

## Sermon: Luke 14:16-24

*Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.'"*

We have in the parable of the Master's invitation to the great feast an answer to the question that after the teaching of what seems months now we should be asking. That is, we've seen, over and over again the Grace of God rejected by the very ones logically it seems should be the very ones to understand what is before them and accept it. Why? Why do those who seem to be the ones for whom Christ has come, the leaders of Israel and teachers of the law and transcribers of the Scripture, become the most common to reject Him?

It is not by chance the Church has placed this parable for us to consider at this point in our journey in the Gospel of Christ. St. John Chrysostom helps us understand this parable as the answer to not just this question, but as he so often does, he also convicts us to look at ourselves in light of the truth of the Gospel.

He notes first that the supper is held in the evening, signifying the end of the age of Israel and the approach of the New Covenant. Obviously the Master is God the Father and the faithful servant is Jesus Christ, The great supper that He is preparing for them of course is what we come to see almost matter-of-factly as the salvation of our souls. But look how the salvation is revealed to us: not so much as a heavenly place but as a relationship. And not only a connection to God, but in joyful, fulfilling, sustenance-filled fellowship with God!

Truly, salvation then, as it is revealed to us by Christ through the Church, is not a *what* or *where*, but a *who* – because the feast without the presence of the master would be just another good meal. Bliss without the presence of God would be earthly happiness: psychological and physical well-being but soul-less and therefore incomplete and ultimately temporary. It would simply *not* be the stuff to satisfy us eternally...no way. We'll speak more of this later, for now let's consider their response.

Notice what they who refuse Him say – *I bought land, I bought oxen, I married*. St. John says this covers explicitly and implicitly the three passions that keep our souls infirmed and keep us from recognizing the Grace of God when He reveals Himself to us. Let's consider them in some depth.

The land and the oxen represent the material possessions and all the things that hold people to them – what we refer to as materialism: it's the passion of acquisitiveness we've discussed in previous weeks. The coveting or lust for things.

The soul ill with the passion of materialism is blind to the spiritual dimension of life. If it can not experience it with the senses – it is not real, or if it is, it is not important anyway. St. John says

this is the deeper meaning of the five team of oxen: they represent the five senses. In other words, the man is blind to spiritual reality because he can not – and will not – consider anything beyond his senses.

But there is a deeper, more toxic aspect of materialism, you could say the real passion behind the passion. You see, the real danger of this sin is not the trusting of the five senses – the faith they place in their senses is actually the *product* of the passion - not the cause. The cause, the source of this lethal passion, is trusting in the one who's senses are trusted. Which is another way of saying trusting yourself. And not just trusting yourself – but trusting yourself *only*. And you trust yourself only because you have judged yourself to be good without God. This is the passionate ground in which materialism grows.

Likewise the man who refused to come because he married demonstrates the passion of sensual pleasure. As the man that trusts nothing but himself is mastered and imprisoned by the senses, so the one who lives for physical pleasure is likewise mastered and imprisoned. It's really just a different side of the same passionate coin. The bottom line is that each is obedient to the only god either recognize as god – themselves. This self-trust is the third passion St. John speaks of.

The passions of materialism, of sensual pleasure and of vainglory or self love - which the Fathers described as *φιλαυτία* literally 'love of self,' are why they do not respond to the invitation. Why should they? They don't need the master's food even though it will undoubtedly be quality food and be delicious.

But much, much more importantly, they recognize no master but themselves! This is why they won't come. This is why the leaders of Israel can not hear Jesus' words or seem to see the miracles he does even though both happen right in front of their eyes! It is not really that they reject Him as much as it is they have no intention of rejecting themselves as their own master. ...Of repenting. Of acknowledging they can not save themselves, that in fact the only thing that *really* lies within their power is begging God for mercy – but that's the last thing they'll do because they see themselves as righteous.

St. John says, it is not that God is rejecting them, it is that they are rejecting Him. And in the saddest irony of all, he notes that when you consider that the *Kingdom of God* (as Jesus reminds them in Chapter 17) *is within you*, *is near you* (as it is described in Mark), they're actually rejecting who *they* really are, that is, their created purpose and therefore deepest and truest identity. Ultimately they betray not God but themselves.

Notice also in this view of salvation given to us by Christ there is no reward or punishment. The supper is not a reward to those invited, and the invitation extended to others is not their punishment ...Whatever negative result they will experience from having chosen **not** to come is the direct and exclusive result of that choice. It is what they wanted - or in this case, did not want.

You may be thinking at this point about the other banquet (the wedding banquet) Jesus uses to illustrate salvation from Matthew 22 and wondering: wait a minute, that man didn't have the wedding garment and he was cast out – he *was* punished. But was he? Actually it is the same thing that is happening in this 'salvation as feast' illustration. Just as those invited in this parable chose not to come and were consequently left out of the feast, the man without the wedding garment of that parable was not punished; rather, he experienced the consequences of choosing to not prepare himself for the banquet. He wasn't punished anymore than gravity punishes a man

for choosing to step off a cliff. It was not personal. Everyone had to have a wedding garment in order to be in the feast – to be with the Master at this wedding celebration.

So why does the Master - God - invite them? It certainly is not because he is lonely, or because He needs them. He doesn't need anything - he certainly does not need them. It is they who need Him. He is inviting them because he is the master and they are His people and He loves them.

He loves them. But love cannot be love and be forced. ...not between adults. With children yes, but we are not children and God respects our choices – even when they hurt Him – and us.

And so he opens His invitation to His other children that he also loves – because he loves us all equally. But we are not the same. Our calling varies as much as our personalities and personal histories. Israel was to be the city on the hill, but the leaders were not able to overcome the passions we've discussed – resulting in the deadliest passion of self-love.

So he sends His servant to the others that live in the city, that are of Israel, and these he knows will come because they have no material possessions, they have no ability to satisfy their pleasures and they have no confidence or trust in themselves. They have nothing to protect and they have even less to lose. They are the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind of Israel. They have nothing *but* repentance. In losing all hope in this world and in this life in the flesh, they have found their souls. They have found the patience the Lord was talking about when he said “by your patience possess your souls.”

And from among the repentant of Israel the invitation goes out to the gentiles – those who are off the grid. They are on a different road, even to the point of being behind barriers. In other words they have only one thing in common with Israel: and it is not Moses or the Law or anything pertaining to the Law or history of Israel.

They have just one thing: they are also those who find no lasting hope in this world and the things of this world and worldly existence. They are those who know God in their hearts and consciences and who yearn for Him. They are those who, when they are told and shown they will see and hear and will be immediately drawn by the repentance that is waiting within them to be released. They are ready to be brought into the Kingdom of God within them.

Well, what about us? Are we ready to be brought into the Kingdom of God within us?

That invitation? Make no mistake, since the time it has been given, there is still room at this supper table my brothers and sisters. In fact, as St. John tells us, He's brought the supper to us and some of you will experience it today. This supper is extended to all who repent and believe and submit themselves to God as He has made Himself known and accessible in His Church – His body. The body of Christ.

This is why He says we must leave all and follow Him. Why we have to pick up and carry our cross. Why we cannot serve God and Mammon. Why we must love – not even parents or children – more than we love Him. But who can do that? How?

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. And God makes all things possible when we repent. When we trust Him and NOTHING ELSE – *especially* ourselves. This brings life-giving patience. The patience that by the grace of God empowers us to “possess our souls.”