

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
April 25, 2010

Inclusion in Community

Luke 14:15-24

Key verse: “Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame” (Luke 14:21).

Jesus often taught in parables. This one is a parable about a great feast. The parable reflects the Jewish belief of Jesus’ day that the Messianic age would begin with a great banquet or feast. So, Jesus tells his hearers a parable about God’s invitation to this great feast.

The parable teaches at least three primary truths:

First, this is a parable about God’s plan for Jew and Gentile. Without mentioning the Jews explicitly, Jesus warns that if the Jewish people reject Him, then God will focus His efforts on bringing the Gentiles into His kingdom.

The Bible teaches that God’s original purpose was to bless the whole world through the Jews. For years and years, they had looked forward to God sending the Messiah, who would usher in God’s kingdom. But when God sent His son, born as a baby to a poor couple from Nazareth, the Jewish people largely rejected Him. So, when they would not respond to God’s invitation through Christ, God shifted His focus—for a season—to inviting the Gentiles into His kingdom and to His great banquet.

This is almost certainly one of the primary truths of the parable. But it is not the only one.

Second, this is a parable about excuses. When God’s invitation went out, the excuses poured in. One excuse, said Jesus, was the following: “I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it” (v. 18). The second excuse was this: “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets” (v. 19). A third excuse was this: “I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come” (v. 20).

In his *Daily Bible Study Series*, William Barclay says of the first excuse (“I have bought a piece of land”): “He allowed the claims of business to usurp the claims of God. It is still possible for a man to be so immersed in this world that he has no time to worship, and even no time to pray.”

Of the second excuse (“I have bought five yokes of oxen, and I am going to try them out”), Barclay says: “It often happens that when people enter into new

possessions they become so taken up with them that the claims of worship and of God get crowded out. People have been known to acquire a motor car, and then to say, 'We used to go to church on Sunday, but now that we have got the car we go off to the country for the day.'"

Concerning the third excuse ("I have just been married"), Barclay observes: "It is one of the tragedies of life when good things, the best of things, can crowd the claims of God out of life."

When I read these three excuses for skipping God's great feast, I think of the list someone gave for *not washing*. It is meant to mirror some of the excuses people give for not going to church:

Ten Reasons Not to Wash

- 1. I was forced to wash as a child.*
- 2. People who make soap are only after your money.*
- 3. I wash on special occasions like Christmas and Easter.*
- 4. People who wash are hypocrites—they think they are cleaner than everyone else.*
- 5. There are so many different kinds of soap, I can't decide which one is best.*
- 6. I used to wash. It got boring, though, so I stopped.*
- 7. None of my friends wash.*
- 8. The bathroom is never warm enough in the winter or cool enough in the summer.*
- 9. I'll start washing when I get older and dirtier.*
- 10. I can't spare the time.*

This is a parable about excuses. We have all made them. But when it comes to our response to God's great invitation, excuses can be dangerous. As D.L. Moody said, "Excuses are the cradle that Satan rocks men off to sleep in."

John Piper put it this way: "The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night. For all the ill that Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet table of His love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14:18-20).

"The greatest adversary of love to God is not His enemies but His gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable." (*A Hunger for God*, Crossway 1997)

This parable of Jesus is a parable about (1) God's plan for Jew and Gentile, about (2) excuses, and...

Third, this is a parable about God's gracious invitation. "Go out...into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (V. 21). In other words, invite *everyone*—"so that my house may be filled."

God, in His marvelous grace, wants all people—and all *kinds* of people—to come to the banquet table of His love. God's will is that everyone would know His saving grace in Christ, and have a place in His eternal kingdom.

This part of the parable reminds me of the great invitation found in the very last chapter of the very last book of the Bible. Here God extends one final, gracious invitation to salvation in Christ: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17, NIV).

God wants all people—and all *kinds* of people to come to the banquet table of His love. Heidi Baker ministers to the poor in Mozambique, Africa. She shared about a dream she had, a dream she believes came from God:

"I saw the wedding feast of the Lamb. There were huge, long tables laid out with the most beautiful food I have ever seen. I heard the Lord say, 'Wake up, Church! Wake up, Church! The feast is about to begin! The poor have not yet been called, and my house is not yet full. I want my house to be full!'

"Then I saw the Lord Jesus dance on the garbage dump, and I was with Him. As He called, the children and youth began to follow and dance with us. Together, Jesus and I would stop and touch them. Their bloated bellies would become flat, and their infected wounds healed. Their hair, turned brown by malnutrition, would become black and shiny.

"He put beautiful garments of purple, blue, gold, and silver on them. He led them out of the dump and into the wedding feast and said, 'You sit in front!' And the hungry children from the garbage dump sat at the head of the table.

"I've worked in the garbage dump ever since, and many hundreds of children and youth have met the Lord and are being fed physical and spiritual bread."

(Contact Michael at msigler@fumcfwb.com.)