

THE GREAT SUPPER

Luke 14

The teacher will need to review who the Pharisees were, what their attitude toward the Lord was, and why. Then remind them of the lawyer in the lesson the Good Samaritan since the lawyers were the most learned and honored of the scribes, and the scribes and Pharisees are often mentioned together.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord invites us all to receive truth and good from Him.

Even the Lord's parables present many problems unless we understand the internal meaning.

Insincere faith is like insincere friendship.

Excuses show the true nature of our affections.

Notes for Parents

Again we have one of the Lord's parables, this time addressed to the Pharisees, who thought themselves better than anyone else. Did you ever stop to think why so many little stories with a moral to them are written for children? It is because children like stories and remember them, and often they will see the moral for themselves and think about it; whereas if we tried to teach them the same lesson directly, they would close their ears to it. Well, that is why the Lord so often spoke in parables, and indeed why so much of the Bible is in story form. For we are all children to the Lord. We close our ears to His instruction, just as our own children do, when we see immediately that it applies to our faults. But we listen to His stories, which seem at first to be about other people, and afterward we come to see that we are just like the people in the stories, and then the lesson comes home to us.

We all live in a Christian country and most of us think of ourselves as Christians. We consider ourselves friends of the Lord. So

if we see that the man in our parable is the Lord, we are all among the friends who were first invited to His table and had accepted His invitation. The Lord gives us our material food, of course, but He also offers us food for our souls which we need still more, for we shall all leave our bodies behind us someday, but our souls are to last forever, and the kind of spiritual food we “eat” determines whether they will be healthy and beautiful or ugly and shrunken and misshapen.

When the invitation to the Lord’s table comes to us, the feast which He offers us is in His Word, which is spread before us in His house, the church. Do we ever make excuses? Are we ever so occupied with our own little worldly occupations and ambitions that we can’t take time for religion? We know that the poor and maimed and halt and blind—the people who realize their own shortcomings, their sin and weakness and ignorance—go eagerly to the Lord’s table to be fed. Do we really think we are better than they? If we do, the Lord tells us in the parable that we shall never taste of His supper.

Primary

Even the little children can get a glimpse of the spiritual meaning in this parable. It is good to emphasize with them the idea of the church as the Lord’s house to which they are invited every Sunday.

The Pharisees were the Lord’s enemies, but they pretended to be His friends because so many of the people believed in the Lord and followed Him. The Pharisees were a group of people who pretended to be especially religious, and so considered themselves better than anybody else. They would not associate with poor people. But the Lord told them over and over again that their attitude was wrong.

Why did the Lord rebuke them at the feast?

In the parable the Lord told them the man who invited his friends to dinner means the Lord.

The Lord invites all of us to receive instruction and goodness from Him.

Do we ever refuse His invitation?

What three excuses were given in the parable?

Sometimes people today think they are too busy to go to church.

But the church is the Lord's house and it is He who invites us to come there.

Whom did the man in the parable find to sit at his table?

The poor and maimed and halt and blind picture the people who realize how much they need the Lord.

You see, the Lord came into the world to help everybody, but He could not help the people who were so satisfied with themselves that they thought they did not need His help. Such people were like the ones in the parable who were so interested in their own affairs that they could not take time to have dinner with the friend who was kind enough to invite them.

Remember this when you think you would rather stay home and play than go to church and Sunday school. You know that the church is the Lord's house. It is really the Lord who is inviting you to come to church every Sunday and hear the good things He has to tell you in His Word.



Junior

The Juniors are old enough to understand about spiritual food and drink. Have them try to think for themselves what "bread of life" and "living water" mean. Point out that we could not live without love and truth—we could not grow up if our parents did not love and teach us, and all their goodness and knowledge really comes from the Lord.

In our chapter for today, who invited the Lord to eat at his house?

Who were the Pharisees?

What did the Lord notice about the guests?

What did He advise the Pharisees to do?

Then the Lord told them a parable. The Lord in His teaching spoke many parables. This was because a simple story holds our attention, is easily understood, and stays in our minds afterward. We may not see the point of the story at first, but sometimes it comes to us later. So in our chapter, if the Pharisees had closed their selfish minds to the plain teaching which the Lord gave them first, they might listen to the parable and think it over later.

In the parable whom did the man first invite to his supper?

What excuse did the first man give?

What was the second excuse?

What was the third?

Whom did the man find to eat his supper?

We can see some of the lessons in this parable easily. One is that we should not let our selfish activity about our own affairs interfere with the obligations of friendship. Another is that people we look down upon might make better friends than some we choose. This was taught also in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

But there is a still greater lesson which we may not see so easily. The man in the parable pictures the Lord, who is our greatest friend. The Lord has prepared a great feast for all of us and invited us to come. Of course we know that He gives us our natural food, the food that nourishes our bodies; but the real feast He offers is food for our souls, His love and truth. Again and again in the Word He invites us to come to His house and take freely of the good things He has for us. He calls Himself the “bread of life” (John 6:35) and says He will give us “living water” to drink (John 4:10, 14). You would think that no one would refuse such an invitation, coming from the Lord Himself.

But we do often make excuses, just as the men in the story did. We are too busy with our work and our play and our selfish affairs to study the Bible and to go to the Lord’s house. When we hear the invitation, we mean to accept it, but when the time comes, we can’t bear to lay aside what we are doing. We are the friends who are invited first, because we call ourselves Christians; that is, we claim to be friends and followers of the Lord, and we know all about the feast and where to find it.

Who do you think are the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind who do come to the supper? See if you can find the answer in Matthew 5:3-6. There are a great many things in the Gospels about the rich and the poor. It will help us to understand these things if we know that by the rich the Lord does not mean the people that have money, but all those who are rich in their

own estimation, who think they have all the goodness and truth they need; and by the poor the Lord always means those who know they are not good or wise enough, but that they need help from the Lord all the time. Read Revelation 3:17, where the Lord is speaking of a Christian Church which had become like the Pharisees. The maimed and the halt and the blind are those who realize that they have done wrong things which have hurt their souls or that they are somehow not quite strong enough to walk in the Lord's way as they should, or that they are ignorant of the Lord's teachings. We are all weak and imperfect in many ways, and we should make the most of every opportunity to receive the help the Lord offers us so freely.

Intermediate

The correspondences in this lesson are simple and very helpful, especially in the three excuses. The Intermediates are reaching the age when many children begin to rebel against going to Sunday school, and the teacher can use this lesson in such a way that it will inspire them to continue. Point out that every new state and experience to which we come in life calls for fresh spiritual food, and that the Word is the Lord's table and we come to it when we come to Sunday school and church.

We wonder sometimes why there is so much in the Bible about eating and drinking. Physically, eating and drinking are essential to our life in this world. Everything we do uses up some of our bodily resources and they have to be continually renewed. The Lord has put into the world a wonderful variety of animal, vegetable, and mineral substances for this purpose. Also we are so made that we enjoy eating and drinking. And we like to eat and drink together. Perhaps the most universal way of showing friendship is the invitation to share a meal.

We are told in our chapter that the Lord went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees "to eat bread on the sabbath day." The Pharisees were the Lord's enemies. Because the people were flocking to hear Him, they pretended first to be His friends and to be willing to hear Him, too, but they were always hoping to catch

Him in some teaching which they could say was contrary to the law. The Lord did not hesitate to accept their invitations although He knew their hearts. He was no one's enemy. But He never hesitated to tell them the truth. So in our chapter He first calls attention to the foolishness of the desire always to be first, and then He tells them a parable, as He often did when His plain teaching was not understood or not well received. The parable would stay in their minds and perhaps make them think afterward.

Our physical bodies, we know, are merely the clothing which our souls wear in this world. They are what they are because they serve and express attributes and powers which our souls possess. So from our physical processes we can know about the unseen things which go on in our souls. Our souls also need constant renewal. Spiritual food—goodness and truth from the Lord—is essential to our spiritual life.

So we may understand that in this parable today the man who “made a great supper and bade many” is the Lord, and we who call ourselves Christians are the invited guests. We know that in the Holy Communion—the Lord's Supper—the bread and wine picture the goodness and truth which the Lord provides for us freely. But the Lord's Supper, like the supper in the parable, is only symbolic of what the Lord offers us all the time. He gives us His truth in His Word, and as we learn and obey it, His goodness flows freely into our hearts.

We all mean to accept the Lord's invitation. But all of us sometimes, when the time comes, make excuses. The three excuses in the parable are typical of the things which come between us and the full acceptance of the happiness which the Lord offers us. “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it.” We remember that ground pictures the minds of men. Sometimes we are too interested in our own ideas to read the Word and think about it. “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them.” Oxen represent affections for useful work. Sometimes, like Martha, we are so busy with what we consider necessary work that we have no time to sit at the Lord's feet and hear His Word. These

two both asked to be excuses. They recognized their obligation although they did not go. But the third man said, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” He pictures our state when we have become fixed in the intention of going our own way, “wedded” to our selfish ideas and activities.

All the people who make these excuses are apt to consider themselves good—they count themselves among the Lord’s friends. But they do not really want to learn from Him and obey Him because they think they have enough knowledge and goodness of their own. But in the parable the man found other people who were glad to accept his invitation. The poor are the “poor in spirit” of the first blessing (Matthew 5:3), those who are humble-minded. The maimed are those who have fallen into sins—like the man in our lesson on the Good Samaritan who had been robbed and wounded—and who feel the need of the Lord’s help to become spiritually whole again. The halt, or lame, are those who recognize that they have weaknesses which make it hard for them to “walk in the way of the Lord.” The blind are those who realize that they need more understanding of the Lord’s teaching. These are the people who are eager to read the Word and to be helped to understand it and to find the strength which can come only from the Lord. Read Revelation 3:17. We are all spiritually halt and maimed and blind in one way or another. If we admit it, we shall accept the invitation to the Lord’s table.

Basic Correspondences

- oxen = affections for useful work
- marriage = the union of heart and mind
- the poor = the humble-minded
- the maimed = those who see that their sins
have hurt them
- the halt = those who feel they lack the
power to do right
- the blind = those who recognize their lack
of knowledge and understanding



Senior

The Seniors can profit by the same lesson suggested for the Intermediates, but for them illustrate it from conditions prevailing in the community and the world in order to encourage in them the determination to align themselves with the “poor” rather than with the Pharisees.

In our parable today it is the Lord who prepares the great supper and invites us to come. We find this feast in the Word, in the Lord’s house. Those who claim to be friends of the Lord—all Christians—have heard and recognized the invitation and are presumably willing to accept it, but when the actual time to partake comes—the time to study the Word, to go to church, to express our love for the Lord by doing His will—how often we begin to make excuses!

The Lord spoke this parable to the Pharisees. They had found fault with Him for not keeping all the regulations which they had added to the law of Moses. But He had pointed out that they themselves, while they kept the letter of all the laws, kept the substance of none of them. Because they saw the people flocking to hear Him, they maintained for a time a show of respect for Him, and He used all the opportunities they gave Him to try to teach them as He taught everyone. The Lord, as He said, came as a physician to heal the sick, and in His mind the Pharisees were suffering from a spiritual disease worse than those which afflicted the publicans and “sinners” whom they despised. So when He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees “to eat bread on the sabbath day,” He was carrying on His purpose. This time He attacked their desire for preeminence, first in plain teaching which might appeal to their worldly reason and then in the parable of the great supper, which might perhaps stay in their minds and have its effect later. We all need its lesson.

In their correspondence the three excuses in the parable picture three types of self-indulgence which we are likely to allow to come between us and participation in the spiritual feast to which the Lord invites us. The first man had bought a piece of ground and had to go see it. The ground pictures the mind. This is the man who is too interested in developing his own ideas to stop to receive

instruction from the Lord. The second had bought five yoke of oxen and wanted to try them out. The oxen represent affection for useful labor. This is the man who has so much to do in his business and the woman who puts so much effort into her busy life that they have no time to study the Bible or go to church. The third had married a wife and therefore could not come. This is the man who is really “wedded” to his own selfish ways and has closed his mind to anything which will interfere with his going his own way.

The invitation was accepted only by “the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.” These are the people who are humble-minded, who recognize their own sins and weaknesses and ignorance, and look eagerly to the Lord for guidance and strength. They are those mentioned in the blessings, the poor in spirit, the meek, they that mourn, they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

The Lord’s feast is perpetually spread for all of us. If we are rich in our own estimation, we shall make excuses; if we are poor in spirit, we shall accept and be fed. We should note the warning with which the parable closes: “For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.” Our opportunity is now—not in some vague tomorrow.

In the rest of this chapter a further lesson is drawn from the parable. The invited guests who acknowledged the invitation and then did not attend the supper are like the man who began to build a tower without first counting the cost, and like the king who started a war without estimating his forces, and like the salt which had lost its savor. In John 9:41 the Lord says to the Pharisees, “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see: therefore your sin remaineth.” To acknowledge truth and then recede from it constitutes sin. We all need the Lord’s admonition: “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

Adult

The contrast between the Pharisees' attitude toward the Lord and His attitude toward them makes a good discussion topic, especially in view of the humanistic character of much so-called religion today. The ideas that man is inherently good and that human intelligence is the arbiter of truth are essentially Pharisaic. The three excuses also offer good discussion material.

Eating and drinking play a large part in our daily lives. Our bodies must be nourished regularly, and our food must be varied and wholesome. When we invite guests to a meal, we desire not only to do them good by feeding their bodies, but to enjoy the pleasure of association with them. Our associations with our friends are of the spirit, so that even with us, if we are in good states, eating together performs spiritual uses.

Many times in the Word the Lord spoke of eating and drinking, of feasts, suppers, wedding feasts. We can know that He was talking of spiritual uses. The food and drink which He offers us are His love and wisdom, good and truth to sustain and develop our souls, as *natural food and drink* nourish the body. But He offers us more than this. He promises to come in and sup with us, to be present with us, associating with us Himself. In the Word He spreads a perpetual feast for us, good and truth in every varied form which we may need and which will add to our happiness, and He is present there Himself ready to speak wise and loving words to us, to answer our questions, to help and encourage us in our problems and temptations, to delight us with new desires and thoughts.

But we are free to accept or to reject the Lord's invitation. In this world we choose the company with which we wish to associate. We can seek those who are wiser and better than we, and learn to become steadily wiser and better ourselves, or, if we like to show off our knowledge and virtues, we can seek those who, we think, know less than we, and so cut ourselves off from making progress and actually go backward. This is what the Lord teaches in our chapter in the parable of the wedding feast, which precedes the parable of the great supper. If we truly "hunger and thirst after righteousness," we will readily accept the Lord's invita-

tion, seek Him in His Word, accept the truth He offers, and try to practice it and so receive its good, we will associate with others who are learning of Him, and unite with them in work for His kingdom. The Lord's Supper, of which we partake occasionally, is the external symbol of our acceptance of His invitation to sup with Him in His kingdom. It has reality and power for us in proportion to our desire to receive the good and truth from the Lord which the bread and wine symbolize, and in proportion to our desire to associate with the Lord and with angels.

The Lord's invitation is given to all. It is repeated again and again. Not only do we hear it in the letter of the Word in its general form but in every truth which impresses itself upon us personally, just as the servant was sent out to each guest. If we do not accept the invitation, it is because we do not wish to. When we read the parable, we wonder that any of the invited guests should have refused so delightful an invitation; but we refuse it ourselves whenever we find other pursuits and other thoughts so absorbing that we allow them to interfere with our associations with the Lord.

The three excuses symbolize all the types of preoccupations which keep men from looking to the Lord for love and wisdom. The first man had bought a piece of ground and must needs go to see it. The ground, or more properly field, is the mind, intellectual things, in this case leading away from the Lord. When we become so interested in thinking our own thoughts and developing our own theories that we have no time to learn of the Lord, to read the Word, to go to church, we are making this excuse. The second had bought five yoke of oxen and went to try them. The oxen represent our affections for natural usefulness. When these are turned to the Lord's service they are good, but when we are too busy caring for our families and providing for their present and future needs, or even too occupied with the external charities which the world recognizes as good to look to the Lord and seek to know Him better, we are making this second excuse. Both these guests recognized that they ought to accept the invitation and asked to be excused for this time. So we may feel that sometime,

when we have completed the study or the work which now absorbs our attention, we shall find time for the Lord and the church. But we cannot put off the building of spiritual character. Before long we shall be saying, as the third man did, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” We shall be so wedded to our own ideas and our own occupations that we shall reject the Lord’s invitation outright.

The parable of our lesson was spoken to the Pharisees. The invited guests who made the excuses pictured the church, which had the Scriptures but had become wholly absorbed in worldly ideas and pursuits. The guests who were brought in to take the places of those first invited represented those who did not have the truth but desired it, first those in the streets and lanes of the city, those who had had some contact with the truths of the Word through living among the Jews, and then those in the highways and hedges, altogether outside of the city of doctrine, who must be “compelled,” that is, drawn by the power of love rather than reached through the truth. “‘The poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind,’ do not mean such in a natural sense, but such in a spiritual sense, that is such as had not the Word, and were therefore in ignorance of truth and in lack of good, but still desired truths by means of which they might obtain good; such were the Gentiles with whom the church of the Lord was afterwards established.” (AE 652³¹) See also AC 2336⁴ and AE 223²².

The last verse of the parable points to the serious nature of the choice offered us in the Lord’s invitation: “For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.” Our reception of the Lord’s love and truth depend upon our desire to obtain them. If we choose to go our own way, we close the door to the Lord and the time comes when even He cannot open it. Our life in this world is our opportunity to choose between self and the Lord, and the choice is made not in a moment but day by day, by putting away wrong thoughts and selfish desires and letting the Lord’s truth and love take their places. Whenever we hold back from fully following the Lord, clinging to some idea or

enjoyment which we love but know to be from self, we limit our ability to advance in the kingdom of heaven. If we really want the Lord to come in and sup with us, we must open the door to Him and keep it open, by ridding our minds and hearts of the self-esteem and self-love which shut Him out. This is the cost we must count, of which the Lord speaks in the parables which complete our chapter.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 252: “As suppers signify consociations by love and consequent communication of delights, therefore the Lord compared the church and heaven to a ‘supper,’ and also to a ‘wedding’; to a ‘supper’ in Luke . . . (14:16-24). (Nearly the same is meant by the wedding to which invitations were given in Matthew 22:1-15.) ‘Supper’ here means heaven and the church; ‘those called who excused themselves’ mean the Jews with whom the church then was; for the church specifically is where the Word is, and where the Lord is known through the Word. ‘The poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind,’ mean those who are spiritually such, and who were then outside the church. Heaven and the church are here likened to ‘a supper’ and to ‘a wedding,’ because heaven is the conjunction of angels with the Lord by love, and their consociation among themselves by charity, and the consequent communication of all delights and felicities; the like is true of the church, since the church is the Lord’s heaven on the earth.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- I. Why did the Lord put the story of Mary and Martha in the Word immediately after the parable of the Good Samaritan? *to help us learn how to love the neighbor*
- J. Who were the Pharisees? *a strict religious sect*
- J. In our lesson for today what fault did the Lord see in them? *they wanted the best for themselves*
- P. What parable did He give them? *the great supper*
- P. Whom did the man in the parable first invite to his supper? *friends*
- J. What three excuses were given by his friends for not coming? *field, oxen, wife*
- J. What fault in his friends did this show? *selfish thoughtlessness*
- J. Whom did the man afterward find to enjoy his supper? *poor, maimed, halt, blind*

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- J. Whom does the man in this parable represent? *the Lord*
- J. To what “feast” does the Lord invite people? *His Word, containing His love and truth*
- P. Where is the Lord’s house? *the church*
- J. Who are the friends who make excuses? *all of us who call ourselves Christians*
- J. Who are the poor people who accept His invitation? *the humble-minded*
- I. What does eating at the Lord’s table represent? *feeding our souls with the Lord’s goodness and truth*
- S. What do the three excuses picture?
- (1) *field: intellectual pride (mind)*
 - (2) *oxen: wrong priorities in our affections (heart)*
 - (3) *wife: “wedded” to selfish ways (act)*