

Excused? Or Not?

Luke 14:15-24

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

You sent invitations to your party, and in the invitation, you asked people to RSVP their regrets only. In other words, you expected all who were invited to come to the celebration, only those who were excusing themselves from attending were to respond. Invariably, there will be those who will excuse themselves. And, there will still be others who do not bother to respond, but will fail to show up.

I don't know about you, but when someone I invited to a party is absent, it sort of feels like an insult. When there are many who are invited, but choose not to attend, those feelings intensify. How does it make you feel? Do you feel slighted when someone does not attend a gathering you plan and prepare to celebrate with friends?

Does God feel any different when we fail to attend the events He prepares and plans, the meals He sets out before us?

How about we throw another monkey wrench into the mix. What about the supposed undesirables who attend? Sometimes there are people who feel that certain others do not belong at an event, they believe that somehow these "others" somehow sully the party – they are in some way undesirables. How often have you and I felt that way about someone at a gathering, wondering, "Who invited them?"

At that beginning of our text, one of those who was there stated, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Jesus does not deny those words at all. In fact, He goes on to tell the parable we have in our text about all those invited, all those who attend, and those who make excuses.

As Jesus tells this parable, the Pharisees would understand it. Not all those who had *a right* to be at the party, did come. On the other hand, not all those who had *no right* to be there, were the ones who were there.

This parable is speaking about the fact that it has nothing at all to do with what we might consider "rights"? You and I are going to be dealt with by God *in spite of* what we deserve by our human nature, not according to it. There are *none* who belong at the banquet, they are all invited guests, invited by the gracious kindness of the master of the banquet.

Our first inclination is to focus on those who were invited, and who made excuses. We do not need to do so, for we know what happens to them, they shall not taste the banquet. They gave their excuses, but ultimately it means they do not eat at the eternal table of the kingdom of God.

We could focus on those who made no excuses but did attend. Jesus does not, so we will not either. So, what happens? The master sends his servants out to gather the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. They are not necessarily the ones who grace the social registry, but were those found on the streets and lanes of the city; the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. When those from this new group had all gathered, the banquet hall still wasn't full. So, the master sent the servants to the highways and hedges to compel them to come in. The master wanted the house full.

These last two groups are not invited because they are pitied. This is not Jesus' great socialism plan, this is not a "take from the rich and give to the poor" scheme. It is in fact, much more simple than that. Yet, it is amazing how often it is totally and completely misunderstood.

You see, this event is all about the host. The host does not care who attends the banquet, just that the banquet hall is filled. He *wants all* to eat at his banquet, no matter who they are. The first ones made their excuse, so others will fill the banquet.

That, dear friends, is grace. Grace is not a response to the deserving work of others. Grace is not a proportionate reply given to those who have something to offer the giver. Grace is not repayment. Grace is pure, undeserved gift.

Jesus is showing by this parable that God's grace is a crazy initiative that makes no sense whatsoever. In fact, if the truth were told, those initially invited, would be appalled to be at this banquet filled with the undesirables of society. You do remember that the Pharisees complained that Jesus ate with sinners.

Do we exhibit God's grace in welcoming everybody to join us when we gather together? Or, do we look askance at some, wondering, what are they doing here? They do not belong at my church!

Dear friends, it is all about the foolishness and weakness of God. God does it all – the inviting, the compelling, the bringing in, the filling of the banquet hall, and the feeding of the guests.

In other words, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"
Who are those that are blessed? Blessed are those who eat bread in the kingdom of God.

One made an excuse to go visit the new property he has purchased to grow crops. Another excuses himself with business expansion of a few oxen. Another excuses himself by saying he just got married.

What is it that was important to them? Is it to be at the banquet to which they were invited, or to be about other matters? What is important to note, is that they were invited. They were on the guest list. These people think of themselves as the desirables, the upstanding citizens.

What is the bread they are invited to eat in the kingdom of God? Jesus explains that in John six when He says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst..." "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I give for the life of the world is My flesh." (John 6:32-35, 48-51)

What is the bread that blesses in the kingdom of God? This is not simple bread, but the Bread of Life, the flesh of Christ which was sacrificed upon the cross to win forgiveness of sins and to grant life. It is bread which feeds the hungry, the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

Those hungry for righteousness are fed by Christ, they are filled with good things, His righteousness comes to them and satisfies them unto life everlasting.

Those poor in spirit understand their sinfulness and know that the Bread of Life alone can make them rich in holiness by the forgiveness won and delivered by Him alone – in the bread of Christ alone.

Those who are crippled by their own sinfulness, unable to do any good thing, come for healing – come to eat and to be strengthened in a new life they cannot live alone, but only in Christ.

We often try to walk by sight, leaving faith behind and resorting to reason and senses, only to discover that in so doing, we have become blind fools, stumbling through life and trusting in ourselves. But the table is set, the Bread of the Kingdom is placed before you to forgive your self-righteousness and open your eyes to God's grace, to see that you are forever blessed in Christ.

Yes, this is the feast, it is the banquet table of the kingdom of God by which you are healed, no longer lame, but able to walk by faith and not by sight.

Blessed indeed are all those who eat bread in the kingdom of God, for Christ is the Bread which came down from heaven and gives us the riches of God's grace. You are invited, yea even compelled to come in and eat. Here is food for hungry souls. Eat and be blessed unto life everlasting. Amen.