

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

Burning Question #62 ***Noah, a Preacher of Righteousness?***

2 Peter 2:4-10

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2 Peter 2:4-10 (NASB)

⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; ⁵ and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; ⁶ and *if* He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly *lives* thereafter; ⁷ and *if* He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men ⁸ (for by what he saw and heard *that* righteous man, while living among them, felt *his* righteous soul tormented day after day by *their* lawless

deeds),⁹ *then* the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment,¹⁰ and especially those who indulge the flesh in *its* corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties,

You folk come up with some of the most fascinating questions, like this one:

“Where did the idea of Noah preaching to the people about the flooding come from? I can't seem to find any account of it in the book of Genesis.”

So, I decided to piggy back on last Lord's Day's sermon on the Day of Judgment.

There is a huge parallel, isn't there?

Last week, I shared the story about the great Scottish preacher who took seriously his need to prepare people for the Lord's return?

I like the way the celebrated Scottish preacher of the last century, Robert Murray McCheyne looked at it.

He used to ask groups of preachers the question, "Do you think the Lord is coming tonight?"

And usually the preachers would respond, "No."

Then McCheyne would counter with

Matthew 24:44 (NIV2011)

44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

And, wouldn't you know it!

The Sunday you decided to stay home and clean the house, rather than be here in worship, BAM, Jesus shows up.

There are somethings we just can't take for granted, and His coming is one of them.

I. Where did the idea of Noah preaching to the people about the flooding come from?

The questioner says: "I can't seem to find any account of it in the book of Genesis."

And, the questioner is right, but that is not the end of the story.

A. Jewish Tradition

It may surprise you that the Jews had a tradition about Noah preaching for 120 years.

The Talmud is the written form of what Jesus called the Traditions of the Elders.

In nearly all Jewish communities, the Talmud was the centerpiece of Jewish cultural life and was foundational to "all Jewish thought and aspirations", serving also as "the guide for the daily life" of Jews.

It is believed that the Talmud is the continuation of the teaching of the Pharisees.

The Babylonian Talmud says:

"...the righteous Noah rebuked them, urging, 'Repent; for if not, the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring a deluge upon you. and cause your bodies to float upon the water like gourds, as it is written, He is light [i.e., floats] upon the waters. Moreover, ye shall be taken as a curse for all future generations, as it is written, their portion is cursed' in the earth." (Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 108a)

Jewish tradition also saw the 120 years not as simply time for an enormous ship building construction project, but also as a period of mercy to allow time for the people to repent.

Jewish tradition says it was Noah's responsibility to preach repentance:

Ezekiel 33:8-9 (NASB)

8 "When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will

require from your hand. ⁹ **"But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life.**

B. Christian Tradition

But, there is also very early Christian tradition about Noah preaching repentance.

If you look in your New Testament at **Philippians 4:3** you will see a Clement referred to.

After Paul and Peter were martyred at Rome, Clement became a leader of the church there.

Irenaeus and Tertullian both refer to Clement of Rome as Bishop of Rome, holding office from 88 to his death in 99.

You can visit the Church of San Clemente in Rome today, thought to be built over Clement's house.

Or, you go to down south to Orange County and visit the sea side town of San Clemente.

Tradition has it that about the year 100 AD he was martyred by being cast into the sea tied to an anchor.

Not much detail is known about Clement of Rome, but some of his writings provide valuable insight into the early church.

His letter to the church at Corinth may be the earliest document we have outside of the New Testament.

Clement refers to Noah twice:

"Noah preached repentance, and they that obeyed were saved."
(1 Clement 7.6)

"Noah, being found faithful, by his ministration preached regeneration unto the world, and through him the Master saved the living creatures that entered into the ark in concord."
(1 Clement 9.4)

And, of course, there is our text today that says God:

5 did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a

preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

There is plenty of source material to validate the idea that Noah did not stand idly by during the building of the ark, and endured the mockery, but witnessed to his generation.

That undoubtedly is why the Apostle Paul says:

Hebrews 11:6-7 (NASB)

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. ⁷ By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

II. Noah Lived by Faith

Paul reminds us that

⁷ By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household

James said,

James 2:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

What he meant by that is true faith is supported by action.

And Noah is certainly the classic illustration of that fact in the Old Testament.

His action of faith is in some ways more remarkable than anyone else.

The Bible everywhere and always teaches that men come to God by faith alone and then go on to live in faith, that simply means to

take God at His Word and trust in that Word as true.
Never by works or self-effort, or ceremony, moral achievement do you reach God..
You always come to God by faith.
It has always been so, it has never been any different.

Noah had nothing to go on but what God had said.
He had nothing to go on but the Word of God.
And God told him something was going to happen that had never happened in the history of the world.
Was Noah going to believe this?
Was he going to be committed that what God said was in fact true.

Genesis 6:13-17 (GW)

13 God said to Noah, “I have decided to put an end to all people because the earth is full of their violence. Now I’m going to destroy them along with the earth. **14** Make yourself a ship of cypress wood. Make rooms in the ship and coat it inside and out with tar. **15** This is how you should build it: the ship is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. **16** Make a roof for the ship, and leave an 18-inch-high opening at the top. Put a door in the side of the ship. Build the ship with lower, middle, and upper decks. **17** I’m about to send a flood on the earth to destroy all people under the sky—every living, breathing human. Everything on earth will die.

A. Build a ship?

Nearly a thousand miles to the sea?
Let me share some comparisons:

The Syracuseia was an ancient sailing vessel designed by Archimedes in the 3rd century BC, one of the largest ships ever built in antiquity and as having a sumptuous decor of exotic woods and marble along with towers, statues, a gymnasium, a library, and even a temple.

According to ancient sources it was 360 feet long.
The ark was 450 feet long.

The Syracusia carried 1,940 crew, passengers, and Marines.
The Ark had eight.

The Syracusia carried 20 horses, with separate stalls for each one,
which were needed to load the ship.

The Syracusia's Cargo capacity around 1,800 tons
It took 300 workers one year to build the Syracusia.

God says to Noah, “Build a *tebah* in Hebrew.

The word is used throughout the flood narrative and means something like a box structure, and because of this some have made a big deal that it was like a coffin, rather than a ship. However, I see nothing in the word *tebah* that could not mean a ship as we know it.

The scale of the Ark is huge yet remarkably realistic when compared to the largest wooden ships in history.

The proportions are even more amazing, as a 1993 Korean scientific study headed by Dr. Seon Hong at the world-class ship research center KRISO, based in Daejeon, South Korea, demonstrated.

Dr. Hong’s team compared twelve hulls of different proportions to discover which design was most practical.

No hull shape was found to significantly outperform the 4,300-year-old biblical design.

In fact, the Ark’s careful balance is easily lost if the proportions are modified, rendering the vessel either unstable, prone to fracture, or dangerously uncomfortable.

The research team found that the proportions of Noah’s Ark carefully balanced the conflicting demands of stability (resistance to capsizing), comfort (“sea keeping”), and strength.

In fact, the Ark has the same proportions as a modern cargo ship. The study also confirmed that the Ark could handle waves as high

as 100 ft.

If you remember the 1973 movie *The Poseidon Adventure*, you will recall that the SS *Poseidon* was a luxury cruise ship in the Mediterranean on New Years when a massive underwater earthquake created a 90 foot Tsunami that capsized the ship. The world class Korean study says the Ark could have handled that Tsunami.

Genesis 7:5-7 (GW)

**5 So Noah did everything that the LORD commanded him. 6
Noah was 600 years old when the flood came to the earth. 7
Noah, his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives went into the ship
to escape the floodwaters.**

Think about Noah's faith in carrying out God's instructions.

One of the largest British shipping companies was the P&O (formerly the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company.)

The largest ship ever built was launched by the P&O - the *Great Eastern*, built in 1858.

The *Great Eastern* could carry 4,000 passengers.

The *Great Eastern* which was almost 700 feet long, and was said to carry 17,274 tons, five times the tonnage of any ship before it.

Noah's ship, built 4,500 years earlier was pretty remarkable, wouldn't you say?

B. Living In Obedience

Jesus said

John 14:15 (NASB)

15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

Isn't that something we resist?

How many ways do you and I resist keeping His commandments?

Well, Noah kept God's commandments.

So being warned by God about things not yet seen, he acted.

Now I just want to tell you three things about his faith, okay?
Just three things, they're listed here.

1. Noah obeyed God's Word.

Genesis 6:22 (NASB)

22 Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

He obeyed God's Word when it was way beyond anything he could experience or conceive or comprehend.

Hebrews 11:7 (NASB)

7 By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

And, God was patient, giving Noah 120 years to bring people to repentance.

Genesis 6:3 (NASB)

3 Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years."

Over that 120 year period, he built a massive 15,000 ton ship in the middle of nowhere.

Why?

For one reason, because God told him to do it and God told him the flood would come and the judgment was inevitable and he obeyed.

This is the essence of faith. Faith doesn't have to understand, it doesn't have to comprehend.

Faith reaches out for something that is beyond experience, beyond comprehension.

We walk by faith and not by sight, right?

2. Noah Preached by Faith.

His obedience showed up in his preaching.

For 120 years they observed Noah building the ship.

They must have thought him crazy because it was so bizarre.

He didn't seem to care what they thought.

But by his obedience in building this massive ship in the middle of the wilderness because it was going to rain and there was going to be a flood the likes of which no one had ever experienced, **he condemned the world.**

That very act was a constant statement for 120 years that judgment was coming...judgment was inevitable.

And that is why Peter says God,

2 Peter 2:5 (NASB)

5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Noah was a preacher of righteousness.

III. We Are Preachers of Righteousness

Perhaps you don't realize how serious this is.

According to Dr. Stuart Robinson, in his book, *Mosques & Miracles*, the Muslims are concentrating on evangelism here in the USA.

They laugh at we who call ourselves Christians, we who sit on our thumbs saying nothing.

They boldly proclaiming

Allah is god

And Mohammad is his prophet

Internet resources of Islam say that there were 8,000 conversion in New York City, and almost 15,000 in Washington, DC.

There are an estimated 50,000 Christians per year who are converting to Islam.

We sing cutesy songs that say

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord

And we pray that our unity will one day be restored

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yeah they'll know we are Christians by our love

And, while we singing that, the Muslims are boldly proclaiming

Allah is god

And Mohammad is his prophet

It rankles me every time I hear someone say we don't have to share words, just show them we love them them.

One very clever and popular quote is . . .

Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.

It is always attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order.

And those who quote it say that proclaiming the Gospel by example is more virtuous than actually proclaiming with voice.

It is a quote that rankles me because it creates a useless dichotomy between speaking and action.

And it is arrogant because those who quote it are implying that those who "practice the Gospel" are more faithful to the faith than those who "preach the Gospel."

But here's the fact: Our good Francis never said such a thing.

None of his disciples, early or later biographers have these words coming from his mouth.

It doesn't show up in any of his writings.

Not even close really.

The closest comes from his Rule of 1221, Chapter XII on how the Franciscans should practice their preaching:

No brother should preach contrary to the form and regulations of the holy Church nor unless he has been permitted by his minister ... All the Friars ... should preach by their deeds.

Essentially, make sure your deeds match your words.

And, it just does not match with what is known of St. Francis' preaching.

Thomas of Celano (c. 1185 – 4 October 1265) was an Italian friar of the Franciscans (Order of Friars Minor) a close acquaintance of St. Francis, as well as a poet and the author of three biographies about Saint Francis of Assisi.

Writing just two years after Francis' death, His biographer, Thomas of Celano, quotes him instructing his co-workers in the Gospel this way:

"The preacher must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons; he must first grow hot within before he speaks words that are in themselves cold."

Those who misquote Saint Francis do not see that fire.

There is no doubt that St. Francis was quite a preacher, actually more along the lines of George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards or Billy Graham.

His biographer, Thomas of Celano says:

"His words were neither hollow nor ridiculous, but filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, penetrating the marrow of the heart, so that listeners were turned ..."

Francis clearly spent a great deal of time using his words when he preached

He sometimes preached in up to five villages a day, often outdoors. In the country, Francis often spoke from a bale of straw. In town, he would climb on a box or up steps in a public building. He preached to any who gathered to hear.

He may have been strange but he was a feisty, fiery preacher. He was sometimes so animated and passionate in his delivery that it was said that “his feet moved as if he were dancing.”

The Apostle Paul is crystal clear:

Romans 10:17 (NASB)

17 So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

It's simply impossible to preach the Gospel without words. The Gospel is inherently verbal, and preaching the Gospel is inherently verbal behavior.

And the proclamation of the Gospel by the way you live is not biblical either.

So next time you hear one of your brothers or sisters in Christ use this quote to encourage or challenge you in your labors for our faith, gently guide them from the land of misinformation and point them to the Holy Spirit inspired Apostle Paul , who asks the Church at Rome

Romans 10:14 (NASB)

14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

Noah was a preacher of righteousness.

You are a preacher of righteousness.

But, what is righteousness?

The simplest answer to that question is this:

Righteousness is doing what is right in the sight of God.

This is a simple definition that is far more complex under the surface.

To be righteous is to do everything that God calls us to do.
The demands of true righteousness are so great and so many that
none of us ever in this world achieves it perfectly.
It involves following the whole counsel of God.

Are you following the whole counsel of God.
Have you professed your faith in Christ publicly.
Have you renounced sin in your life, and are dedicated to changing
your thinking and behavior.
Are you willing to surrender your pride and follow our Lord into
the waters of baptism?
To be righteous is to do everything that God calls us to do.

Prayer and Invitation

July 29 Lesson 9 (NIV) Parable of the Great Dinner

Devotional Reading: [Luke 14:25-33](#)

Background Scripture: [Luke 14:15-24](#)

LUKE 14:15-24

15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

16 Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. **17** At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

18 “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

19 “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

20 “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

21 “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

22 “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

23 “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. **24** I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

KEY VERSE

Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.—

Luke 14:21

Introduction

A. Jesus' Eating Habits

Some time ago a study was undertaken to address the question, “What would Jesus eat?” The study investigated common foods of Jesus’ day in order to determine what was most likely a regular part of his diet.

The Gospels note that Jesus shared a typical Passover meal with his disciples ([Luke 22:15](#)) and ate fish after his resurrection ([24:41-43](#)). They also record different times when Jesus ate in homes or ate with his disciples, but no specific menu is mentioned on those occasions.

A more important issue involving Jesus’ eating habits, according to the Gospels, is *whom* he ate with. These include Matthew (also known as Levi) the tax collector, in whose house Jesus ate along with “a large crowd of tax collectors and others” ([Luke 5:29](#)). He also ate with unnamed Pharisees ([Luke 11:37; 14:1-24](#), the Scripture from which today’s text is taken), with various “tax collectors and sinners” ([Luke 15:1, 2](#)), with Martha and Mary ([Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-3](#)), and with his disciples (as noted above). In fact Jesus was criticized as being “a glutton” ([Luke 7:34](#)).

Jesus’ eating habits reveal his desire to reach out to all people—both the sinners who knew they were sinners and sinners such as the Pharisees whose self-righteousness blinded them to the truth about their condition.

Those habits highlight Jesus’ purpose for coming into the world. As he told another tax collector, Zacchaeus, “For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost” ([Luke 19:10](#)).

B. Lesson Background

The parable of the great dinner in today’s text comes not long after Jesus’ teaching in last week’s text from [Luke 13](#). Following that section of teaching in [13:22-30](#), some of the Pharisees informed Jesus that he needed to vacate the territory of Perea because Herod

Antipas (son of Herod the Great) wanted to kill him ([13:31](#)).

Jesus was not fazed by this threat (which may have been fabricated by the Pharisees in order to diminish the effectiveness of Jesus' ministry). He continued to focus his attention on reaching Jerusalem and lamented over its failure throughout the years to accept the words of God's appointed messengers, some of those even being killed ([Luke 13:34, 35](#)). He knew that in just a few months, he would be among that number.

[Luke 14](#) begins with Jesus' entering the house of "a prominent Pharisee" for a meal on a Sabbath Day. We do not know the exact location of this house, but it can be assumed that Jesus was still in the territory of Perea (where the teaching in last week's text occurred). He was being watched closely, apparently to see if he would violate the Pharisees' standards of conduct. After healing a man in the house, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocritical behavior ([14:2-6](#)).

Jesus then told a parable aimed at those in attendance at the meal, in order to correct their behavior of selecting prominent seats ([Luke 14:10](#)). He then spoke more directly to the man who had invited him to the dinner ([14:12](#)). Jesus challenged him to invite the rejects and the outcasts of society—those unable to return the favor. A reward for such generosity may not come in this life, but it will come in God's time: "at the resurrection of the righteous" ([14:14](#)). The mention of resurrection prompted a comment from one of the guests in the Pharisee's house, which is where the lesson text begins.

I. The Place

([Luke 14:15](#))

A. Sitting with Jesus ([v. 15a](#))

15a. When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus,

We noted in last week's study how Luke often recounts situations when people in an audience speak up spontaneously with a question or comment directed toward Jesus. Here,

following Jesus' teaching concerning proper dinner etiquette (from a spiritual standpoint), *one of* the guests in the Pharisee's house speaks up.

B. Speaking to Jesus ([v. 15b](#))

15b. "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

The guest's comment is an interesting one. Jesus has said nothing in the house thus far specifically about *the kingdom of God*. He used the word *blessed* in [verse 14](#) to encourage his listeners to invite to their dinners the outcasts and the neglected. Perhaps this man is trying to one-up Jesus' statement by declaring his own understanding of what blessedness means. Perhaps Jesus' teaching has made this man a bit uncomfortable since neither he nor any other Pharisee seems likely to follow Jesus' advice when planning his next dinner. So his statement may be an effort to turn the conversation in a different direction.

On the other hand, this person may be one of the few in attendance who understands what Jesus has said thus far. He seems to understand that Jesus is speaking of *the kingdom of God*, which will include a heavenly banquet (see [Isaiah 25:6](#); [Luke 13:29](#); [Revelation 19:9](#)). The future banquet is a symbol of God's acceptance and reward of the resurrected, righteous people. This ultimate inclusion by God is also the ultimate blessing.

II. The Parable

([Luke 14:16-24](#))

A. Invitation Extended ([vv. 16, 17](#))

16. Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.

Although Jesus' reply is to the man who has made the previous remark, the reply is certainly intended to be heard by all who are present. That the host in this parable—who undoubtedly represents God—has *invited many* should be understood in light of how such gatherings are typically planned and

organized. The initial invitation to a gathering like *a great banquet* amounts to being given a heads-up: be prepared! At some future time the invitation will be followed by an announcement that the banquet is indeed ready. Then it will be time for the invited to come.

17. “At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ *The banquet* likely takes a considerable amount of time to prepare, to accommodate the many who have been invited. Once everything is in order, a *servant* is dispatched to issue the second invitation: *Come, for everything is now ready.*

B. Invitation Rejected ([vv. 18-20](#))

18a. “But they all alike began to make excuses. Amazingly (perhaps shockingly to those hearing the parable), the individuals who had earlier been invited to the banquet reply with a series of excuses as to why they cannot attend. The phrase *they all alike* does not suggest that these people conspire to answer as they do. It means, rather, that they all offer reasons why they cannot come.

What Do You Think?

How do we overcome excuses people make to avoid responding to Jesus’ invitation?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

When those excuses have an intellectual basis

When those excuses have an emotional basis

When those excuses have a volitional basis

18b. “The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

Two issues may be raised regarding this excuse. First, one would not buy *a field* without first going to see it and assess its value. Second, a field can be (re)examined at any time; why does it have to be done right at this moment? No doubt Jesus’ audience sees through the flimsiness of this response. It’s obvious that the man simply does not want to come.

19. “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

The same critique applies to the second excuse. Why do these *oxen* have to be tested now? As was true with the piece of ground, the time to test the oxen is before the purchase, not after.

How to Say It

Antipas *An-tih-pus*.

Demas *Dee-mus*.

Herod *Hair-ud*.

Perea *Peh-ree-uh*.

Pharisees *Fair-ih-seez*.

Zacchaeus *Zack-key-us*.

20. “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

This third individual does not present even any semblance of politeness; there is no “Please excuse me” accompanying his statement, as with the other two. All he says is *I just got married, so I can’t come*.

But this is as poor an excuse as the previous two. Why should marriage keep one from responding to a previously given invitation? Even if this man has gotten married since the original invitation was issued, common courtesy requires that he follow through and attend the dinner once it is ready. Not to do so is to insult the host’s gracious spirit.

It should be noted that these activities that are used as reasons not to attend the dinner are not wrong in and of themselves. There is nothing inherently sinful with buying a field, buying oxen, or getting married. The problem is that these three situations have become nothing more than pathetic excuses to cover the individuals’ unwillingness to come to the dinner. If they really want to attend, they will come.

MAKING EXCUSES

Most people are pretty good at making excuses. It happens in every realm of life. Children blame misdeeds on their siblings or friends. Politicians blame their predecessors, at least during the first few

years of their terms in office. Married people excuse their own contribution to the problems in their marriages. Students blame poor grades on their teachers or the subject matter. Examples are legion.

On the other hand, a lot has been said as to why we shouldn't excuse ourselves. Benjamin Franklin put it this way: "He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else." J. C. Penney built a successful retail chain on this principle: "I do not believe in excuses. I believe in hard work as the prime solvent [solution] of life's problems." But as Mason Cooley observed, "Excuses change nothing, but make everyone feel better." Cooley was only partially right: we may feel better at the moment; but when the truth comes out, the game is over.

Think of the people who excused themselves from attending the feast Jesus spoke of in this parable. They each had what, at the time, might have seemed like a good reason for declining the invitation. But in the context of this invitation to God's eternal feast, they missed the chance of their lifetimes! Those who reject this invitation may think they are choosing correctly. Oh, how wrong they are!

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What changes are needed for believers to make their relationship with Jesus the highest priority?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering distractions of a person's age demographic

Considering distractions based in cultural expectations

Considering family fissures that may result

C. Invitation Expanded ([vv. 21-24](#))

21. "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' The host is understandably upset at such cavalier rejections of his invitation, especially when they are accompanied by

obviously unacceptable reasons for doing so.

Although angry, *the owner of the house* orders the servant to invite the town's most unfortunate: *the poor* (destitute beggars), *the crippled* (disabled due to injury), *the blind*, and *the lame* (unable to walk). These people are to be found on the main *streets*, perhaps begging, but will also live in the *alleys*, the backstreets of hovels and shacks. They are the very same groups that Jesus had encouraged those in attendance at this gathering to invite to any banquet they may prepare ([Luke 14:13](#)).

We can imagine that the fatted calf is roasted, the raisin cakes are baked, the wine has been delivered, and the musicians are already playing. The feast cannot be delayed.

What Do You Think?

How will you help your church reach out to the overlooked people in your community?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding those with disabilities

Regarding those with addictions

Regarding the poverty-stricken

Other

UNEXPECTED INVITATIONS

Each year, the president of the United States delivers the State of the Union address to a joint session of Congress, gathered in the House of Representatives chamber of the Capitol Building. The hall is filled for the event with “important” people. The speech is televised and seen by millions. Presidents of both parties have used the occasion to promote their programs for the nation, hoping to rally the support of the citizenry.

In more recent times, a few ordinary people who represent some element of the presidential agenda have received unexpected invitations. They are seated in a prominent place in the audience. When the president mentions them in an effort to draw sympathetic attention to the presidential agenda, TV cameras zoom in on these newly created celebrities-of-the-moment.

Much like the guests invited by the host near the end of Jesus’

parable, the presidential guests are often the victims of life's injustices. However, the invited guests in the parable were not so honored to promote the host's political agenda. Instead, they were summoned to show the Lord's desire to share his feast. But remember: those invited who dishonor the summons cannot reconsider later.

—C. R. B.

22. “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

Even though those in the streets and alleys of the town have not received an earlier invitation, they are more than happy to come. Perhaps, being in the condition they are in, they have never been asked to such a gathering as this. However, as *the servant reports, there is still room.*

23. “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.

Now the host instructs *the servant* to extend his invitation even farther. *The roads and country lanes* likely refers to the territory beyond the town limits; we might say “out in the sticks.”

The appeal is not to be given halfheartedly or casually; the servant is to *compel* these residents *to come*. Perhaps this is necessary because at first those in these far-removed locations will find it hard to believe that someone in the town actually wants *them* to attend a dinner. But the host's objective is clear: he desires that his *house will be full.*

What Do You Think?

What additional steps can you take to share God's Word with the lost?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Personally

In cooperation with other Christians

24. “‘I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

The ending of this parable does not turn out “happily ever after” for the original invitees. As we contrast those originally invited with those receiving the later invitations, the message of the parable becomes clear: Jesus is describing how God’s invitation to his kingdom is presented first to the Jews. It is they who have received the initial invitation by means of possessing the prophecies of Jesus’ coming and their position as God’s covenant people. But they, for the most part, reject the kingdom as presented by Jesus. John writes, “He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him” ([John 1:11](#)).

Then the message of the kingdom is offered to a different group, including those scorned by groups such as the scribes and Pharisees. These outcasts are represented by the poor and physically disabled. The third group, in the roads and country lanes, represents the Gentiles, those peoples and nations who are also among the lost whom Jesus came to save ([Luke 19:10](#)). They were described in last week’s text as those from the four corners of the earth who will have the privilege of sitting down in the kingdom of God ([13:29](#)).

The tragic irony is that those first bidden to come to the kingdom (the Jews) are the ones who will be excluded from the dinner; however, they have no one to blame but themselves for being left out. The parable’s message thus ties very closely with Jesus’ statement that concluded last week’s printed text: “Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” ([Luke 13:30](#)).

What Do You Think?

How should we interact, if at all, with those who accepted Christ at one point but now reject Him?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering arguments for seeking them out ([Luke 15:4-10](#); etc.)

Considering arguments for not seeking them out ([Hebrews 6:4-8](#); etc.)

Conclusion

A. Keeping First Things First

While last week's text included the statement that the first will be last, today's study could be summarized by considering the importance of keeping first things first. There is no contradiction between the two ideas. Last week's lesson dealt with the way that God sees people and the manner in which they will be treated on the Day of Judgment; today's study concerns priorities in the lives of God's people.

The excuses offered by the three individuals in Jesus' parable reveal much about the individuals who offered them. Each excuse clearly shows that attending the dinner was not a priority for any of the three. They had something better to do. They could have made time for the dinner—if they had *wanted* to. Attendance was not high on their to-do list, if it was on there at all.

It is still true that the cares of this world and the obligations associated with it can often take priority over the things of God. This is a warning that is found throughout the Scriptures and one that today's Christian must take seriously. "Do not love the world or anything in the world," writes John. "If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them" ([1 John 2:15](#)). James is just as direct: "Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God" ([James 4:4](#)).

In the parable of the sower, Jesus described how some of the seed fell among thorns ([Luke 8:7](#)). He later explained that this represents "those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature" ([8:14](#)). In his second letter to Timothy, Paul lamented of Demas, who "because he loved this world, has deserted me" ([2 Timothy 4:10](#)). Demas may not have been tempted by a field, by oxen, or by a wife, but something in the world had seized control of his heart.

B. Knowing the Times

During the change to David's leadership in ancient Israel, some

who “came to David at Hebron to turn Saul’s kingdom over to him” are described as those who “understood the times and knew what Israel should do” ([1 Chronicles 12:23, 32](#)). We live in a time when spiritual values are not promoted in any significant, meaningful way by culture. The lure of the world is very strong and begs for our attention through the various media outlets of our time. Our youth are especially the targets of these outlets and must be instructed by both the home and the church. The battle for hearts has never been more intense. Do we know the times? Having that knowledge, do we know what to do with it?

Those are important questions, and we must answer them to protect our own relationship with God first and foremost. Let’s face it: we won’t be much good for the kingdom of God if we’re so focused on protecting others that we neglect our own spiritual well-being. While multitudes clamored for Jesus’ attention, he still realized the need to be alone with the Father from time to time ([Luke 5:15, 16](#)). He realized that his apostles needed rest ([Mark 6:30-32](#)).

But rest and time alone with God go against the grain of an always-connected, 24/7 culture. Inadequate rest lowers our spiritual defenses. Consider how Satan timed his attack on Jesus: the attack came when Jesus was physically at his weakest ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)). Adequate rest makes possible the effectiveness of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, and the supportive fellowship of other believers.

To know the times and to know what to do with that knowledge has a direct bearing on the cost of discipleship. To attend the great banquet requires not only an invitation to do so, but also the willingness to pay the “opportunity cost” required to be there. From the world of economics, an opportunity cost is the “benefit that a person could have received, but gave up to take another course of action.” We see opportunity cost in [Mark 10:21, 28](#); [Luke 14:33](#); etc. What price are you willing to pay to be at the great feast?

C. Prayer

Our Father, with gratitude we thank you for the invitation we have

received to be at your great banquet! May we examine our hearts as the day approaches and destroy all excuses for not attending. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who makes the great banquet possible. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Only the life that puts Jesus first will last.

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