

Ignoring An Open Invitation

Luke 14:15-24

How many of you like a good quartet? I know some of you do. How many have heard the Kingsmen Quartet? They wrote a song that is appropriate for the message today. You'll see what I mean.

("Excuses")

Excuses, excuses, you'll hear them every day.
And the Devil he'll supply them, if the church you stay away.
When people come to know the Lord, the Devil always loses
So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them excuses.

In the summer it's too hot. And, in the winter, it's too cold.
In the spring time when the weather's just right, you find some place else to go.
Well, it's up to the mountains or down to the beach or to visit some old friend.
Or, to just stay home and kinda relax and hope that some of the kin folks will start dropping in.

Well, the church benches are too hard. And, that choir sings way too loud.
Boy, you know how nervous you get when you're sitting in a great big crowd.
The doctor told you, "Now, you better watch them crowds. They'll set you back."
But, you go to that old ball game because you say "it helps you to relax."

Well, a headache Sunday morning and a backache Sunday night.
But by worktime Monday morning, you're feeling quite alright.
While one of the children has a cold, "Pneumonia, do you suppose?"
Why the whole family had to stay home, just to blow that poor kid's nose.

Excuses, excuses, you'll hear them every day.
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When people come to know the Lord, the Devil always loses
So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them excuses.

Well, the preacher he's too young. And, maybe he's too old.
The sermons they're not hard enough. And, maybe they're too bold.
His voice is much too quiet-like. Sometimes he gets too loud.
He needs to have more dignity. Or, else he's way too proud.

Well, the sermons they're too long. And, maybe they're too short.
He ought to preach the word with dignity instead of "stomp and snort."
Well, that preacher we've got must be "the world's most stuck up man."
Well, one of the lady's told me the other day, "Well, he didn't even shake my hand."

Excuses, excuses, you'll hear them every day.
And the Devil he'll supply them if the church you stay away.
When people come to know the Lord, the Devil always loses
So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them excuses.
So to keep them folks away from church, he offers them excuses.
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An excuse is an explanation offered to justify or obtain forgiveness for actions or non-actions. It's an attempt to rationalize or lessen the impact of the consequences that may come from what you did or didn't do.

Whether you are a parent or a manager or were a

teacher you have no doubt heard some doozies or maybe you have been creative yourself.

When Queen Elizabeth II was to be crowned, she sent an invitation to those of her subjects chosen to be present for her coronation. The invitation was sent to peers of the realm, members of her government, and to representatives of the common people. Regardless of whom the invitation was sent to they all bore the same closing statement: "All excuses ceasing." When royalty issues an invitation it is no ordinary matter. It is a command.

You didn't dare have any excuse for missing the coronation. You were expected to show up. It would be unheard of to stiff the Queen in that way. All excuses were unacceptable.

There is something else for which many people have made excuses. It is regarding the gospel invitation. People have come up with a variety of excuses to reject it.

Some say they are too busy.

Some don't believe the invitation is for them.

Some say they never got the invitation.

Some just don't want to accept it or believe it.

Some think it will be boring.

Some would rather go elsewhere.

Some say there are too many hypocrites in church.

Some say the church always asks for money.

Our passage today suggests three common excuses for not accepting Christ's invitation of salvation. The bottom line is that there is no excuse that is justifiable. No one will have a valid excuse. Our passage also tells us what will happen to those who ignore the invitation. Because they rejected it they would also be rejected. Turn to Luke 14:15-24. Jesus illustrates with another parable.

I. THE EXPECTATION – v. 15

This passage is linked with the previous one. The setting is the home of a prominent Pharisee

somewhere in the region of Perea on the Sabbath. Jesus had been invited to dinner along with a man who had a disorder known as dropsy or edema. They wanted to see if Jesus would heal the man on the Sabbath. Of course He would and He did. He asked them two questions about healing and helping on the Sabbath and then told a story about a wedding feast. Through it He intended to once again reveal their hypocrisy. He illustrated it with the man who came to a wedding feast and took it upon himself to sit in the seat of honor only to be humiliated in front of all the other guests by being led to the place of least importance in order to seat another more important guest there.

Jesus exhorted the guests who all clamored for the seat of honor and followed it by exhorting the host to invite the outcasts of society instead of those who would return the favor. Such action would demonstrate a heart that has truly been transformed, an act that would be repaid in the future at the resurrection of the righteous. That act doesn't bring righteousness but it reveals a heart that is right with God.

Picture the scene with me. Jesus has just indicted them for their hypocrisy by thinking that they deserve heaven. He said that those who exalt themselves would be humbled and those who humble themselves would be exalted.

I think that there was a lull in the conversation. I think that no one spoke because they didn't know what to say or how to respond. I think they were squirming in their seats, glancing around the room from one guest to another or maybe looking to the host to say something to counter what Jesus had just said. When the atmosphere is tense there is always that awkward silence when no one knows quite what to say or do next.

Have you noticed that when something like that occurs that there is always one person who has to say something? There's always that one person

who can't stand the silence and what he says indicates that he totally missed the point of what was just said.

Jesus had just spoken about being rewarded at the resurrection of the righteous and this guy piped up "What a privilege it would be to have a share in the Kingdom of God." (NLT) It's going to be a happy time. It's not a confession or repentance because of what Jesus just said. What he says is an expectation. He assumed that he along with the other religious guests would be present in heaven at the feast. It was presumed among the Pharisees that heaven was their prerogative. It was their right, something they were entitled to.

Maybe he thought that if heaven was going to be made up of the poor, the lame, the maimed, and the blind that a person such as himself would surely also be there. It was a very pious, self-exalting expectation. The man liked the prospect of heaven and considered himself happy to be invited and included.

John Phillips writes "He sat there impervious to the Lord's teaching and encased in the armor of his own smug self-satisfaction."

There are a lot of people today who believe the same as this Pharisee. They are complacent in their own self-exaltation, too blind to see that they are worse off than those who already know they are in distress. He was unable to comprehend that they will be the ones humbled. They would miss heaven. Many believe they are entitled to the bliss of heaven and the banquet that is being prepared because they attend church or speak about religious things or use religious clichés. They give to the needy and carry around a big Bible that they often quote from but fail to live by. There are many who have the expectation of believing they will be ushered into heaven's presence only to be denied.

How does Jesus respond to such a bold assertion?

He tells a story. He speaks first of an invitation.

II. THE INVITATION – v. 16-17

Jesus begins by noting that there was a certain man. This man was preparing a great banquet. This man invited many guests. By the type of banquet he is hosting the man was very wealthy. He has the financial means to throw a big banquet and to invite as many guests as he wants. It would be a very lavish event. No expense spared.

It was typical in that culture for someone hosting a feast to send out invitations to guests well in advance of the event. Today if we throw a party we write up an invitation and tell the guests the day, the time, and where. We also indicate what kind of party it will be.

Rebekah has posted an open invitation to the church to attend her graduation party on June 6. Everything we need to know is on that invitation. There won't be another one to announce the celebration of this momentous occasion.

In Jesus' day, the host sent out an invitation to his guests that he was going to celebrate with a feast, but that was all the information you received. So when Jesus says that a man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests, He is stating that the initial invitation had already been sent out to the guests. They were aware that a banquet was going to be held. The guest would then give some indication of accepting the invitation so that the host could adequately prepare.

Continuing on then in verse 17 we read that when everything for the banquet was ready the host sent his servant to tell those who had been invited that it was now time for the feast to begin. The time had arrived and they could go to the host's home. This was a second invitation. We see this in Esther 5 and 6 when the Queen invited the King and Haman to dinner and then the next day she sent the servant to

summon Haman because the feast was ready.

In the parable, God is the man preparing the great feast. The first or initial invitation to the feast came through the Law and through the prophets in the Old Testament. The Israelites were the guests. As we look at verse 17, the second invitation has been sent out summoning them to the banquet. Both John the Baptist and Jesus were the servants sent to inform them that the banquet was ready. They both proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

There is a shift in the story after the second invitation had gone out. It's evident in the very first word of verse 18 – “but”. “But they all alike began to make excuses.”

III. THE RATIONALIZATION – v. 18-20

“But they all alike began to make excuses.”

In His parable, Jesus generalizes their excuses into three common types.

The famed baseball player turned evangelist Billy Sunday once said that “an excuse is a skin of reason stuffed with a lie.”

The invitation that Jesus offered them was not appealing and so they forged some lies about why they didn't want to attend.

Understand that such a feast would have been the highlight of the year, the must go to party. This was to be a grand affair, an event without precedent. To have been invited should have been the talk of the town, but they all refused. They were God's chosen people, the one's given the initial invitation and initially they had said yes. Israel talked about the coming Messiah but when He came and He proclaimed the nearness of His message they rejected Him.

And when you think about it, rejecting such an

invitation seems ridiculous, but reject it they did. There were three general reasons. We find the first in verse 18.

A. Wealth – v. 18

The first guy said that he had just bought a piece of property and had to go see it and begged to be excused. That this man could buy a piece of property indicates that he had some wealth of his own.

In that culture, purchasing land was long and complicated. It can be that way now. It may take a long time to sell and then there is the closing. This guy would have had multiple times as a prospective buyer to go and look at the property.

Now, let me ask you a question. How many of you would go and buy a piece of property without first going to check it out – probably more than once? This man was either foolish or a liar or both. He would have been foolish to buy a field without seeing it. Most banquets were held in the evening so to say that he couldn't attend the banquet because he had to go inspect the field, seems like a very flimsy excuse. An evening banquet wouldn't have given him much time to go and inspect the field. He would have had plenty of time during the day. Besides, if he had money, he probably had servants who could have also gone and inspected the field leaving him free to attend the banquet. The bottom line is that he just didn't want to attend.

A rich, young ruler came to Jesus once and asked what he needed to do to have eternal life. Jesus said he needed to keep the law. The man said he had done that since his youth. Jesus said he lacked one thing. He needed to go and sell all his possessions and give the money to the poor. The man went away very sad because he was wealthy. Jesus said to His disciples that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. They are depending on their wealth.

This man was allowing a possession to stand between him and the greatest banquet ever. Don't allow possessions to become more important than salvation in Christ. Wealth can be an excuse.

B. Work – v. 19

Here's another common excuse. The second guy had just purchased 5 pair or 10 oxen and needed to go and needed to go test them out. Like the first guy who rejected the invitation, this guy was also either foolish or a liar. Now folks, really, how many of you would go and buy a used car sight unseen? Yet this is what this guy used as an excuse. He too must have had some financial means to need 5 pair of oxen. But again, if the banquet was held in the evening, he would have had all day to test them out and limited daylight in the waning evening hours. Oxen didn't come with a set of headlights. He also would have had servants who could have tested them. The bottom line is that he too, didn't want to attend. And besides, like the land, they weren't going anywhere, both could have been inspected the next day after the banquet was over.

People need to make a living. But that will not be an acceptable excuse with God. We can become too busy making a living that we have no time for God. It comes down to a matter of priority.

Work can be an excuse.

There is a third excuse offered.

C. Wife – v. 21

According to the Mosaic law in Deuteronomy 24:5 marriage was the only acceptable reason to keep you out of military obligation and that only for the first year. Marriage did not excuse you from other obligations, even banquets.

This third guy gave a really flimsy excuse. I just got married – sorry. Hey, here's a novel idea – take her with you. Even if it's true that in the culture of

Bible times men were the one's typically invited to these social events, your spouse shouldn't be the reason you use to justify your absence at THE social event of the year. There are many who, even today, allow their spouse to come between them and the Lord. Remember that decision is forever.

People come up with all kinds of excuses to ignore the invitation for salvation through Christ.

Times have changed.

I don't believe as you do.

It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.

I don't understand it.

I'm banking on good works.

I'll do it some other time.

I'm just too bad.

Possessions, positions, and partnerships are not legitimate reasons to reject God's invitation. Actually, there are no legitimate reasons. Folks, we can allow all kinds of things to become obstacles for ignoring the invitation to follow Christ. Is there anything keeping you from the single most important event that you can ever attend?

Scripture tells us that we are all without excuse.

Romans 1:18-20

We won't be able to stand before God and say that we didn't know or weren't invited or can we have another chance. The invitation has gone out and it is still not too late to accept the only way into heaven. So what happens if you do accept it?

IV. THE INCLUSION – v. 21-23

In Jesus' parable, the servant returns with the news of all the excuses for declining the invitation and he became angry. He is angry at their rejection of his invitation. He ordered his servant to go back out and get others in the streets and alleys of the town, to bring in the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. The servant said that his order had already been carried

out but there was still room, so the host ordered him to go out into the surrounding area and compel others to come to the banquet.

The word compel has two meanings. One is to force another to do something, the other is to earnestly petition or urge another to do something. It is the latter that is intended here. It means to strongly persuade, to plead.

We see this passage carried out in the gospels and in Acts. Israel rejected their Messiah and had Him crucified. They came up with all kinds of excuses to ignore the invitation. In Acts we see that many Jews did come to believe in Christ as the Savior, but most rejected Him. The Apostles then went to Samaria with the gospel message of salvation and many trusted Christ as Savior and then they took the gospel to the Gentiles. We are His servants taking the gospel invitation to others to compel them of the urgency to accept God's invitation of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. All we are waiting for now is the coming of Christ to take us to the banquet.

I Thessalonians 4:16-17

The poor couldn't afford to buy land or oxen. The lame wouldn't be able to work the oxen. Those who were maimed or poor often didn't get married.

But yet those would be the very ones who received an invitation to the banquet in the parable. It says to me that salvation isn't by anything I have or do. Those initially invited rejected the invitation so God has extended the invitation to others because He wants many to fill His house. Receiving the invitation is one thing, accepting it is another.

In His parable, Jesus is indicating that many more will be invited. Included at the banquet will be those who the Pharisees thought would not be there, but there will also be those who will be excluded.

V. THE EXCLUSION – v. 24

All those who had rejected the invitation would be excluded from the banquet. The Pharisees all knew He was talking about eternal life, a life they all believed they would have, but in the story, Jesus so aptly illustrates that they had rejected God's invitation and would be excluded from entering His Kingdom. The host shut the door on those who so casually threw aside the invitation. They had initially agreed to come but insulted the host by refusing His invitation when the time arrived.

Jesus told this parable because many of them would not be in God's kingdom because they refused His invitation, they refused the only means by which they could enter His kingdom, they refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, repent of their sin and believe in Him for salvation. They had no desire to enter the banquet if Jesus was the door.

God's invitation for salvation has been sent out, have you said yes?

John 3:16

Isaiah 55:6-11

Many have rejected God's invitation, but many have accepted it and yet there is still room. Our destiny depends in our response to the invitation, an invitation that still stands, everything is ready.

Revelation 22:17

This was the last text D.L. Moody preached. Before he went to Kansas City he told his students that he must have some souls in Kansas City. He said "Never, never have I wanted so much to lead men and women to Christ as I do this time." Barely able to stand he preached and some 50 people responded to trust Christ. The next day he returned to Chicago and a month later he died. To the very end he was compelling people to come in.

Heaven is by invitation only, and has been extended to everyone. Have you responded to it by trusting Christ as Savior or are you making excuses?

Gospel Invitation