

Missing Out By Making Excuses

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[0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship firstly. We're singing in Psalm 27. Those of our visitors will, if you have this blue psalm book, there are two sections to it. The first section is some of the newer psalms, newer renderings, and the second section from page 200 or so are the more traditional psalms, the older psalms of David in the Scottish Psalter.

So we're singing from Psalm 27 on page 236 in this blue book, 236. The tune is Jackson, singing verses 1 to 5.

And so on all the way through to the verse marked 5 on page 236. And we stand. If you're able to stand, please stand to sing. The Lord's my light on saving hell, who shall make me desperate.

My life's that there's the Lord of earth, then shall I be afraid.

When I smile and hear me sun calls, most wicked persons all, To eat my flesh against me rose, this humble dunderpong.

[2 : 06] Against me, though I'm close and calm, my heart yet fearless is.

Though more against me, price I help, be confident in this.

One thing I offer, Lord, desire, and will seek to obtain, That all days of my life I may, within God's eyes remain.

The time that beauty of the Lord behold may and admire, Am not I in His holy place may reverently inquire.

be trze athing day, but ali becomes a white man. The peace of the Lord is koyed■ lyon, of the fruit of us is full and áng h rudek, the Onae days into my money in this.■■■ tells thee to obey the Lord of O plenty of save and mil eae.

[3 : 54] For these children of this land is free, to observe the Lord of who has■■ of me that may Nak■, One day of my shoes and live in the world of earth, Or an earth will ■■■ublik and passa upon me be compared to sea.

Before we are part of the Father of albes and I'm close to sea. praise. Let's join together in prayer briefly. Our prayer is particularly for the children and young people today. Lord, our gracious God, make us thankful, we pray, even though we express our thankfulness already, increase our thankfulness that we are gathered here around your Word, and that we come together as a fellowship of believing, worshiping people. We thank you today that this is our great privilege to draw aside for a time from the things of the world, from the things of the ordinary course of life, and to give due space to the worship of your glorious name.

We thank you today, Lord, that we come together as all ages and all backgrounds, and we give thanks today that we are able to come to your Word to receive further guidance and teaching from what it has to say to us. Bless the children, we pray, as they gather with us at this time. We thank you again for them. We thank you that as they belong to your church and the world, so you have many promises attached to their participation in worship and in being in your church visibly. We bless you today for them and ask that you bless them and be with their families, with each and all who belong to them, and look after them and care for them in the world. Bless all our children. Bless the generation rising up amongst us, we pray, and shield them from all the harmful influences that are in the world that seek to draw them away from the things of the gospel, from the things of the Lord, from salvation in Christ. Bless us now, we pray, continuing with us and hearing our prayer and pardoning our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Okay, children, the hands up. Those of you who like to help with cooking or with baking, hands up. Those who like helping out mums or dads or grannies or even shenners with cooking or with baking. Yeah, quite a few hands going up, so that's always a nice thing to learn, isn't it? How to cook and how to actually bake scones or whatever it is, cakes or whatever, and then taste them

afterwards.

Well, in Psalm 34 and verse 8, we have a verse that's really to do with eating, but it's spiritually. It says that, oh, taste and see that the Lord is good. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good.

[6:50] Now, what does it mean to taste and to see that the Lord is good? Well, when you've got something to cook, if you've got a recipe that you're following, then you'll have a list before you of all the different parts of it, the different ingredients, as we call them, that go into the recipe, whether soup or a stew or you're baking a cake, you'll have a list of the things that go into it. So, you have to set apart all of those things that you're going to use, first of all, and it's important that you have them all ready and that you use them in the way that they're set out in the recipe.

And whoever makes up the recipe is always careful to actually have the recipe so that all the bits of it go together properly. All the things you use in your cooking or in your baking actually do work together and work together so that the final product, whatever you get at the end of it, is as it should be, that it tastes as it should be, and that it's actually going to be really pretty special, you hope. So, if I was looking at a recipe and it said, add, I don't know, three spoons of sugar to it if I was making a cake, and if I decided, I think instead of using sugar, I'll try and use salt.

How would that be? Do you think that would work if I just put three spoons of salt into the cake instead of what it says on the recipe, three spoons of sugar? Would that be very tasty, do you think? Hands up those who think that would be pretty horrible. Yeah, I agree it would be. So, we have to keep carefully to what's set out in the recipe because whoever made up the recipe has been very careful in putting all these things together in the right measure and the right kinds of things. Now, God is telling us in order to actually experience what it's like to be a Christian and to be saved, God has given us the food that we need, the spiritual food for our souls, and it's explained to us in the Bible.

And that's why it's important always to keep to the things that God himself has said are important for our spiritual feeding and well-being. If we try and add things that God hasn't specified, or if we take away things that God has, let's say, for example, we could think that, well, I don't really need to believe in Jesus. I can manage without doing that. Would that still be okay? Of course it wouldn't, because God is saying the recipe for eternal life means and includes believing in Jesus for our salvation. So, you actually need to have all the right ingredients, and you need to make sure you're keeping them together the way that they are in the recipe. It's the same with our salvation, with our being in the kingdom of God. All the things that God says are important, we keep them like that, and we use them and we follow them like that. The second thing I need, if I'm going to be following a recipe and actually saying that the outcome is going to be good, it's no use just looking at a picture of it. I might have a card with the recipe on it and a picture of the final dish on the card, and it looks absolutely delicious, whether it's a main dish or whether it's a dessert, like a pudding on the card. The picture of it looks great, but I can't taste it from the picture.

[10:18] I have to do it. I have to actually cook it, or I have to bake it, and then I have to taste it, and it's only then that I realize whether it's good or not. And so it is with what the Bible tells us as well. God is giving us in the Bible a picture of salvation. He describes what it's like. He sets out all the ingredients of it, but we have to actually do what it says, not just look at it. We have to do it. We have to believe. We have to confess our sins. We have to come to Jesus. We have to live the kind of life that the Bible says is pleasing to God. It doesn't matter what age we're at. That's what's important. So there's the recipe for eternal life, the recipe for a Christian life. All the ingredients need to be kept as they are carefully, and then when you actually put them together, you need to do what it says in the Bible in order to come to know God and to know Jesus for ourselves.

Now we're going to say the Lord's Prayer, so let's say the Lord's Prayer together. Amen. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Amen. We're going to praise God once again. This time we're praising him in Gaelic. We're singing two verses in Gaelic. We do this every so often, especially at times when we have a lot of visitors with us. And the Gaelic Psalm is Psalm 130. And on the back of the bulletin sheet, you'll find the English words specified there from Psalm 130, verses 7 to 8.

I say more than that to watch the morning light to see. Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with him mercies be, and plenteous redemption is ever found with him, and from all his iniquities he, Israel, shall redeem.

[12:34] A psalm of confession of sin, a psalm of assurance of salvation and forgiveness, as we come to trust in the Lord. So the two verses we're singing in Gaelic.

And for the Gaelic sing, we remain seated. These two verses, Begdachis Israel in Gaelic.

And for the Gaelic sing, we remain seated.

...

Chant ■■■■-■■ ■■■■■■. Occursor AKA Dowania Thank you.

[15:03] Thank you.

Thank you. Form 1945, we will be estrogen.

Now we're going to read from the Scriptures, from God's Word, in the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 14.

The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 14. And your pew Bibles, it should be around page 1052 or so.

I'm going to read verses 1 to 24. So Luke, chapter 14, at the beginning.

[16:24] On Sabbath, when Jesus went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?

But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. And he said to them, Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?

And they could not reply to these things. Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him.

And he who invited you both will come and say to you, give your place to this person. And then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, friend, move up higher.

Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

[17:45] He said also to the man who had invited him, When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. But he said to him, A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.

And at the time for the banquet, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, Come, for everything is now ready. But they all alike began to make excuses.

The first said to him, I have bought a field, and I must go out to see it. Please excuse me. Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to examine them.

[18:52] Please excuse me. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and the crippled and the blind and lame.

And the servant said, Sir, what you have commanded has been done, and still there is room. And the master said to the servant, Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.

For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my banquet. And may God add his blessing to this reading of his word.

Let's call upon him once again in prayer. Let's join together in prayer. Lord, our God, as we come once again to draw near to you in prayer, enable us to do so in due dependence on your Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, to bring before us those matters which we ought to lay before you in prayer.

We thank you for this access that we have to you, that we are able to speak to you as our Creator God and as our Savior, that we are able to come for ourselves through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[20 : 15] We thank you that we are assured of access and of a reception by you, as we come trusting in his name. And we pray today, O Lord, as we come before you, that you would bless us through your word, that you would bless us by your Spirit, taking of the teaching of your word, and applying it to our hearts and to our minds.

We pray that you would further us in our knowledge of yourself, knowledge of you as you are revealed in your word to us. And we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in this way, that you have not left us in the darkness of our fallenness and our sinfulness, but that you have come, Lord, to bring us the light of your truth so that it may shine into our darkness.

And we pray today that you would bless your word to us. We pray that we may be all the more dependent upon you for your word teaching. We thank you, Lord, today that we gather with others, not only here but throughout the world, indeed as we find so many people who worship you today in different places.

And we thank you for the many, many people who worship you as the same God as we do. And we give thanks today, O Lord, that we form part of a great number of people who believe in you and trust in you and seek to commend you to others.

We bring before you, Lord, the needs of our own lives as we know them, though we acknowledge that you know our need far better than we do ourselves. And we give thanks for this, for even if we find, O Lord, that there are things which we are unable to see for ourselves or measure for ourselves, we thank you that all things are known to you.

[21 : 56] We pray today as we confess our sins that we may know your forgiveness, that we may know, Lord, that cleansing of our lives in such a way that our sin will be lifted up from us and taken away and buried out of your sight.

We thank you for all that has happened to make this possible, O Lord, that you have come to enter into this world in the person of your own Son, that you have come in him to take our sin to yourself and to die the death that we deserved.

And we bless you today that at the heart of the Gospel is that person of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that great account that we have of his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.

Lord our God, what shall we render to you in return? As the psalmist once said, for all your goodness extended to us, enable us to reply with him, I will take the cup of salvation and pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of his people.

Help us then, we pray, to reach out by faith anew today and take to ourselves all that you have provided for us in the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. We pray your blessing, Lord, at this time upon us as a congregation.

[23 : 17] We pray in all our activities that we may reach out with the Gospel in due dependence upon you, that we may fulfill our own responsibilities nevertheless and realize that you are calling us to yourself not to keep to ourselves those things that you dispense to us by way of blessings, but that you tell us to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them all the things that you have commanded.

And Lord, we pray today that for our own responsibility in our own locality, this may be true of us also. So, bless us here, each one according as you see our needs.

We pray that you would, Lord, come and speak to us personally today through the Word. We pray that you bless us in our homes and families and communities.

Bless us in all that we seek to do in the world, in our daily lives. Bless, we pray, those today who have particular difficulties and traumas in life to contend with. We think of those who have serious illness.

We commend them to you. We ask that you bless those who are facing surgery. We ask for those who have lost loved ones in recent times. We pray for them.

[24 : 33] Ask, Lord, that you would bind up their hearts with your comfort and pray that they may know yourself and your strengthening during this time. We pray for those who are anxious over loved ones, those who have received bad news in regard to their health.

We pray, Lord, that all of these matters of your providence may draw us to yourself and may be blessed by you in such a way that we would, in being drawn to you, come to know the strength and

the comfort that God alone is able to minister to us.

Bless the world in which we live. Bless us in our own nation, in our own locality here. Bless all that is done, Lord, from day to day. May particularly we commend to you those who are in authority, those in the parliament, those, Lord, who have places of importance in our land as they seek to administer justice and keep law and order and deal with those who are sick.

Lord, we ask that you would return us, we pray, to the teaching and the principles of your word which have served us so well over many years. Yet, Lord, we find that in these recent days that we find so much of a decline, so much of a turning away from the teaching and from the principles, the foundational things that your word sets out for us.

Return us, we pray, and return to us, O Lord, in your own mighty power. Bless us and be merciful to us. Bless us and we ask again that you bless our children, be with them as they grow up and protect and care for them.

[26 : 08] Be with all those who seek through different agencies to deal with, those who are poor, those who have so few of the things in life that many of us enjoy. We pray that you bless them.

We ask for the work that goes on in our own locality, with regard to safe families. We pray that your blessing, Lord, will accompany all that they do. We pray, too, for road to recovery, those dealing with various types of addiction.

We pray for those, Lord, who are engaged so wonderfully in that work. And we pray that your blessing will follow all that they seek to do in your own name.

Now hear us, we pray, and this is our prayer. Continue with us throughout the service and bless us more than we are able to ask or think, pardoning all our sin for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Well, before we turn to look at that chapter in Luke, let's sing once again. And it's Psalm 116. This time it's from the Sing Psalms version.

[27 : 08] That's on page 154. Sorry, I think I gave the presenter the wrong psalm there.

It's not the wrong psalm, but it's the wrong version. It's Psalm 116 in the older version. And that's on page 395.

The tune this time is Cunningham. I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did hear. I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear.

Of death the cords and sorrows did about me compass round. The pains of hell took hold on me. I grief and trouble found. Singing the verses 5, beginning at verse 5 through to verse 14.

God merciful and righteous is. Yea, gracious is our Lord. God saves the meek. I was brought low. He did me help afford.

[28 : 10] So that's Psalm 116 from verse 5 through to verse 14 to God's praise. God merciful and righteous is.

Yea, gracious is our Lord. God saves the meek.

God saves the meek. I was brought low. He did me help afford. O thou, my soul, do thou return. Unto thy quiet rest. For your hearts below the Lord to thee, his bounty hath expressed.

For my distress and soul from death delivered what's by thee.

[29 : 36] Thy lips by hoarse. My heart, my eyes from tears. My hate from falling free.

I hear the land of those that live. Will walk the Lord before.

I can't believe. Therefore I speak. I was afflicted sore.

I said when I was in my haste. That all men lie are seen.

What shall I render to the Lord. What all his gifts to me.

[30 : 56] I love salvation. I love salvation. I love salvation. Take the cup. On God's name will I call.

I'll take my life now to the Lord.

For his people long. Now please turn with me to Luke chapter 14.

Luke chapter 14. And we're going to look at the section there from verse 12. Down as far as verse 24. It's entitled, some Bibles at least, entitled the parable of the great banquet.

So that's Luke 14 from verse 12 down to verse 24. Throughout the Bible we find that meal times were very often significant occasions.

[32 : 08] Because to have a meal at times, as the Bible describes it, is more than just to replenish your physical needs. Meal times were times of family times.

Times of family teaching. Times of family gatherings and fellowships. Time for sharing. And of course that's something that you find built into what you find in the Lord's Supper.

Which is essentially a spiritual meal as well as being physically taking bread and wine. It's a meal in terms of sharing together in the death of Christ.

In the blood of Christ. And in all that Christ has achieved by his death and resurrection. And in this passage we find that Jesus is using a meal time or a banquet really as it is.

In order to convey the teaching that he wants to get across at that time to those who are listening.

Now you have a preliminary there as he uses this as the basis of a teaching.

[33 : 11] Of teaching regarding salvation or entering into the kingdom of God. Or having a place in the kingdom of God. You'll find the preliminary to it in verses 12 to 14.

When you find there the verses that are preliminary to what he says from verse 15 also. The preliminary being that this man who gave a dinner.

When he says, when you give a dinner, don't invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your rich neighbors. Lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.

And you will be blessed. Because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. In other words, that's a challenge really to our motives as to why we do things.

What is the purpose for our doing things? What lies behind how we deal with other people? How we treat other people? And indeed, in many ways, what you find in these verses is really a key to that Old Testament book, the book of Job.

[34 : 18] The book of Job is a pretty difficult book to go through. It's a book that deals largely with suffering, the suffering of this man Job. But what's the key to it? Because he wasn't somebody who needed correction in his life.

He was a very holy man. And the key to the book of Job is, was Job really believing in God and being true to God, so that he could himself then reap the benefits of and get so much out of it even for this present life?

And the whole emphasis of the book of Job is, no, Job is not actually a believer in God. He doesn't trust in the Lord just for selfish reasons. He trusts in the Lord because it's the right thing to do.

He trusts in the Lord, come what may in his life. He goes on trusting in the living God. And in a sense, that's behind these words of Jesus as well.

You don't actually invite people so that you will get something in return for it. You do it as an act of love, as an act of mercy, or whatever it may be, just as this person was, when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you'll be blessed.

[35 : 30] That's the preliminary, really, to the words that follow on from verse 15 onwards. So as it challenges our motives, then you come across this man, one of those who reclined at table with him.

When he heard these things, he said, Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God. And I think we take from these words that he himself was pretty sure he was in the kingdom of God.

That he already belonged to the kingdom of God. Just as you find very often in the New Testament, Jesus challenging those who thought, well, by way of birth, for example, as a Jewish people, by way of their birth, they were themselves of the view, many of them, that they were automatically in the kingdom of God.

But as he said to Nicodemus in John chapter 3, no one is in the kingdom of God except those who are born again. You entered through rebirth. And here is Jesus actually saying to this man, one of them when he said, Blessed is he who or everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.

But he said to him, a man once gave a great banquet. In other words, Jesus, as he so often you find through the Gospels, he doesn't actually answer either statements or questions in the way the person making the statement or asking the question might expect.

[36 : 49] Jesus always gives the right answer, the correct answer. Sometimes he even goes as far as to say, well, this is what you should have asked and not what you did ask.

And Jesus here is in a sense correcting this man as well. Here he is confident that he himself is among the blessed ones who will eat bread in the kingdom of God, just assuming that he himself automatically is belonging to that number.

And Jesus saying, no, but a man gave a banquet. And then he went on to explain, not everyone who was invited to the banquet actually came to partake of the banquet. And as you come to this description of the banquet, we can divide it into two sections.

First of all, invitations returned by the unwilling. Invitations returned by the unwilling. And then you find also invitations extended to the unlikely.

Here from verse 22 especially. Invitations returned by the unwilling. Here he is then giving this parable.

[38 : 01] A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. At the time of the banquet, he sent a servant to say to those who had been invited, Come, for everything is now ready. In other words, the table was set.

All the things that were there for the banquet had been prepared. They were all set out. The banquet, the table, this great feast was ready for people to partake of. So those who had been invited, the servant went and said, Look, everything is now ready.

So come, come and take freely of all that's been provided for you in this banquet. And exactly the same is true of the gospel table today. Exactly the same is true of the salvation that this really is setting out for us as an imagery of salvation of the kingdom of God.

And in responding to blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God, Jesus is saying, well, there are invitations given, but they're not all returned in a way that accepts them. They're not all accepted. Some return them and say, I can't come. We'll see that when we come to the excuses. But in the gospel, in the salvation that God has provided in Jesus Christ, God is saying to you and to me today, the table is set.

[39 : 13] How is the table set? What's on the table? What's on the table is salvation, all the ingredients of salvation. Everything that you need for salvation, for time, for eternity, it's already spread on the table.

Why is it spread on the table? How has it been prepared? Well, Jesus has come. Jesus has taken our human nature to himself. Jesus has come into the world and died the death of the cross. Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus ascended to glory. Every single thing that was needed to be done to actually provide for us as fallen, sinful human beings has been done by God.

The table is set. The table is set. And the message of the gospel is, everything is now ready. Come and take your fill of what God has provided.

God has set the table already. And through the gospel today, his invitation is to you and to me.

[40 : 14] Come and sit at this table. Come and see for yourself. Or as we said to the children earlier, come and taste that God is good. How do you taste that God is good?

You actually comply. You respond obediently to his invitation to come, to his offer of salvation in Jesus Christ that comes to us through the gospel. Everything is now ready.

And then what do you read? Well, he said, they all alike began to make excuses. First of them said, I've bought a field. I must go out and see it.

Please excuse me. Another one said, I've bought five yoke of oxen. I'm going to examine them.

Please excuse me. Another one said, I've married a wife. Therefore, I cannot come. Now, we don't need to go into each of those excuses because they're really just sample excuses, if you like, that really covered all the excuses you might think of that people could give for not responding to God's invitation to come and eat at his table.

And you notice, they are all things that have to do with this current life that we're living. Life in this present world as we know it. That's what they're saying.

[41 : 27] All of these things have to do with everyday things, everyday activities, everyday situations. Somebody's bought a field. Somebody's bought five yoke of oxen. Somebody's just newly married.

All of those things are everyday happenings. And yet here they are, made as excuses for not responding to the provision that this man made in the great banquet. That's how life is.

That's how life is. And that's how you and I often are ourselves. Because when we look for an excuse not to accept Christ's offer of salvation, we very often, almost always, turn to things that we are actually engaged in in the present time.

I'm just too busy with my work. I can't afford to take the time just now to start becoming a disciple of Jesus, to follow Jesus, to actually have what the Bible requires of me in terms of attending church or coming to pray.

Life is too busy. Or maybe I have many other responsibilities. And this one then has to take its own place. Somebody might say, well, that's all very well.

[42 : 42] But at the moment I'm not in that position. Maybe later on in life when a lot of the things that burden me just now will no longer be there. Maybe then I'll be able to think more clearly about coming and taking my place at this table.

You see, they're all excuses made from everyday activities. And what it challenges us with is this. What is my priority in life?

What do I put first in life? What do I put at the top of life's agenda? What is it that I cannot afford to be without?

What is my priority? And if you go back to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel in chapter 6 especially, you'll find that Jesus addresses all the concerns that people have in the world, things that fill up our minds, that fill up our time, things that keep us back from our trusting in God and following Christ Himself.

And He points out to the likes of the lilies of the field. He says, look at them, look at them and their beauty. They're not taken up so much as people are with concerns and with worries and with anxieties.

[43 : 59] And how shall I do this? And how shall I do that? How can I afford this? How can I afford that? All legitimate worries, but you don't put them top of the agenda. So what did Jesus say? You see, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

And all these things will be added to you. You see, you begin with the kingdom of God. You begin with your salvation. You begin with pleasing God. You don't begin with the things that you cram into your life and then somehow expect to tack on believing in God or following Christ at the end of it. Must be the other way about, mustn't it? That's what He's teaching us here, the priority, the priorities in life. And the priority is the salvation, the banquet, the wonderful eternal life that God has provided for us.

So here are invitations returned by the unwilling. They all alike began to make excuse.

And then secondly, you have invitations extended to the unlikely. The servant came, verse 21, and reported these things to his master.

[45 : 12] Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame. Who were these people?

Who were these people? Well, they were generally, by the Pharisees and those who were at the top of the religious system of the time, generally they were despised people.

They were looked down on. They were not worthy of a place in the kingdom of God. That's why Jesus is emphasizing here and so often that actually the kingdom of God is for their like.

And the people who excuse themselves are very often too proud to bow to come into the kingdom of God. They're self-sufficient. They have everything themselves as so they think. And if you go back to chapter 13 and verse 28.

In that place, he says, where he speaks about those who will ultimately be rejected in the judgment of God. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[46 : 37] When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God. And you yourselves cast out. People will come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.

And behold, some who are last will be first. Some who are first will be last. That would be incredibly offensive to the Pharisaic mind. To the mind that automatically, that thinks automatically they have a place in the kingdom of God.

Who are these people? How does Jesus mean that these people are going to be ahead of us in the kingdom of God? But of course, the Lord knows the situation very well.

And what is a scandal to the Pharisee is very much a treasured, precious thing to the poor and the blind and the halt and the maimed and the crippled.

Those who are looked down upon by the likes of the Pharisees. And when that was reported to the man who had provided the banquet, what was the response?

[47 : 43] Well, he became angry and said, go quickly to the streets and lanes of the city. Bring in the poor and the crippled, the blind and the maimed. And the servant said, sir, what you have commanded has been done and still there is room.

Many a great sermon has been provided on the basis of these words, yet there is room. Here is a banquet provided by someone who wants as many as possible to come and partake of it.

Those who initially received the invitations refused. They said they couldn't come. So now he is saying, well, go out further. Widen the circle. Bring people from the streets and lanes of the city. Tell them this is for them as well.

And so they say, we have done that, but there is yet room. Are you here today and still not saved? Are you here today still outside the kingdom of God? Are you here today and have not yet come to know Jesus as your own savior?

[48 : 49] To know God as your father in heaven? Are you here today thinking somehow that automatically you have a place in the kingdom of God because you were brought up in this church or some other church or in some other advantage position?

Are you thinking that that itself is going to be somehow or other going to be a guarantee that your place in the kingdom of God is assured that whoever else is left out, it will not be you?

Well, listen to what God is saying. Listen to what this parable is saying. There is no such thing as an automatic right to a place in the kingdom of God.

It is something that Christ has earned for us, but it is something that we receive from him by coming to comply with and be obedient to and accept his terms of belonging, his terms of membership in the kingdom of God, to receive himself, to confess our sin, to know his forgiveness, to place our life in his hands, to say, Lord, I cannot look after myself when I think of all that it means that's facing me in terms of the difficulties of life and especially of death and entering into eternity and coming before you in judgment.

I cannot look after myself. I don't have the resources myself that will guarantee my acceptance. So, Lord, here is my life. I give it to you. That's what the gospel is saying to us.

[50 : 21] That's what the table is spread for. So that we will leave all those things that we think qualify us and instead come and accept Jesus himself as the only qualification we need.

He has done everything already for us. And so, we are only excluded if we exclude ourselves. Because he's saying we've done that, but yet there is room. And so today, if you are still outside of the kingdom, I'm not saying to you, don't worry about that.

I'm saying to you, do something about it urgently. Because if you're outside now, you might be outside forever. You might be left outside. There is no guarantee that you'll be inside, but just by wishful thinking.

But I am saying there is plenty room for you here as well. All are invited throughout the streets and lanes of the city.

[51 : 32] And yet there is room. There is still room in the kingdom of God for you and for me. We're still not saved. But then there is something else.

The seventh said that is room. And the master said, go out into the highways and hedges and compel people to come in that my house may be filled.

In other words, go out further than the city. He's saying go out into the countryside, into the highways and the hedges. Go as far as you can into the countryside. Because this house of mine must be filled.

And if people refuse, nevertheless, go further and seek others that will come in their stead. See, it's important, isn't it, that however many people refused and made excuses and couldn't come to the feast because of some reason they gave themselves, the feast goes on.

This is the thing, you see. People refuse to accept God, refuse to believe in God, sometimes refuse to believe there is a God. Is that going to change reality?

[52 : 41] Is that going to suddenly mean that God no longer exists? Is that going to suddenly mean that, well, if this is what I believe myself, this is certainly how the outcome will be?

Of course it isn't. Nothing is altered by our unbelief except our own hopes. Compel them to come in. What does that mean? Well, that doesn't mean force them into the kingdom. Preaching the gospel that I'm seeking to do today is not a matter of trying to force people's minds.

You do not become a Christian by your mind being forced by a minister, by elders, by the church. You become a Christian because the Holy Spirit opens your heart.

You are made willing to accept Christ. That's the bottom line. We're not in the position of seeking to coerce people, to force people.

[53 : 39] That's why we need to counter this whole idea that's current in our day that wants to have laws enacted against so-called conversion therapy.

Now, whatever is meant by that, and I'm still seeking to find a proper definition of what these people mean by conversion therapy, but we're not in the business in the church. Not in this church. We're not in the business of conversion therapy. Conversion is God's work. It's not my work. It's not the church's work. We don't force people's minds, but we present the gospel that says, think about this.

Consider this. Is your life as it should be in relation to God? Because it's not a matter of forcing. It's a matter of reasoning, setting out the biblical arguments, why it's important to be in Christ, to accept Jesus, why it's important to confess your sins, to seek pardon and cleansing from God.

Remember, in Acts chapter 24, we have an account of Paul preaching, preaching to a very important man of his day, a man called Felix. And we read there that as Paul reasoned with Felix, that's the important word, as Paul reasoned with him, what did he reason with him about?

[55 : 03] He reasoned with him about righteousness, sober living, and judgment to come. These three things were the three points of his sermon to Felix.

Righteousness, what God requires of us. And also, sober living, a life that's properly based. And judgment to come.

Felix trembled. And just like those people here who made excuses, he said, well, go your way for the moment. I'll send for you when it's convenient for me. What was Paul doing?

Was Paul trying to force Felix into the kingdom? Was Paul engaged in conversion therapy? Of course he wasn't. Paul was presenting the truth. And the truth is addressed to people's minds, to your mind, to my mind, to our conscience.

The conscience that God has given us. The conscience that's informed by the word of God. If we're familiar with the gospel as we are today, that gospel is a gospel, the truth of which comes into our minds.

[56 : 07] And through our minds, it's then, if you like, filtered to your conscience. And your conscience pronounces you either guilty or not guilty. Acceptable to God or not. And if your conscience is saying to you today, I can't be acceptable to God because I haven't accepted Jesus.

Well, God is saying to you today, why not do it now? Why not do it today? When will you have a better moment to accept the offer of the gospel, to accept Jesus, than now?

When will you have a more convenient time than you have at this moment? So, you see, this is really the essence, if you like, of our evangelism.

If you want to carry it into that area, I'm not going to expand on it. But evangelism is not trying to force people's minds. It's presenting them with the truth of the gospel. It's providing means by which we come to have the gospel presented to them.

Not just in church services like this, of course. Other ways as well. And other activities that we actually have in this congregation itself. By which we seek the truth of God to come to touch our hearts and change our lives.

[57 : 29] But it's always going to be the truth itself. Reasoning its way, or God, if you like, through the Holy Spirit. Reasoning by using his word. Reasoning his way into our minds.

Not forcing us. But making us willing. Giving us the mind to accept Christ. To accept the truth of what God is saying.

Invitations returned by the unwilling. Invitations extended to the unlikely. Unlikely, in the words, in the eyes at least of the Pharisees and others.

Who would not see these people as candidates for the kingdom of God. But if you're in the kingdom of God today. If you've accepted Jesus. If Jesus is your savior. If you're living by faith in Christ.

If your basis of hope is in all that Christ has completed and done. Well, you're blessed. You're blessed because you're eating bread in the kingdom of God. And if you're not today, then don't despair.

[58 : 35] But along with saying, don't despair. I say, don't delay. Why should anyone delay when it means the best thing possible is laid before them?

Why should there be any delay? When God is saying, here is my table. It's spread with the best possible products and ingredients and dishes.

Spiritually, here is eternal life. Here is forgiveness of sin. Here is justification. Here is sanctification. Here is hope. Here is all of these things that you require. Be foolish to refuse, wouldn't it?

When everything is there. And it's all free. Christ has paid the price. All that's required of us to say, I accept it, Lord.

Thank you for your love. Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you for the provision you have made for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[59 : 43] We thank you for the fullness of life that is in him that the gospel comes to us with and brings before us and invites us to partake of.

And we thank you for this day and we thank you for these moments when we can dwell for a time upon those important truths that your word sets out for us. So bless this to us, we pray.

And give us whatever our relationship with you is, Lord, today. Give us, we pray, the grace by which our hearts will be opened to you. And may your Holy Spirit help us once again to open our minds and willing to receive you so that we may become members of the kingdom of God.

Hear us, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now we're singing, it's our final psalm, in Psalm 36.

Psalm number 36, you'll find that on page 44. We're singing verses 5 to 9.

[60 : 51] Your steadfast love is great, O Lord, it reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extending to the sky. Your righteousness is very great, like mountains high and steep.

Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast. You keep. You keep. You keep. You keep. You keep. You keep.

You keep. You keep. You keep. You keep. You keep. You keep. You keep. You keep.

You keep. You keep. International psalms say best and said best, here most are without us. You will find what universal is, but heaven is ever and uhil .

Where righteousness is very great, Like mighty high and steep, Where justice is like ocean depths, O man, how peace to him.

[62 : 18] Thy precious sense to step past love, What confidence it brings, O thy and o'er thy shelter in, The shadow of your wings.

The feast when they hear house and play, From streams of pure delight, For when here is the source of life, In your light we see light.

If you please let me get to the main door after the benediction, I'll greet you on the way out. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.