

Responding to the Invitation, Part 4

Luke 14:15

One of my favorite texts of scripture, for its value as a reality check, but also as a reminder of what truly matters before God, is in 1 Corinthians 1:26 and following. In the first chapter there in 1 Corinthians, Paul reminds the Corinthians, and he's reminding them of this because they had become a little too big for their britches.

They'd become a little bit proud and self-centered and thought that they were something when they were really nothing. And Paul reminds them there in 1 Corinthians 1 he says, "For consider your calling brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many of you were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing the

things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

You count yourself in that list? The foolish, the weak, the low, despised of the world. Putting that into physical categories of the parable, the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. No chance these social outcasts will be able to steal glory from God. No chance that they'll be able to boast in themselves before him. All credit belongs to him, and so all credit goes to him.

So these on the new guest list, they share an affinity with the master, both they and the master have been rejected by the proud, the wealthy, the strong of the world. The quality of those on the guest list by almost every human measure, their quality is not great at all. In and of themselves, they know that they're the wretched, the pitiable, the poor, the blind. They have never been first to be picked on any team, anytime, anyplace.

Because they know that, they put no confidence in the flesh. Because they know that, they attribute all glory and honor to God. Their quality is measured by God. And it's in their humility that God now esteems them. He esteems them very highly. God says Isaiah 66:2, "This is the one to whom I will look. He who is humble, and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word." God esteems those kinds of people. Those who're humble, and contrite, and God fearing, the people who heed his word. That's who God esteems.

He looks at no external measure. He looks inside the heart. He looks to the person, that character before him. Their quality same thing he says in Jeremiah, Jeremiah 9:23,24, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man boast in his might. Let not the rich man boast in his riches. But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me. Then I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, and justice, and righteousness, in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." So there is room at the master's banquet table for people like that. Those who were counted as the social outcasts of Israel, verse 21. They're characterized by humility and the fear of the Lord, and that's what matters to God.

So thanks be to God that there is room for more. Not just the social outcasts of Israel, but for, verse 22, "for us." Master of the house said in verse 21, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city" and he says, "bring in the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame. The servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded,' or Lord what you commanded, 'has been done, and still there's room.' The master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them, compel people to come in. So that my house may be filled.'"

We see how the rejection of the Jews opens a window of opportunity for targeted salvation to the Gentile peoples. This is what we're seeing here. And before we get to that glorious truth that we all have benefited from, I wanna just insert a third point into the outline before we look at that Gentile salvation. This quality shared by the new guests, described it as humility, contrition, meekness, the fear of God. We see in the text's third point, the hesitancy of the new guests. We see their hesitancy is implied in the text here.

Back in verse 21, after returning to the, you know, returning to the master, getting his command. Want you to see a single verb in that verse of the master's command, he says, to the servant, he says, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city." And then it says, "and bring in the poor, crippled, blind, lame." The verb, bring in, *eisagó*, it means to conduct somebody from one place to another. You could think of bringing or leading someone from one place to another. It's like escorting them. It can also mean to carry somebody from one place to another and thus conduct them. Again, it's because that commentator had put it, the poor would get no other invitation. They expected no invitation.

The maimed would not be likely to marry, they're maimed. They are disabled. The blind, they couldn't see to go. Lame wouldn't go to prove the oxen. So because these poor, crippled, blind, lame, people, they are used to being passed over. So used to it so used to being despised, rejected, the master must command his servant go out quickly and bring them in. Carry them if you have to. And that very well may be necessary.

Notice the eagerness of the servant here. You'll remember the servant here represents Jesus in the parable. The master is the Father, the servant is Jesus. Notice his eagerness to invite and carry even the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. It's evident in verse 22, "Lord, what you commanded has been done." The words have barely gotten out of the master's mouth, and he says, already done. Check! You said go quickly, carry them in, already been done, Sir. This is the compassion of the master. It's made effectual by this eager obedience of the servant.

I'll just insert a footnote here. Isn't it neat to see when the master's heart is exposed, and revealed to us and his will is known, that we are eager as Jesus is and joyful as Jesus is, to run to obedience? That's how the master's heart in his compassion, his goodness, his kindness is made effectual, is by our eager and zealous obedience. What a joy to be a part of that. End of footnote. He's eager to go seek these people out. Jesus said to the paralytic Luke 5:20, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And then in verse 24, "'I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.' Immediately he rose up before them, he picked up what he'd been lying on, and he went home glorifying God."

With the Gentiles, God shows that same compassion, and Jesus shows that same eagerness toward us. Look verse 23, "Go out in the highways and hedges." and look at the word there, "compel them to come in." Compel them, compel people to come in. He has to overcome their hesitancy. These are Gentiles after all. They're not used to this kind of treatment by Jews.

James Edwards says this is an expression of what he calls compulsory benevolence. He explains the need for it. He says this, "People who are invited to occasions unexpectedly and for which they are unprepared are, not surprisingly, reticent to accept them. The use of compel reflects ancient Near Eastern practices, in which a resolute host takes the hand of hesitant guest and ushers him or her personally into the house." End quote. Frédéric Godet, he says that this, "applies to a people who would like to enter but are yet kept back by a false timidity. A servant is, is to push them in a manner, into the house, in spite of their scruples." End Quote.

This is why the master sends his servant, and he sends him out with the command, overcome their hesitancy by compelling them. Compel. This isn't forcing them against their will. That's not the idea here. This isn't conversion at the point of a sword or at the end of our M4. This is leading the hesitant. This is being gentle to the timid. This is overcoming the anxieties of the fearful. It's leading them by the hand gently, but firmly into the banquet hall. It's insisting along the way. No, he chose you for this. No, here's your invitation. It's got your name right here. It's your name, it's not a forgery, really did come from me. Here's the promise in scripture. This is rightly called an expression of compulsory benevolence. This is how we need to evangelize. This is how we need to go out to them. This is how it was brought to us.

Just like the poor, crippled, blind, and lame among the Jews, the social outcasts among the Jews, the Gentiles too. They're used to being despised by the Jews. Paul says that in Ephesians 2:12, that they're separated from Christ. They're alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. They're strangers to the covenants of promise. They have no hope, they're without God in the world. They're pagans.



It's clear evidence yet again, of God's great, great kindness. His goodness, his compassion, his power to put all that into effect, to save those who are despised and rejected. He shows compassion to the dregs and the castaways. He is gentle and tender toward those who are rejected by the proud, and the wealthy, and the elite. Oh, we're going to need a dose of this gospel, aren't we in our day?

As we see elites basically taking over the world, and government, and politics, and setting direction for the world ahead of us. There's no gentleness, and tenderness, and compassion among the elite, among the wealthy. They despise and look down upon those whom they rule.

Oh, but this is a gospel for our time. This is a gospel for our day, and we are the bearers of this good news. God's compassion is not partial to ethnic Jews only. God's compassion extends to an entire world of lost people as he illustrates in verse 23, he previews there in verse 23, a future work in this parable. A work that is secured by his cross. Go out there, the master

says, and compel people to come in and he uses that compulsory benevolence to bring those Gentiles who are very far, to bring them near.

So that brings us to a final point, and this is what reveals the master's intent. There's actually a subordinating conjunction that is used to express purpose here in this section. That shows the divine will. Point number four, the diversity of the new guests. The diversity of the new guests. So we can at least say a diversity of Jew and Gentile. Diversity of the new guests. The master instructed his servant in verse 21, he says, Go and bring in the social outcasts from popular Judaism, bring them in. And that's been done. Jesus comes, reports, that's been done.

He invited the tax collectors, the sinners in verse 21. Many of them responded in faith. But there's still room, praise be to God, and the opportunity then widens to reveal the master's full intent to bare his heart and intention all along. Go out into the, what he calls the highways and the hedges, the highways and the hedges.

When he says go out, he means go out of the city. So he's been talking about ministry in the city. Now let's go outside of the city that is into the open countryside. It's a picture of the gospel that leaves the boundaries of the nation of Israel. It's like Acts 1:8 in those terms. It's leaving Jerusalem and Judea and then extending and entering into Samaria at first, and then extending even further to the Gentiles who live at the uttermost parts of the earth. That's where the country roads will take you. Keep wandering them and keep going. That's where it takes you is to the very far reaches of the empire, far reaches of the world.

As Jesus is telling this parable, it reveals something that these people around the table have not only no heart or stomach for, but no mind for. This is completely outside their understanding, but he is revealing something to us here that we are living proof it's happened. Parable here portrays the master's concern for those who are outside the borders of Israel. "Go out into the highways and the hedges," he says. Paul wrote in Romans 11:11, this is what he described there is "through Israel's trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles,"

the highways in the hedges. This parable anticipates not only Gentile salvation, but in light of the Jewish rejection of Jesus and his crucifixion on the cross, it also indicates the post resurrection post ascension, mission to the Gentiles in light of the Jews continuing opposition to the gospel.

Just wanna take a brief foray into the letter of the Ephesians. If you'd like to turn there to Ephesians Chapter 2. And we'll just work out a little bit of the theology that's there in Ephesians Chapter 2. Paul, when he refers to a dividing wall in Ephesians 2, not only does he refer to what is a historical reference for the Jews, a physical reality in the temple environment, but he may be alluding to Jesus' use of the word hedge right here in this parable.

In Ephesians 2:14, if you identify that verse there, Paul uses that same word, *phragmos*, Ephesians 2:14 it says, "For," Christ, "himself is our peace, who has made us both one," Jews and Gentiles, and he, that is Christ, "has broken down in his flesh," there it is right there, "the dividing wall." That's the *phragmos*, that's, "the dividing wall of hostility." This dividing wall of hostility, it pictures a wall in the temple

courtyard. A literal wall that separated Jew from Gentile. He describes it as a wall of hostility. Not simply a physical barrier, not just simply a *phragmos*, he describes as a wall of hostility, which is very accurate.

Hostility is the word, *echthra*. It's enmity, it's hatred, animosity. The Jews thought that way about the Gentiles. They were lower, they're unenlightened barbarians. They are veritable dogs. Even today, a Jewish prayer book called the *Siddur*, it contains a daily prayer for Jewish men, "Blessed are you Hashem," that is to say, blessed are you The Name, they just call him The Name, "king of the universe. Blessed are you for not having made me a Gentile." The daily prayer.

Jews kept this Gentile court separate from the inner court, a Jew-only area. Marking the two areas was a short wall called *Soreq*. It was four and a half feet high, literally a dividing wall. And it kept the Gentiles from entering into the inner court where the Jews were. And they had posted a message on that wall written in several languages. Put at different places it says, "No stranger," by that they're referring to a Gentile, "No stranger is to enter within the balustrade, round the temple and

enclosure. Whoever is caught will be responsible to himself for his death, which will ensue.”

In other words, you cross this line you die. Probably could have saved some ink if they would have just written it that way. It was not friendly at all. It's a threat. It's intended to be a threat. It's intended to convey the enmity and the hostility from Jew to Gentile. Because they, the Jews felt that they had experienced that from the Gentiles back to them. In fact, the presence of the Romans within their land demonstrated that very fact. They hated each other. There's enmity. There's a dividing wall of *phragmos*, dividing them and reminding them all the time of this hostility, and hatred, and enmity.

So how did this get resolved? In Christ. Look at Ephesians 2, “For he himself is our peace, he has made us both one. He's broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two. So making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”

God has unleashed power in this text, power in Christ. First, it's a destructive power. It's a power to destroy what divides us first from himself, he's destroyed that. He unleashes another destructive power to destroy what's divides us from one another in Christ. Look at the language there, God broke down, he abolished, he killed. And then God unleashed another power, a creative power positively focused, reconciling Jew and Gentile to himself, bringing them together in Christ.

There's this profound, unbreakable unity. Paul said he is our peace. He made both of us one, he created in himself one new man, to replace the two. He made peace, not only is that he is our peace, but he made peace, how's that, by reconciling us both to God in one body. Why does God extend his mercy universally? Beyond his chosen people? It's because his glory is that great. It can't be contained. His glory is eternal. It is infinite and therefore by definition it is uncontainable.

God intends, as Romans 9:23 and following says he intends, "to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy which

he's prepared beforehand for glory - even us whom he's called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed it says in Hosea, 'Those who are not my people,' it's us, 'I will call "my people" and her who was not beloved I'll call 'beloved.'" "The very place where it was said to them, 'You're not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Where is that going to happen? By obliterating that wall in the heart of the temple. They were called, "not my people" there outside the wall, outside, treated with enmity and now obliterating that dividing wall in that place, they're called "my people."

So we've dipped into the writing of Paul. Just filling out some of the theology, let's go back to Luke 14:23, finish this out. "The master said to his servant," and that is, as you know, the father speaking to his son Jesus. He says "go out," verse 23, "go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, in order that my house may be filled. For I tell you none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet."

He reveals the father's intention. It's portrayed in the diversity of the new guests who enter into the kingdom, who come



into his great banquet. They raise a chorus of praise in honor of his son, who is their savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's this Jesus who in reconciling us to God through his atoning sacrifice on the cross, this Jesus broke down that dividing wall of hostility. And it says at the end of the book at the end of the Bible, Revelation 5:9, They're all saying "Worthy are you, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God," get this, "from," what, "every tribe and language, and people and nation." All kinds of ways to divide us up, all kinds of ways to distinguish us from one another. Every tribe, language, people, and nation and you've made them a kingdom, priests to our God, one.

All these guests share an affinity with God. They are eager and grateful recipients of God's amazing grace. These new guests are all united with that same quality. They're humbled to the floor, contrite in spirit, trembling at God's word. They're amazed that they're favored. Especially in light of who they know themselves to be. In spite of their own inherent unworthiness. These new guests then are united in Jesus Christ. They're redeemed by his blood. They're justified by God's grace.

Over in Revelation Chapter 7, it says, using this, again, this diversity language Chapter 7 verse 9, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!'" Unity in that diversity. The glorious diversity of that great multitude, from every nation, all tribes, all peoples, all languages. Even at the end God still regards those distinctions. He still sees distinctions among us.

The fact that we come from 21st century now America, the fact that we come from Northern Colorado, and all the peculiarities we have in our own place and time. We're going to have those there, sanctified, but we'll have them there, and we'll identify those people from 13th century China, and from 5th century BC Greece, everybody in between.

They all have their unique flavors, and dialects, and words, and ethnicities. God sees that, spots that, we're gonna see that, spot that. We're going to see even at the end how he regards all these nations. He marks their national, tribal lingual identity. There's a veritable kaleidoscope of color and design there, testifying to the glory of God's creativity. But all of them, all those people united with one voice.

They show forth the unity and the harmony of a shared salvation as they stand before the same throne, before the only Lamb of God, clothed in the same white robes of one person, the righteousness of God in Christ. They cry out with one voice, harmonious, singing the same song of praise, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to his Lamb."

That's what makes the end of this parable here. Which is joy for us, isn't it? But it makes it into this parable in which Jesus, he's speaking half in and half out of the parable. He's kind of stepping out of the parable. Just make a point to the guests there. He inserts himself into the story. He speaks here in the first person in verse 24. He addresses the men in the room with the plural form of you in verse 24, "I tell you, you people

sitting here, all of you sitting here before me around this table. None of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.”

That's hard. He issued a similar warning back in Luke 13:28, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the prophets, they're going to recline in the kingdom of God. But you Jewish leaders are going to be cast out. You who were invited will be cast out. People are going to come from the east and the west and the north and the south, that's all of us Gentiles, they're going to recline with them at the table in the kingdom of God. The glory of this diversity in God's plan of salvation. Joy for us. Let's give thanks for that now as we pray.

Our Father, we, we are humbled to the floor. Because we are the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame. We are those who are, spiritually speaking, wretches before you. We have nothing to commend ourselves, nothing that should cause you to turn your eye of favor upon us.

We just give thanks to you for your kindness to us in Christ, even as we see what it took, what it cost. As we see what it costs for those who were originally invited and now rejected. We also see what it costs your beloved son. He would die on the cross.

Father, we just want to thank you for your goodness to us and faithfulness. Father we're caught up into a plan that's so far, so far above us, so much greater than us. And yet you pay attention to each and every one of us, showing kindness and compassion. Speaking tenderly to us, compelling us to come, leading us by the hand and carrying us into our eternal home. We love you and thank you for all that we've learned in Jesus' name, amen.