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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“FEAST OR FAMIINE?”
LUKE 14:15-24

{Jn 4:14; 6:35; 10:10} Christ Jesus declares, **“Those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. ...the water I give...will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** **“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry.”** **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

{Ro 6:8-9} This **“life”** is *eternity* itself, for **“since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again,”** and **“if we died with [him]... we will also live with him.”**

This *eternity* is **“life”** itself, total vitality: perfect love, joy, peace, wholeness, strength, beauty, purpose and satisfaction in overflowing, oceanic abundance.

? Isn't this the desire of our hearts? Isn't that why we have said “Yes” to Jesus? But *is this what we are actually choosing for ourselves?*

□ Jesus poses this same question in the Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14. Please turn there with me.

● {Lk 14:1, 7, 10-11} Jesus is **“[eating] in the [home] of a prominent Pharisee.”** A few minutes ago **“he noticed... the guests [picking] the places of honor,”** so he advised them **“to take the lowest place... For... those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”**

● {Lk 14:13-14} Next, he instructed them to humble themselves by inviting in **“the poor, the crippled, the lame, [and] the blind.”** By hosting those who have nothing

to give us, we open ourselves up to be rewarded **“at the resurrection of the righteous.”**

■ That brings us to verse 15. One of the guests hears this and says to Jesus, **“Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”**

○ {Is 25:6-8} **“The feast”** is an image of the extravagant, abundant blessings of life in God's eternal kingdom. As Isaiah prophesied,

**On this mountain the LORD Almighty will
prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine –
the best of meats and the finest
of wines.**

**On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away
the tears from all faces;
he will remove his people's disgrace
from all the earth.**

The LORD has spoken.

“Blessed” indeed **“are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God”!**

But not everyone will have a place at the table.

I am not speaking only of atheists and adherents of false religions. I mean people who profess biblical faith, who pray the Sinner's Prayer, who go forward for an altar call and yet fail to accept

Christ's invitation. That might well include this man who speaks in verse 15. The parable Messiah tells in reply to his comment is disconcerting (or at least, it should be!).

■ Verses 16-17: **“A certain man [prepares] a great banquet and [invites] many guests. At the time of the banquet he [sends] his servant to tell those who [have] been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’”**

In first century Palestine it is customary to send two invitations. The first includes the date (but not the time), and the recipients are expected to accept or decline it. The second invitation alerts those who agreed to attend that the preparations are complete. (This might sound loosey-goosey to us, but in a world without timepieces and kitchen conveniences it is the best way to do things.)

We enter this parable after the first invitation has already been issued. Now everything is ready, so a servant summons the guests who previously said, *“I’ll be there.”*

■ But they fail to show up. In fact, verses 18-20,

They all like [begin] to make excuses. The first [tells the servant] “I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.”

“Another [says], ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’”

Still another [says], “I just got married, so I can’t come.”

❶ The first no-show **“just bought a field.”** His excuse *sounds* reasonable: real estate is the biggest asset anyone can own, unless they are super-rich.

But this guy also says, **“I must go and see it.”** Who would make such a huge investment without inspecting the property first?! And if he did buy it sight unseen, the field will still be there tomorrow.

☹ {Lk 9:57-58} The real issue is that the man is prioritizing his property above the Feast. I am reminded of another man who tells Jesus, **“I will follow you wherever you go”** then refuses to follow because Messiah is homeless and without property.

❷ The second no-show **“just bought five yoke of oxen”** (ten animals). His excuse *sounds* reasonable: without these oxen his operation will fail and he might not be able to feed his family or pay off his debts.

But this guy also says, **“I’m on my way to try them out,”** to verify that they are worth the cost. What farmer would buy that much livestock without checking them out first?! And if he did, there is no hurry **“to try them out”** now. The oxen will still be his tomorrow.

☹ {Lk 18:23} The real issue is that the man is more committed to making money than to attending the Feast. I am reminded of another man who knowingly rejects the offer of eternal life **“because he [is] very wealthy.”**

❸ The third no-show **“just got married.”** Not only does his excuse *sound* reasonable, he can back it up with Scripture. Deuteronomy 24:5 states that **“If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to**

war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.”

But this law is not intended to insulate the groom from all social obligation: its purpose is to protect the bride from childless widowhood and the newlyweds from extended separation. Attending the banquet will not put the groom or his marriage at risk.

☹ {Lk 10:61} The real issue is that the man is idolizing pleasure and comfort to the exclusion of joining the Feast. I am reminded of another man who fails to follow Jesus because, he wants to **“first... go back and say goodbye to [his] family.”**

These “[excuses] **are** [reasons] **wrapped in** [lies].” It would be better to bluntly admit, “You can keep your Feast! I have got all the life I need in my possessions, my money, and my current relationships.”

■ In verse 21a **“The servant [comes] back and [reports] this to his master,”** who “[becomes] **angry.**”

He is angry because accepting an invitation and backing out at the last minute is among the rudest *faux pas* a person can perpetrate. It is a slap in the face.

And he is angry because he has prepared the most delectable dishes, the finest wines, the most elegant table, the best entertainment. For those who attend it the banquet will provide greater pleasure, make more excellent memories, and create happier friendships than any other event in their lives – but these men are willing to throw it in the garbage.

■ The Master quickly salvages the situation. In verse 21b he **“[orders] 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.’”

The needy, broken and disabled don’t qualify for anyone’s first century D-List, much less the A-, B- or C-Lists. The only list they are on is the one titled, “Do Not Invite.” Yet the host of the feast makes them welcome.

■ Verses 22-23:

“‘Sir, the servant [says], ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

“Then the master [tells] his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.’”

The invitation is expanded to include social pariahs, *personae non gratae*: lepers, tax collectors, sinners, Gentiles even. The Master means business. That is why he instructs his servant to **“compel them to come in.”**

We must be careful here. This is a hyperbolic statement and the Church has a wicked history of abusing it. The LORD neither commands nor justifies the use of legislative compulsion, economic coercion, or physical violence to make Christian converts.

He is saying that it will take urgent effort to prove to these outsiders that they are wanted at his banquet. He is instructing his servant: Do not give up too quickly. Don’t casually take “No” for an answer. Persuade them that this is not a joke or a mistake.

Urge them to come in their filthy rags, I will give them fine garments to wear. Convince them that this is the best opportunity they will ever have.

■ That brings us to verse 24. Many of the needy, broken, disabled, lepers, tax collectors and sinners, and Gentiles will come join the Feast; but, the Master, says: **“I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”**

The people in verses 18-20 might have great property, tons of money, and a nice marriage – but that is all they have, and they won’t be taking it with them into the afterlife. Having said “No” to Heaven’s Feast, they have said “Yes” to Hell’s Famine (with a capital “F”) – an eternity of ravenous hunger, unquenchable thirst, gnawing frustration and consuming emptiness.

Many in Christ’s original audience fell prey to presumption and preoccupation. What about us?

Many in Christ’s original audience fed on garbage from the dumpster instead of feasting at the banquet table. What about us?

☑ {Snodgrass} Many in Christ’s original audience did not accept that **“the kingdom comes with limitless grace but brings with it limitless demand.”** What about us?

? *Will it be feast or famine?*