

If there's anything that you can call Jesus--we could call him many things, actually. You could say that he is humble. You could say that he is the King of love or the Prince of peace-- but if there's anything that you cannot call him, it's a coward. Because Jesus is sitting here in the middle of a group of Pharisees, at a feast, to be exact. And in the middle of this feast, he tells this parable as a warning, as a warning to all of them that they should beware lest they not listen to God and time run out for them to listen. He is certainly courageous to do this in the midst of them, but he also proclaims the same message courageously to us today. Christians, we are called to listen, to listen to what God has to say, because frankly there may not always be a tomorrow.

Now I know when we look at this parable most of the time, we probably tend to focus on things like the people who are being brought in. The poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, and the foreigners who are all being brought into the house. And that's certainly a valid part of this parable, but it's not the main point. It's really kind of a secondary point after we get through the main thrust of this parable, which is just that, that we are called to listen lest our time run out, and there be no more time to pay attention.

Because consider what Jesus is saying in this parable. He says this, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many." Now we know from the other parables that Jesus, when he tells parables, he's telling us something about the kingdom. So one thing stands for another. And in this case we see that the man in this parable is a symbol for God the Father. God the Father who is giving this great banquet. God the Father who is sending forth his servants. God who is the one who is the focus of this parable. And this man, it says, once gave a great banquet. And the banquet, we are told in many places in the Scriptures, is a symbol of our salvation, of that which is coming. Because we're told in books like Isaiah that God will prepare a rich feast on his holy mountain, a feast of rich foods and well-aged wine. The feast, which is coming, that prosperity, is the salvation which God is holding out to you today, the salvation which he is offering to all people. So in this parable, the man giving a banquet is a symbol of God offering his salvation, offering heaven to those whom he invites. And he invites many, because God desires to save many. God desires to bring us into this kingdom and to make us a part of it. But at the time of the banquet, we are told, this master sends his servant to go and to say to those who had been invited, "Come, because everything is now ready!" The servant is a symbol of his prophets, of the apostles, even his pastors, those who have been sent to proclaim the word of God, to call all who will hear to that feast, the feast of salvation which God has prepared in his Son Jesus Christ. And so when they go and proclaim that message, they are proclaiming the Gospel, the Gospel which will bring us into the kingdom.

But the people in this parable aren't really listening, are they? They begin to make excuses, excuses why they don't want to go. The first one says, "I have bought a field, and I must go out and examine it. So please, have me excused." Not very good excuse, though, is it? For two reasons, really. Because on the one hand, he could have gone tomorrow. He doesn't have to go right now, because the field isn't going to disappear. It isn't going to change. He could've done it some other time and gone to the feast right now. But it's also not a good excuse because who buys a field without looking at it? Either this guy has no business sense whatsoever and is a complete idiot, or, what is more likely, he's looking for anything, anything he can come up with, no matter how stupid it might sound, rather than go to the feast to which he has been invited. And the same is true of the next one. He says, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I need to go examine them. Please have me excused." Again, it could wait, and again, who buys things without looking at them? He's making up any excuse that he can think of to get out of having to go to the feast. And the third one says, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." He's not even asking to be excused. He just says, "I'm not coming. I'm not going to do it. I married a wife." She could've come too, but he's coming up with anything rather than go to God's feast.

Is it a surprise, then, that the master of this house is angry? These aren't good excuses. And so he is angry at these men, saying, "Fine! They don't want to come. I'll find someone else to come to my feast. Go out to the streets. Go out to all of the roads of this city, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame," the people that you wouldn't invite to a feast, the outcasts of society. They will be the ones who will come into this feast. But the servant says, "We did it. And there's still room. What should we do now?" This is where he says, "Fine. Go out to the highways and to the hedges. Find foreigners, people who we don't even know, people who aren't even part of this community. Bring them in, and they will be a part of my feast. For I tell you, none of the men who were originally invited shall taste my banquet."

And that is the warning, Christians, that God is giving us in this parable, the warning that he gave to the Pharisees to turn from their sinfulness, to listen to the Lord their God, lest they be left out of the banquet to which they were originally invited. And they were left out, because they did not turn. They kept in their sinful ways, and God cut them off. Like the natural branches of the tree, as Paul says in the book of Romans, cut them off and threw them away to make room for the branches which have been grafted in which are you and I. And if God was not willing to spare the natural branches for their unbelief, do you think he will anything different for those of us who originally not part of this tree?

And that is the warning, Christians, that God gives to you and to I this day. Will we listen to when God speaks to us? Because the time is coming, Christians, when there will be no more time. How do we know that we will have a tomorrow? How do we know that we will have a next week? We don't. This very night your soul may be required of you, and these things which you have gathered for yourselves, whose will they be? Are we going to come up with excuses why we don't want to be in the things of God? Excuses like fields and cattle and family, excuses or maybe even worse, like entertainment and pleasure and comfort? Anything, because we figure, hey! We've always got time. There's always more time to do the things that God would have me do. But do we have that time? Do we have tomorrow?

Because Christians, God calls to you today. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the favorable time. God comes to you today with his holy Word, that Word which brings you life and salvation, that Word in which we abide means that we are abiding in Christ. God comes to you today with his Son's body and blood to forgive you your sins and to bring you into his kingdom. God comes to you now, and he offers you his salvation now. We don't always know if there will be another time, but what we do know is that God's offer of salvation is for you today. So hold onto him. Listen to him. Come to him, because he offers it to you freely. Come to the banquet, the great feast of the Lamb, and receive life and forgiveness and salvation. Because the feast which he has prepared for you in Jesus Christ is yours today, and he offers it to you freely. So come. Receive his gifts. Call upon his name, and be saved.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.