

Our theme for this morning's meditation is 'Our Response to the Call of God.' God calls each one of us to respond to the great love that he has shown for us on the cross. Christ died for all of humanity. That is why we read in John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (Jn. 3:16 NIV). God offers for us eternal life in and through Christ. We are called to respond to this invitation and put our trust in Christ and appropriate his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins individually. When we do that then we become the children of God.

The invitation to be part of God's family and his kingdom has sharply come into focus with the coming of Jesus. The good news of the gospel came to the Jews first. Unfortunately, they rejected him and the good news spread to the rest of the world and has come to you and me. The invitation to become part of God's family and enter into his kingdom continues to ring out even today. Salvation is seen in the bible as an invitation to participate in a great banquet – the Messianic banquet at the end of time when God will judge the people. The response to the invitation can be many and varied just as it was in the first century. Jesus tells a parable to highlight the various responses to the call of God.

Jesus told them a parable about a man who was preparing a great banquet and had invited many guests. In West Asian culture very similar to ours invitations have to be personal and so a person would not only get the official invitation but also personally be asked to come. In this banquet two invitations have already gone and now it is the day of the banquet and the man is sending his servant to remind all those who have been invited to come. Interestingly each one of them makes excuses: the first one says that he has just bought a field and that he must go and see it; the second one says that he has bought five yoke of oxen and that he must go and try them out; another says that he just got married and he cannot come.

All these excuses seem to be normal excuses at first glance, but when we look at them closer we see that they are all lies. Nobody buys a field and then goes out to see it. When we buy a plot of land or a house a lot of enquiry is made about the plot and its surroundings, the location, the availability of water, the soil and all the other possible questions. These are done before the purchase of the field not after. So we see that this excuse is not genuine. The second person then says that he has bought five pairs of oxen and that he was going to try them out. The story is the same. Nobody buys oxen without trying them out. In a village market the oxen are usually tried out before the purchase is made. So this excuse also is false. The third person says he has just been married. The wedding obviously was not on the same day as the village would not have been able to cope with two huge festivities on the same day. So it may have been a few days earlier. The groom could have easily said no to the invitation at the beginning. But he says it only at the last minute when all the food had been cooked.

The servant comes back to his master and tells him about the responses. The master is angry and he asks them go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled the blind and the lame. These were all the outcasts of society. The banquet is not full still and the master commands the servants to go out to the roads and country lanes and compel people to come in so that his house would be full.

The point made by the parable is that the people of Israel were given the first chance to respond to the good news of Jesus Christ and they rejected him. The message has now gone out to the ends of the world and has come to us. What is our response? Have we made a personal commitment to Christ and have entered into his kingdom or are we still coming up with various excuses. The invitation will not last forever and so may we take time today to respond to that invitation.