



One of those at table with Jesus said to him, "Blessed is the one who will dine in the Kingdom of God." He replied to him, "A man gave a great dinner to which he invited many. When the time for the dinner came, he dispatched his servant to say to those invited, 'Come, everything is now ready.' But one by one, they all began to excuse themselves. The first said to him, 'I have purchased a field and must go to examine it; I ask you, consider me excused.' And another said, 'I have purchased five yoke of oxen and am on my way to evaluate them; I ask you, consider me excused.' And another said, 'I have just married a woman, and therefore I cannot come.' The servant went and reported this to his master. Then the master of the house in a rage commanded his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame.' The servant reported, 'Sir, your orders have been carried out and still there is room.' The master then ordered the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedgerows and make people come in that my home may be filled. For, I tell you, none of those men who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

Introductory Prayer: Oh God, thank you for allowing me to come into your presence. Your love enlarges my soul. I long to see your face! I come to this prayer with a thirst to just be in your presence, relax under your loving gaze. May my presence here be an expression of my love for you.

Petition: Lord, help me to put aside all excuses when invited to your banquet.

1. Valuing the Invitation: Some of the happiest moments of our lives are spent around a banquet table. Milestones are celebrated there, friendships grow deeper, and relationships are renewed. Could this be why Jesus so frequently used this image to describe heaven? Let's spend a moment thinking about the joy of heaven, of this never-

ending feast. We cannot fathom what it will be like to see God and the inexhaustible beauty of his Triune majesty. And the company will be great! In the heavenly banquet it doesn't matter where you sit: you'll be next to a saint, and the conversation will be wonderful!

2. Legitimate RSVP? Going to a banquet takes some effort. You need to get a babysitter, pick out something to wear and possibly alter previous plans. If the invitation isn't valued, that effort won't be forthcoming; instead, you will make excuses. They may express a reality—those oxen are ready to go!—but they camouflage the real issue: that particular banquet doesn't seem worth it. This should make us reflect on the excuses we have about our spiritual lives. Do they mask a growing spiritual mediocrity?

3. The House Will Be Filled: The master of the house is upset because the people that should have been the first to accept his invitation turn him down. But everything is purchased, and the party is ready to go. Someone will have a chance to enjoy it. Here perhaps is another angle for reflection: We are that master's servants. He wants his house to be filled, and he needs us to make it happen. The servants are quick and agile, and they understand what the master wants: "There's still room!" So too, let's ask the Lord to give us apostolic hearts that won't rest until the house is full. What a feast that will be!

Conversation with Christ: Lord Jesus, I am looking forward to the day when we will be with you at the feast of the Kingdom of Heaven. Help me to understand that the joy and happiness of that banquet are worth the sacrifice of any worldly priority. So often I have excuses. Give me strength never to be pulled away from you.

Resolution: I will accept God's invitation and not put anything in front of my prayer life today.