in their midst. They missed the boat!

We need to be careful that we don't allow ourselves to be lulled to sleep by our Savior's delay in coming back at the end of the world. We don't know if we have any more time; we need the sustenance that only the Holy Spirit provides through the hearing of His Word and the reception of His Sacraments on a regular basis. How are we going to be familiar with our heavenly Father, with Jesus Christ the Savior, with the Holy Spirit the Comforter, if we don't continually learn from and about Him? How are we going to have eternal life within us unless we eat of Jesus' flesh and drink of His blood? How are we going to consider ourselves baptized children of God, supported and steadied throughout our earthly lives, if we aren't continually reminded of His love, His mercy and His coming to us when we could not come to Him? Let's look at this text a little bit more, and see how these things all tie together. We want to know what the kingdom of heaven is like; we wonder just what heaven is going to consist. Let's sit at Jesus' feet and learn from Him just how things are going to be when He returns to judge both the living and the dead.

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. 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.

The questioner in our text, in verse 15, assumes, like many in our day and age, that everyone is going to be included in God's promise of heavenly glory. *"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!'"* You've heard this, haven't you? A loving God would never send anyone to hell; the concept of hell is outmoded and just a "scare tactic" of the church to convince people to give money; you can go throughout your life, doing what you want, repent at the end, and then be assured you're going to heaven, right? This is dangerous talk – please don't misunderstand me – even though this might be the thinking of the world around us, it's NOT true! If we absent ourselves from the Word and Sacraments long enough, even our faith can be endangered, and we can replace saving faith with a trust in the things of the world around us.

Remember last week, where we talked about the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man was in hell because he trusted in his money and possessions more than he did in the living God. Jesus tells us that it's easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Why is this? The allure of the things of this world is strong; we're easily drawn away from the things of God, and replace them with the things of this world. We must live lives of continued repentance and forgiveness, live our lives in view of our baptism at all times, that we are abject sinners, hopeless without the intervention of God the Holy Spirit in our lives. Jesus wants to paint the picture clearly – that those who think that they are assured of being part of His kingdom of glory just because

they once were part of Him should not be so arrogant and self-assured – we need His working in our hearts, His turning us away from sin, His guiding us into all truth.

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.

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. 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 Master, Jesus, wants each and every one of you in heaven. He has done everything to cause this to be – He came to earth, suffered, died, and rose again, to pay the penalty for your sin. He invited you in from among those who wouldn't normally have been at the feast, and feeds you with His Body and Blood in the Sacrament, and with the Word of God which salves your wounds and feeds your souls. Even though not all will be included in His promised heaven, that is not because He doesn't will them to be there. The cares of this world, the lures of the evil one, the innate sin within each one of us, can get in the way and cause us to choose against Him. Would that this did not happen! Thanks be to God that He loves each and every one of you with a love that we cannot even define, much less understand. He makes you part of the banquet of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. He 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.