

DECLINING OUR INVITATION

Communion Sunday – March 6, 2011 – Luke 14: 7-24 –7th in a series on “Spiritual Leadership”

The Church of the Covenant

Three years ago in a former church of mine Henry Blackaby was coming; we promoted it; we invited people. The first day of the event more than 600 people showed up. It was glorious. But I noticed something –very few of the church members themselves were there. They were busy. On the Saturday morning there was another meeting and some were meeting down in the cafeteria. More than a thousand people attended the Blackaby event but less than 10% of my church did. With all the excitement I had almost begun to think that the Lord might be calling me to remain in that church. But on Monday morning, after the Blackaby event was over, as I was praying it almost felt as if the Holy Spirit left. I knew in my heart I was being called away. In less than three months the committee of The Church of the Covenant called me on the phone and God, through the voice of His people, brought me here. As I was praying on that Monday after the Blackaby event was over today’s scripture kept popping into my head; over and over and over again this passage from Luke kept coming back to me.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords in this parable of Jesus had extended an invitation, to attend the marriage feast. And it was said, *“Come, because all is now ready.”* (Luke 14: 17) But all those on the original invitation list declined. They made an excuse, I am sure completely justifiable in their own mind, why they could not attend. “My child has soccer practice”. “I am too tired after a long day”. “I forgot”. “There is another church meeting that night”. “I have something else to do.” Oops, sorry, I’m getting ahead of myself –actually they said things like, *“I have bought 5 yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you have me excused.”* (v. 18) So the host, read this the Lord, says then *“Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor and the lame...”* (v. 22) But there are so many people who have declined their invitation and made their perfectly justifiable (at least in their own mind) excuses, that when this is done there is still room. So the host says again, Go out and invite even more and then he adds *“that my house may be filled.”* (v. 23) And then the householder, read this the Lord God Almighty, ominously adds –*“For I tell you, none of those...who were (originally) invited shall taste my banquet.”* (v. 24) I sadly remember one of my church people who chose not to attend coming up to me and asking –“Who are all these outsiders and why are they here?” I had to bite my tongue...

First point, ALWAYS SAY YES TO AN INVITATION FROM GOD. No more needs to be said about this; Jesus’ parable speaks for itself. **Second point**, Being saturated to overflow with the presence of God, being fed at God’s table to complete fullness is good –We are invited to a party, not a funeral; God wants us to attend a celebration not a wake; God invites us to LIVE ABUNDANTLY and to sup overindulgently of His Spirit at His table. **Third point**, it requires humility to give up our own agenda, our calendar, what we may want to do on any given day, in order to do God’s agenda. More on that later.

See, there are moments for every church and every people; they are God moments; they are times when God is extending an open invitation; they are times when the invitation is issued to come and to eat at God’s table and to be filled with all the fullness of God. Moments of spiritual opportunity are open for a time and then close. The invitation to come comes and then we need to come, because ALL IS NOW READY. Not later. Not in a few days. Not when we’re ready. Not next year. NOW. Now is the appointed hour of salvation. *“Seek the Lord while He may be found”*, as the Bible says. NOW. We are about to enter into Lent that leads to Holy Week. What was Holy Week other than that God had extended God’s invitation to the people of God in Jesus Christ? God issued an invitation to come to the heavenly banquet. There is a reason why there is a communion table, a banqueting table, The Last Supper, at the center of Holy Week. Jesus is hailed as Messiah on Palm Sunday; the window of spiritual

opportunity for the people of God is wide open on Palm Sunday. But by Good Friday Jesus is nailed to the cross; the moment is gone. The window of opportunity, over. The door, closed. As Gentiles we have a place at the banqueting table of the Lord God Almighty because the first invitees declined their invitation.

The Church of the Covenant is receiving many and multiple invitations to attend a heavenly party set by the hand of God. When we host the Interfaith Hospitality Network we are going to the streets and the lanes of the city to bring people in. Will we find some stupid excuse –the church was left a mess, its an Inconvenience; I don't get the room I want; etc., etc., etc.--to decline our invitation? The Church of the Covenant is being invited to step it up and be the community spiritual leader historically it has always been –will we find a reason to decline that invitation? The children are being invited to come to God's Garden here in March –will their parents be too busy to bring them here? Young people are being challenged to be people of faith through the Confirmation Class –will you find some reason to hold God at a distance? Will you just "join the church" but somehow miss your spiritual moment with God? People are contemplating becoming members of The Church of the Covenant in the upcoming New Member Class –do you want to keep making excuses to sit passively in the pews or do you want to be challenged and invited to be active disciples following the Lord Jesus Christ with your life? Henry Blackaby, a world renowned speaker, pastor and author, is coming to The Church of the Covenant on April 10th (I'm not sure we've ever had this kind of speaker and this kind of opportunity ever before)–will you find some TV program that Sunday evening that you think is more important than your spiritual relationship with God and stepping it up a notch or two in relation to your spiritual leadership? I'm sorry to be this direct, but I am telling you the truth, this invitation isn't coming from me; this invitation is coming from the Lord.

Basically --**Are you too busy for Jesus**...and are you too busy to find out what God's agenda for your life might be? Because the window of spiritual opportunity is opening LARGE here; the invitations are being sent out; the only thing in doubt is who will actually accept the invitation and come. Come, beloved, because all is NOW ready!

"He who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14: 11) The person who sets aside their own agendas, personal calendar priorities, philosophies, attitudes, presumptions and assumptions and who just comes, just accepts God's invitation, these are the ones who will then also receive their invitation to another banquet, this one in heaven. When we lay down our own agendas and get on to God's agenda it is then we who have humbled ourselves will be exalted, not only here on earth, but raised up to that GREAT HEAVENLY BANQUET in heaven. I don't know about you but I want a place at *that* table...

In the communion liturgy there is that which is called "The Invitation". Each of us is called this day to come; to accept the invitation to sit and to sup in close communion with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Come. The banqueting table is all ready now. The invitations are printed and being passed out. Come to the Lord Jesus and to this table. This is your invitation...TODAY...Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*