

## INTRODUCTION

There is a difference between a reason and an excuse. There are times when we may have a legitimate reason for what we do or don't do. An excuse is actually the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. In our text today, we'll see that empty excuses actually anger the Lord. In the verses preceding our passage Jesus has spoken about the danger of pride and the value of humility. There is a powerful principle in verse 11:

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

There's nothing wrong with having friends in your home, but when you show kindness to strangers and those who *cannot* return the favor, you'll receive your reward in heaven. Look at verse 15:

"When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." Jesus replied, "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' 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.' Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' 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.' 'Sir, what you have ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

Studying a parable of Jesus is like peeling an onion, not because it will sometimes make you cry! Like an onion, every parable of Jesus has several layers of application. The outer layer is the story itself. In this case, there was a rich man who invited people to a wedding feast. Below that layer is the historical layer that spoke to Jesus' original audience. The Jewish leaders were infuriated because they understood Jesus was saying although God had invited His chosen people, the Jews, to come to Him, they made empty excuses. So the God of Israel was going to invite the Gentiles to come into His family. Those were fighting words!

Let's peel off another layer and we'll find the layer of personal application—what is God saying to me? Whenever you study the Bible you should ask two questions: First, "What did these words mean to the original audience who heard them or read them?" Second, "What do these words mean to me today?" This is message God has for us in 2002. First, let's consider:

## **I. THE INVITATION: COME TO THE PARTY!**

The parable begins with a rich man inviting guests to come to a wedding feast. It was a “great” banquet and “many” guests were invited, so it was the social event of the season. Of all the occasions in Jewish culture, the wedding feast was the most joyous celebration possible. This is not a last minute invitation. It was Jewish custom to send an earlier invitation giving the day of the banquet, but no time was set. The guests would have already accepted the invitation, and then on the day of the banquet, the servants would simply go out and announce the banquet was ready. In this parable, our Heavenly Father is the host and each of us is invited to the banquet: it’s the greatest wedding banquet in history. It’s the wedding celebration of His Son to the Church, the Bride of Christ. The *Guinness World Book of Records* claims the biggest and most expensive wedding in modern history took place in Dubai several years ago. An Arab prince was married and the cost for the ten-day wedding celebration was \$44 million. That’s nothing compared to the glory and the splendor of God’s party! Let’s notice a couple of things about God’s invitation.

### **1. Knowing is more like a feast than a funeral**

Many people think the Christian life is a dull, boring, sad existence. Unbelievers think to become a Christian you have to stop laughing or having fun. Where did they get this idea? From watching some of you who claim to be a Christian but you have lost the joy of your salvation. They get this idea from attending churches where the service more closely resembles a funeral service than a celebration.

My old friend Vance Havner once wrote: “I could never understand why some Christians could go to a ball game on Saturday and yell like a bunch of wild Indians, and then go to church the next day and sit like a bunch of wooden Indians! Too many church services start at eleven o’clock sharp and end at twelve o’clock dull. ‘The clock struck twelve at Sunday noon and the church gave up her dead.’”

A joyless, gloomy Christian is a contradiction of terms! Many of you need to stop *enduring* religion and start *enjoying* a relationship with Jesus. Salvation is more like a feast than a funeral. The Christian life is a banquet hall not a concentration camp! The Christian life is like a delicious banquet. Here at Green Acres we are serving a varied menu 24/7. You can enjoy all-you-care to eat of the Bread of Life, or free refills on the Living Water, or you can feed on the meat of the Word. You may prefer our blessing buffet. It includes saucers of salvation, the fruit of forgiveness, kegs of kindness, jugs of joy, platters of peace, layers of love, and dishes of devotion—it is a feast to enjoy! It is filling, but best of all—it’s FREE! And you are invited. Here’s another great thing about God’s invitation:

### **2. Everything is ready—you only have to come**

Because my wife is a true Southern lady, whenever we are invited to someone’s home for dinner she always asks, “Is there anything I can bring?” That’s a polite thing to ask, but when you are invited to God’s salvation banquet, there’s nothing you have to bring, and there’s nothing you can do, it’s all been done. As Jesus said in verse 17, “Come, everything is now ready!” He

provides the appetizers; we only have to bring our appetite. He provides the meal; all we have to bring is the mouth!

As I have studied the different religions of the world, I have discovered most other religions consider their god to be a powerful deity who is not to be disturbed. They perform religious acts and rituals to try to appease their god so he won't punish them. They are happy if their god never notices them. They hear their god saying, "Run from me." And they do!

The God of the Bible is saying just the opposite. He isn't saying, "Run from me." He saying, "Come to me." Our God isn't some mysterious deity who is so mysterious and unreachable you have to search all your life to find Him; He's close by.

I believe one of God's favorite words is "come." All throughout the Bible He invites people to Himself. I love Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) That's exactly what some of you need today; you are weary and burdened and you need rest. But that's not the only invitation God extends. When God was preparing to destroy wicked mankind with the flood, He directed Noah to build an ark. When the waters of judgement came, God was already on the ark. That's why we read these words in Genesis 7:2, "Then the Lord said to Noah, 'COME into the ark...'" Some of you need to come into the safety of God's ark, Jesus, so you can escape the waters of judgement you are facing. One of my favorite verses in all the Bible is found in Isaiah 1:18, where we read, "COME now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow..." Is your soul filthy and dirty today because you are carrying a pile of sin and wickedness? If you will come to the Lord, He can totally cleanse you. On the last page of the Bible, God gives one final invitation: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'COME!'" And let him who hears say, 'COME!' Whoever is thirsty, let him COME..." (Revelation 22:17) From Genesis to Revelation, God has been holding out His arms to sinful people saying, "Come to me, I love you, and I can help you." It's hard for me to believe anyone would decline His invitation, but many did and many do. Let's notice:

## **II. THE INSULT: EXCUSE ME!**

In verse 18 Jesus said, "but they all alike began to make excuses." Remember, the invitation giving the day of the banquet had already been extended and accepted weeks earlier. But these people began to make lame excuses at the last minute. In the Middle East, to decline an invitation from a great man was like a slap in the face, an egregious insult. In verse 21, we are told the owner of the house became angry. God is still angered by the empty excuses people try to offer Him.

An excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie. They are alibis that become lullabies. Our culture has refined the art of making excuses. Perhaps you've seen the list of excerpts from actual automobile accidents that explain why people had wrecks. The Metropolitan Insurance Company has published this list:

Reasons/Excuses for Auto Accidents:

(1) "An invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my car, and vanished."

- (2) "The pedestrian had no idea which direction to go, so I ran over him."
- (3) "I had been driving for 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had the accident."
- (4) "The indirect cause was a little guy in a small car with a big mouth."
- (5) "The other driver was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him."
- (6) "I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed over the embankment."

There are a multitude of websites suggesting hundreds of excuses you can give for any situation. They even have them divided into categories. For instance, there are excuses to use if you are caught sleeping at work. A couple of the excuses are: "They told me at the blood bank that this might happen." But the best excuse they suggested was to simply say, "Amen."

There were three excuses given in Jesus' parable. They are the same excuses people are giving to God today. On the surface, they may appear to be legitimate reasons, but when you examine them, you'll discover they are empty excuses they gave simply because they didn't want to attend the party.

### **Excuse #1: I've got to take care of my stuff!**

The first man said he just bought some land and he had to go examine it. Now, how many of you would buy a piece of property without seeing it first? If you would, I've got some prime oceanfront property in Amarillo I want to sell you! This man represents folks who are so possessed by their possessions they are controlled by them. They spend their lives buying more and more stuff and then they have to spend all their time protecting and maintaining and using all their stuff. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist of the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

### **Excuse #2: My job keeps me too busy!**

The second fellow indicated he just purchased five yoke of oxen, so he was going out to test them. These wedding feasts were always held in the evening, so do you really think this guy was going out into the dark to practice plowing with his new oxen? Gimme' a break! It's a lame excuse.

But you and I know dozens of people who don't have time for God because they stay so busy with their jobs. They are so consumed by their work they can't squeeze God into their busy schedule. I've known folks who used to serve God, but they became so successful they no longer have time to serve the Lord in their church.

Dr. R. G. Lee tells the story about a young man in his church in Memphis named Bob. Bob and his young family faithfully attended and faithfully served in Bellevue Baptist Church where Dr. Lee was pastor. Bob was a business genius and started a single retail store that was so successful he expanded and built other stores until he was wealthy. However, he was so busy he never had time for God any more. Dr. Lee said Bob and his family showed up about once a month and quit working in the church. Dr. Lee was pretty bold, so he went to Bob's office one day and walked

right passed the receptionist, and Bob's secretary into Bob's office. Bob was surprised but he said, "Dr. Lee, good to see you." Dr. Lee, said, "Bob I've come by to pray for your business." Bob stammered, "Sh-sure." They got down on their knees and Dr. Lee proceeded to pray, "Lord, I pray that you'll make Bob's business fail." That caused Bob's head to jerk up! Dr. Lee continued, "I pray that you'll take away all those other stores and just give him his original store, because You remember, Lord how much He loved You and served You back before he got too busy for You. In Jesus name, Amen." Bob said, "Dr. Lee, I didn't really like that prayer." Dr. Lee, said, "That's okay, Bob I wasn't talking to you, anyway. See you Sunday." That prayer got Bob's attention, and he started making God and his work a higher priority than his retail business. He and his family got involved again, and instead of losing his business, it grew, but serving God became his main business. Are you using your job as an excuse for giving God 100% of your life?

### **Excuse #3: My family takes up my time!**

Now, I like this third guy because he was a newlywed. Can't you picture this young fella? He's got his hair slicked back so far he can't even blink. He's just learning about marriage. Maybe this kid was saying something like, "I'd like to come, but my wife won't let me." He's clueless, because just think, if he had accepted the invitation it would have given him a reason to miss one of his wife's first home-cooked meals!

But we know this is an empty excuse, too. It was unheard of to invite a man to a wedding feast and not invite the wife. They were BOTH invited, but he just didn't want to accept the invitation, so his marriage was a convenient excuse. Now, spending time with your wife and family is a noble pursuit. It is a much better investment of your time than working or playing with your stuff. However, family can even get in the way of serving God. Jesus said you cannot follow Him unless you love Him more than your mother or father, or brothers or sisters, or wife or husband or children. Family time is important, as I mentioned a few weeks ago.

Today, there are thousands of people in Smith County who choose not to relate to God on a regular basis because they use their Sundays for family outings. The very best family outing is to take your family to worship with you. You can't use your family as an excuse for not coming to God. Actually, no excuse holds water with God. You can lie and deceive other people, but you can't fake God out. There is no legitimate *reason* for not accepting His invitation. In Romans 1:20 we read, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

God has placed you on this earth with a few years of physical life so you can choose to come to Him. His Word and His invitation is everywhere. He's watching—there will be a test—and God doesn't grade on the curve!

I heard about four college freshmen that hung out together and were always intent on having more fun than studying. These guys were always late to a certain class, because they knew the professor was a pushover. They had a multitude of excuses why their assignments weren't finished on time, or why they didn't show up for class. When it came time for the final exam

they were late. About the time everyone else was finishing, they showed up giggling and told the professor their car had a flat tire, so they wanted to take a make up test later. The professor said, "No problem, have a seat in the four corners of the classroom. I'll prepare a special final exam just for you guys, and I'll make it easier—it will only have one question. And since you guys haven't turned in all your assignments, I'll give you another chance. If all four of you answer this question correctly, you'll all get an A, but if any of you miss it, you'll fail the class." He took a moment to write the question in four exam bluebooks. The four guys were grinning when he handed them their books, but their smiles disappeared when they opened the test. The single question on the final exam was, "Which tire was flat?" As the professor stood there between them, they realized they were caught. They each tossed their exam books in the trashcan, as they walked out. Their excuses had caught up to them!

You can make excuses galore while you are here, but one day, all the "reasons" you give for not coming to God and serving Him will become empty excuses. Consider, finally,

### **III. THE INSTRUCTIONS: INVITE EVERYONE!**

When the master learned the guests refused to come he was insulted and angry! But he didn't cancel the party; He just expanded his invitation to include everyone in the region. God is angered by people's excuses, too. But unlike the man in the parable, God keeps on extending His invitation to you repeatedly. In the story, the servants were sent out to invite all kinds of people: the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. Jesus used these suffering people as an example because the self-righteous Pharisees thought these people were blind, poor, and lame because God was *punishing* them, but Jesus was showing God loves all kinds of people—even Texans!

At this point in the parable, our role changes. For those of us who have accepted God's invitation to His salvation party, we are now the servants He sends out. If you are a servant of God, there are two things you should be doing:

#### **1. God's servants must go and deliver the invitation**

Every Christian is like a heavenly Postman, or UPS worker, or FedEx worker: we are delivery boys and girls. God has issued the invitation to everyone—and we are to deliver. We should take it to the down who live in the shacks, and the to the up and outs who live in the mansions. It's to *everyone!*

That's why we are an evangelistic church. We don't believe once you've got your ticket to heaven punched you should just sit around and enjoy the part—we want to invite others. God has told us to GO, so we GO! That's why we have FAITH training on Monday nights, we go out into the community and deliver God's invitation. That's why we send groups to Canada, Cuba, and Asia, because the Master has commanded us to GO and share the Good News, even to the ends of the earth. A person who actively tries to lead people to Christ is called a soul-winner, based upon the words found in Proverbs 11:30, "He who wins souls is wise." Andrew Murray said there are only two kinds of Christians: Soul winners and Backsliders. Are you doing as the Master commanded? Have you delivered His invitation to anyone?

## 2. God's servants must bring people into His house until it's full

God never plays poker, but He sure loves a full house! After the first rounds of invitations, the servants returned and said, "There is still room." He sent them out again and said, "Make them come in." The King James Version says, "Compel them to come in." The Master is saying, "Don't just invite them, bring them if you can!" Sadly, that verse about "compel them to come in" has been used throughout history to justify religious persecution and was the basis of the bloody Inquisition. We should always go in kindness and use tact and gentleness, but God does want us to have a sense of urgency and fervency as we go. God's house is not a church building, it's His family, and we must always be making room for one more. That's why we built this building, so we could make room for more people to come into the family of God.

I've heard people say Green Acres is too big. How big is too big? God wants His house to be *full*. He wants us to keep bringing folks into His family. I've said before, the day we decide we are too big, that's the day I'll string a banner across Troup Highway that says, "GREEN ACRES DECLARES 'GO TO HELL' SUNDAY." When a church stops going and stops bringing people to Christ, that's what they are saying: you can just go to hell for all I care. But if I have anything to do with, we'll *never* come to a time when we say, "We're full, sorry, we aren't going to provide a parking place for you, or a pew for you, or a baby bed for you."

## CONCLUSION

Someone once said there are only two kinds of people on this earth: Those who put people in only two groups and those who don't. Jesus Christ definitely put people into only two groups. He said, "If you aren't for me you are against me. If you aren't gathering for me, you are scattering." Right now, you are either someone who has accepted God's invitation to join Him, or you haven't. I'd like be His servant right now and deliver His simple but beautiful invitation to any man, woman, boy or girl who needs one:

Dearest (your name),

You are cordially invited to come and enjoy the delicious banquet of my salvation. Serving will begin at My House and will continue for eternity. I'd love for you to come and get to know Me personally—and join my Family. This feast is free to you because the cost has already been paid by My precious Son, Jesus. You are receiving this invitation simply because I love you. Please join me...and you may come just as you are.

Sincerely,  
God Almighty

RSVP

Engraved with the Blood of Jesus

What is your response? Will you accept His invitation? Or will you make an excuse? Either you will accept it or reject it. For those of you who choose to reject God's gracious invitation, I have

something for you. Here’s an excuse form for you to use. Fill it out and tear it off. Keep it with you all your life, and when you die, leave instructions for the funeral director to place this excuse form in your hand, so when you stand before God, you can offer Him your excuse.

Dear Jesus,

On June 23, 2002, I heard your servant, Pastor David Dykes, invite me to come to You for forgiveness of my sins and eternal salvation. I’m sorry, I cannot come to You today because (give your excuse)

Then sign it “ Not Yours truly.”

What are you going to write? What excuse do you think God will accept? Instead, why don’t you accept His invitation to receive Jesus as your personal Lord? That way when you go to heaven, you can sing, “Nothing in my hand I bring, only to Thy Cross I cling!”

## OUTLINE

### I. THE INVITATION: COME TO THE PARTY!

1. Knowing is more like a feast than a funeral

2. Everything is ready—you only have to come

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." *Matthew 11:28*

### II. THE INSULT: EXCUSE ME!

Excuse #1: I've got to take care of my stuff!

Excuse #2: My job keeps me too busy!

Excuse #3: My family takes up my time!

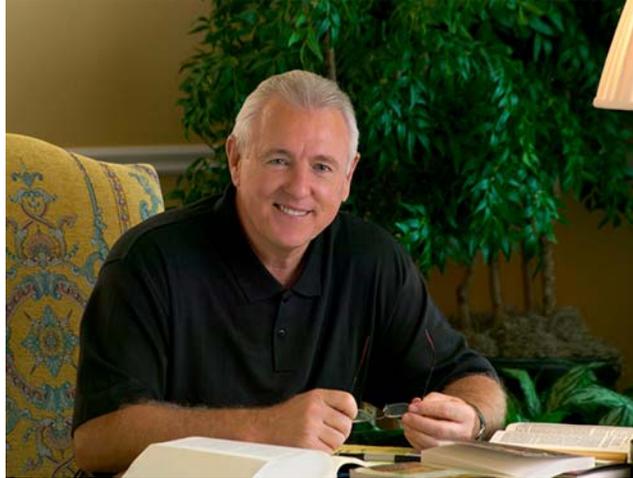
"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that MEN ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE." *Romans 1:20*

### III. THE INSTRUCTIONS: INVITE EVERYONE!

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1. Go and deliver the invitation

2. Bring people into His house until it's full



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes