



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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An Invitation
Dr. Jim Gilchrist

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Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' But they all alike began to make excuses (Luke 14:16-18).

An astonishing thing about God is that God comes to us by invitation and not by force. God invites us to come into his presence, to live in relationship with him. But he does not make us come.

When you consider who God is, and who we are, that truly is amazing, isn't it? God is the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, the one who is and was and always will be. God is the power behind all of nature, the only reason we and everything else exist at all.

We, on the other hand, are tiny specks of life moving about on this "pale blue dot," as Carl Sagan called it, a modest little planet orbiting one of billions of stars in just one of billions of galaxies scattered across the universe. As the hymn says, "We blossom and flourish like leaves on a tree, then wither and perish ...," just as the leaves all around us are about to turn colors before they fall to the ground in the next few weeks. The psalmist contemplated all of this three thousand years ago and it took his breath away. He wrote, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?"

God is so vastly greater than we are, the fact that God wants a relationship with us at all really is astonishing. And then an even more astonishing thing about us is that, when

we receive God's invitation, we often think we have better things to do.

It isn't just a matter of choosing sports or some other activity over church on Sundays, though that may be a part of it. It's the way we live in general – the kinds of things we worry about, the people we clamor to please and impress, the things we spend our time focusing on and our money paying for. We're invited to be friends with the Maker of heaven and earth, but we're so busy looking down at all the things around us that we don't often look up and see how high our calling really is.

So we send our regrets. Sorry, I cannot come. I own this property and I have to look after it. I bought five new things and I need to tend to them. I'm married now, and you know how devoted I am to my family. I have things to do. Please accept my regrets. I'll come some other time, when I'm not so busy.

Now if you or I went to great trouble and planned a feast for our friends, and had the house and garden all decked out with the finest foods and wonderful drinks, and then no one showed up because they all had other priorities, we would probably be upset. We might even wonder if those people really were our friends after all. But the host in Jesus' story wants to make sure that everyone knows they're invited. If some of the prosperous are too preoccupied, he wants the poor and the blind and the lame to know that they are welcome, too. And in fact, they're more likely to come. They have fewer things to distract them, and they don't get invited to many banquets. So they're happy to come.

Even after these latter guests arrive who are surprised that they were invited, there's still more room. So

the host sends out his staff to urge everyone else to come on in. Now all sorts of people show up who would not otherwise be sitting around the same table. But of course, that's what the host wants. He likes to see people come together, especially those who run in different circles and tend to be wary of others that they think are not like them. It turns out that, when they get to know one another, they find all sorts of things in common, and even their differences become more a matter of interest than an occasion for conflict.

The host loves a full house because he is gracious and generous, and he loves to share his bounty with others. As for those who sent their regrets, he says, "I tell you, none of them will taste my dinner." That's not necessarily a nasty comment. He isn't being snarky about it. He's simply stating the obvious: those who don't come won't be there to enjoy the banquet. They'll miss all the subtle flavors, and the marvelous aromas, and the textures melting in their mouths, not to mention the good company. Afterwards, those who were there will say, "You don't know what you missed." And that will be right, of course, because no words can ever take the place of taste. You have to taste and see that the Lord is good.

And the people who came to the banquet will understand that they have no reason to feel superior to the others outside. They're only there because the host is generous and urged them to come. They're just glad they showed up, and grateful for the invitation. And having tasted what the host has to offer, and enjoyed his company and the company of others around the table, it will seem strange to them that anyone who received the invitation might ever have imagined that they had better things to do.



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