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When I was a small child my parents correctly conveyed to me that there was a place called heaven and a place called hell. Hell was on fire and people there were in agony in black darkness alone in excruciating agony. Forever.

Horrifying thoughts for a small boy. My parents told me, again, correctly that christians were the only people going to heaven. A lovely place where there was joy and happiness with God forever.

My parents were attending Bible school in Canada because they desired to be missionaries. They lived a very circumspect life at that time. Dad worked in Los Angeles during the growing season and returned to school in Canada in the fall after harvest. School was held during the winter months when no growing was possible.

The school was in the wheat plains of Canada and had been set up that way in the 1920's so that students could work with their parents in their farms and livelihoods during the normal growing season and come to school in the

months of growing seasonal shut down.

School to go to the mission fields was a 3 year program of hard learning. On our way to Canada in the 1950 Plymouth station wagon in 1957 Dad had an appendicitis attack and had to return home to Southern California. He finished school the following year.

Many of the study books I began with were purchased by my father at the Prairie Book Room at PBI. I'm still using his Strong's concordance and his W. E. Vines new testament dictionary to this day. A favorite treasure from that time period that I still have is R. A. Torrey's "Treasury of Scripture Knowledge". It's an exhaustive compilation of scripture cross references.

As a wee child in that environment I worried about my Aunt Ellen and Uncle Milton. I assumed they were going to hell. They smoked cigarettes. And my Aunt Tina and Uncle Joe were going to hell. They were catholics. And I even heard my uncle Joe say a curse word once.

All of these memories are from over 60 years ago. My! What a different world we live in today. 40 Years ago I went on visitations presenting the gospel to people who had signed a card having visited the church. And 40 years ago if you asked anybody if they believed they were going to heaven, 100% answered that they were.

98% believed they were going to heaven because in a general sense, compared to everybody else, they were good folks. Born in America, pay your taxes without too much lieing, don't kill anybody, don't take things that belong to someone else, don't lie, don't commit adultery . . . you're good to go.

Plenty of people who do bad things to populate hell. Every door I knocked on were good folks, in their own minds, who would make heaven just fine. That was 40 years ago.

In 2020 we've solved the problem of hell once and for all. We've eliminated God, so hell is no longer a concern. All of those old rules got flushed down

the drain with God. Do whatever you can get away with as long as you're not harming someone else. That was the rule 5 years ago.

Now even that "hold" of not harming others is banished . . . if the person you harm is somehow more privileged than you. In that case it's actually good to harm some folks. In our brave new world it's actually righteous to cause harm and loss.

Relax, I'm not going to talk about politics. What I do want to look at though, is the human condition that every human shares that says; I'm OK. You're OK. The default of every human being, even the ones locked up in prison, is justification. Justification.

Every human heart has at it's default, I'm OK. Go to the prisons and ask those guys. Righteous. Every one. We've talked about the noetic effects of the fall before. Our thinking machines are broken. In our fallen condition our reasoning is flawed. Broken.

For three years Jesus has been telling His people, the jews, that God's standards are not what you have supposed. You think you're OK. You aren't OK. You cannot meet God's standards. God's righteousness. There is only one door, one access to God. He's said it a dozen different ways. I am the bread. I am the water. I am the light. I am the shepherd. I am I am I am, in direct opposition to Satan's I will, I will, I will.

I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.

Is anybody listening? Does anybody hear what Jesus is saying. The pharisee's heard him loud and clear. I am is the name God told Moses was His name. *I am that I am*. These pharisee's hear Jesus loud and clear. They will murder Him because He makes Himself out to be God.

Last week we looked at this phenomenon that is unfolding as He addresses these men who are plotting His destruction. In the previous paragraph's He

has told them; vs. 11 *“For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”*

You won't be going to heaven because you are proud. You exalt yourselves in this game of exalting each other in turns. It's all about who is most exalted in your group. There's no place in heaven for that.

Then He doubles down and says, the poor, the lame, the blind, the crippled, these un-exalted folks, the opposites of you, will have a far easier time entering heaven than you will. The poor, the lame, the blind, the crippled aren't proud.

I don't think we give these men enough credit. I think they understand perfectly what Jesus is telling them. They don't believe a word of it, but I choose to believe they were understanding everything He was selling. The reason I believe that is because of this guy in vs. 15.

Jesus says, you proud guys aren't going to be there and these outcast scum type people have a better chance than you do, and one of the pharisee's gives a toast. He understands all that Jesus has said, and he raises his glass and shouts out a toast.

*15 And when one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, “Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”*

I could be reading his intentions wrong, but based on everything Jesus has just told them, I think this fellow shouts this out as an audacious act of defiance. Like he's the loud mouth in the club that shouts out what everyone is thinking.

Blessed are we pharisee's because we'll be in the kingdom eating bread at God's table. And the rest of the pharisee's are lifting their cups saying "hear hear!"

They honestly believe that because of their rules keeping and religious

deprivations they have inflicted on themselves and others that they will be eating bread at God's table in His kingdom.

This is the point where, if it's me, I roll my eyes and say, obviously, there's no point discussing this any further. Your mind is made up. Enjoy hell. And that's to my shame. I give up and walk away. I'm not much of a fighter. Have it your way. Not so Jesus.

Jesus never stops warning these folks, graciously and lovingly confronting them with the truth, until the day they pound the nails in His hands and feet. And that's what He so graciously does with the parable before us.

*16 But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many;*

This is by default a very rich man. It's a big celebration. In their little local culture of day to day existence, always working for your next meal and not much else, a rich guy throwing a gala celebration was the biggest deal of the year. Usually it was a gala party because of a wedding. And being rich, he invites many.

The first part is easy. They're all in. Been here, done this, and it's awesome when some rich guy invites you to his feast.

*17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.'*

Remember now, no clocks, few calendars, it's a primitive time, and when someone is throwing a gala feast, the invitations go out ahead of time so that those who are invited can set some time aside and be ready to quickly come to the event when it's ready.

They didn't send the invitations like ours with a place and day and hour to show up. It was, this is happening, and when I get it ready, the call will go out, and then it's party time.

So the hour arrives, everything is ready, the lamps are hung and lit, the meal is bubbling in the pots, the meat is carved, the wine vats are ready to be poured out, all is ready. And the Master sends his slave to go make the call. '*Come; for everything is ready now.*' The hour everyone has been waiting for is here! Come on in!

Good story. We're all in. We love these parties! Especially since we're the uppercrust. Can't wait to go to the feast and be recognized and seated at the important folk tables. So far they're liking this story.

But then, Jesus goes and wrecks it. Comes up with something bizarre. Crazy talk.

*18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.' 19 "And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.' 20 "And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'*

The feast is ready. The rich man has slaughtered the fatted calf. He's spent a gazillion dollars to honor the whoever it is he's honoring by doing this, usually his son and daughter in law at their wedding.

Everybody knows, when someone of this importance is calling on you to come to his feast to help him honor his beloved, you don't say no. It would be a huge affront to say no. That just can't happen. If your house is on fire, put it out later. Right now you better get to the rich man's party.

But these excuses aren't even good excuses. This is nutty. Nobody would do this. I just won a house I'm going to flip at an auction. Sorry, but my real estate deal is more important to me than honoring your beloved at your party.

I just bought a Model A Ford and the transport delivery truck just unloaded it at my house and I'm anxious to give it a try. Gotta go drive my Ford. I just

bought a new GMC to pull my trailer. Gotta go camping this weekend and try it out. Wish I could come, but you understand. Other folks can take my place. Wish I could be there. Bad timing is all.

I just married a wife and I'm not about to interrupt my honeymoon activities to come honor your beloved. Surely you'll understand. We can't wait another minute. And anyways, my wife put her foot down. I couldn't delay in order to honor your beloved if I wanted to. Outta my hands now. She laid down the law.

The entire scenario is bizarre. Unreal. Hard to put any credence to the story because nobody would ever do that. Sort of like when the president was going to honor the all star team and they say, yeah we hate his guts, so if he's coming, we won't be able to make it. It's that kind of nutty. Idiomatic excuses. Sorry, you'll have to honor your beloved without me. Nobody will miss me.

When it was time to come to God's feast, all of the invited guests were indifferent. Indifference is a pride issue. Everything is about me, I don't care about you, or your feast, or your honor, or the one you are honoring. Sorry it is inconvenient for me to give any honor to you. I'm busy working for ME.

*21 "And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'*

Remember them? The poor and crippled and blind and lame. The people who were invited won't come! Go get the low life's that weren't invited.

All of a sudden these pharisee's are catching on. 5 minutes ago He said the poor and crippled and blind and lame would have a better shot at the kingdom than proud people who think they belong there because of their self righteousness. He's making this story about us. We're the ones who excused ourselves for idiotic reasons. In the kingdom the poor and crippled and blind and lame will be enjoying the feast instead of us. That's what He's saying.

The poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame are outcasts. They don't have pride issues.

But wait. It gets worse. If you're a proud pharisee, that part was bad, but the next part is fighting words. Killing words.

*22 “And the slave said, ‘Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ 23 “And the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”*

These pharisee's are no dummies. The highways. The hedges. The borders. This group of people now . . . this is the gentiles. Bad enough that he gathers in all the losers. All of the outcasts. But that's not enough, now he compels, strong word, compels, the gentiles to fill up his house.

This has gone from bizarre to unbelievably bad, to shocking. Gentiles at the feast instead of the righteous. Shocking.

*24 ‘For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.’”*

In the parable, the Master, the rich man is God. The invited guests were God's chosen people, the Jews. God promised a great feast with His chosen people. A kingdom on earth where Messiah would reign over the whole earth.

Messiah was in their midst calling them to the feast, but they don't want to come to any feast this messiah is calling them to, because His feast requires them to leave Satan's world behind and follow Him. They're too pre-occupied with this world to leave it all behind and follow Him.

They don't like this messiah. They want a conquering hero messiah that rides in and gathers an army and goes out conquering and subduing their enemies and brings a kingdom where they are on top.

They want a political messiah, not a spiritual messiah. Jesus wants to talk about sin, but they're convinced, sin is not their problem. Jesus wants to talk about humility, but humility is the thing they hate most about Him. They want a political warrior.

Jesus comes and says, all is ready! Come into the Kingdom! And they say, we're not interested in any Kingdom you're going to bring.

I've got a vacant lot full of weeds that's more interesting to me than you are, Jesus. I've got a truck and camper that's more interesting to me than you are Jesus. I've got a significant other that's way more interesting to me than you are Jesus. Not about to give up my love interests to have you, Jesus.

So the Master becomes angry. He sends His slaves to call in all of the nobodies. What did Paul say about the church that was being gathered in?

*1Cor. 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, 29 that no man should boast before God.*

The wise, the mighty, the noble are too busy conquering this world for themselves to bother with a spiritual kingdom. The Jews don't want their messiah, they want this world and they want some recognition in it.

God set the Jews aside. But not all of them. At Pentecost it was Jewish apostles who swept 2,000, then 3,000 of their countrymen into the kingdom. But it was the spiritually poor and blind and crippled and lame who come in.

But in the parable, the Master doesn't stop with outcast Jews. No, He goes to the Gentiles and compels them to come. The off-scouring of the earth, the

gentiles, are compelled to come to the banquet.

That would be us folks. We aren't even the poor and crippled and blind and lame, we're the offscouring of the nations. Called to a rich man's banquet. We're the nobody's that didn't even know there was a banquet, stumbling along the world's highways and hedges and suddenly we're compelled to come to a rich man's banquet. A place far above our rank. A feast made for others, and we get to enjoy it.

The invitation is still available. The hall isn't yet filled. The slaves are still compelling the offscouring of the world to come to the rich man's banquet.

What interests you more than Jesus? Land? Investments? Things? Wives? Pleasure? Family? What is it that has more interest for you than Jesus?

Most of the world has heard about the feast and the open invitation to come. And most of the world has all of the same excuses that these pharisees had on the day Jesus gave the parable.

Most people are far more interested in what they can get their hands on in this world right now, than a future world and kingdom. Only a remnant hears the invitation to a heavenly banquet sins forgiven, clothed in wedding garments white and clean, given freely to you at no cost, and sees that treasure as far greater than all the treasures and interests of this world. Only a few.

When Moses brought down the tablets with God's commands, inscribed on stone, the first and pre-eminent command was this;

3 *“You shall have no other gods before Me. Anything that is more important to have or to do than obeying God is idolatry. Places or things or relationships that are more important to you than God are idolatry.*

*I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.’* Idolatry.

19 *“And another one said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to*

*try them out; please consider me excused.*' Idolatry.

20 "And another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'  
*Idolatry.*

Any person, place, or thing that exists in your heart supreme above knowing and having and obeying Jesus, is idolatry. The whole nation of the Jews were guilty of this idolatry of loving this world more than their Messiah who is God in human flesh. And so are we.

These Jews who Jesus has pleaded with for 3 years all have something in common with people today. They were convinced. Convinced that their religion and their lifestyle and their self-righteousness would be enough to get them a place at the table when God breaks bread with the righteous in the kingdom of God in the next life.

So convinced in fact that when Jesus has just told them that proud boasters will have no place in heaven with God, this man blurts out "*Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!*"

Unlike the Sadducees, these Pharisees do believe in a resurrection and a presence in the next world. They are convinced that they will have a place, in that world, with God, at His table, breaking bread with Him.

Are you also convinced? Conviction is a good thing. We enjoy being around people with strong convictions. But conviction based on faith have to be based on faith in the right truths.

These men who raised their glasses to this man's stated boast in his conviction that he and they would be those who *are* the blessed who will be eating bread with God in the next world, in His kingdom, are basing their convictions on faith in their own self-generated righteousness.

Jesus has told them "You must be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect". That is the required standard. They think they meet that standard. Either their view of God is very low or their view of themselves is very high, or both. The

standard is perfection and they are convinced they will be there.

Are you convinced that you will also see God and break bread at His table?  
What do you base that conviction on?

40 years ago when we used to go out visiting people who had visited the church and filled out a card indicating they would have an interest, we would ask a couple of questions gauged to find out where their convictions were based. After a general pleasant few questions about the weather or whatever else, we would ask;

*If you were to die today are you positive you would go to heaven? Most folks would say yes, yes they would be allowed in heaven. Then a second question; If you did die today and appeared before God and He said, why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?*

Now you're at the base of their held convictions. Why do you think God will allow you into His heaven? What reason? And the answers would come. Sometimes it would be based on the blood of Jesus who died to forgive my sins. But often it would be based on their own goodness and law keeping.

Being convinced is worthless if your faith is in the wrong thing. God's standard is sinless perfection equal to His. Are you still convinced? These pharisees were convinced and they're in hell. Their faith was in the wrong thing.

Let me share with you why I am convinced. I'm convinced because like the publican in chapter 18 who beat on his breast and looked up to heaven and said have mercy on me, a sinner, I also realize that I am just a vile lost sinner.

But I believe that Jesus died on a cross to pay the penalty for all of my sins. And I believe that He rose from the dead in order to give me His perfect righteousness. My sins removed to Him and He paid the penalty. His righteousness accounted to my account.

Because of that single act, some day when He says to me, *Why should I let you into my heaven*, I'll be able to say, because Your son gave me these spotless white wedding garments to put on. Because I am clothed in His righteousness. Because He shed His blood to purchase me. Because all of my sins were punished, at the cross, in His death, in my place.

This belief is the only one in all the world, in all the religions and convictions based in belief, there is only one where I can lose my debt of sin and gain a perfect righteousness acceptable to God. Only one.

What the pharisee stated in vs. 15 is true! *“Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”* Totally right. But God told Moses up on Mount Sinai,

*Ex. 34:6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; 7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished,*

How can both be true if we are all sinners. How can God have compassion for thousands and still fulfill His oath that He will by no means leave guilt unpunished?

Only one possibility meets the demands of those opposing truths. He sent His own Son to bear the punishment for the sins of those whom He will have compassion and lovingkindness and forgiveness. Someone still has to pay that un-payable debt. Sin must be punished.

Praise be to God that Jesus paid the debt of our sin at the cross. He is the one way both of those truths can be completed and we can stand before God with a righteousness, not our own, given to us by Jesus, His righteousness, and in that righteousness, we will some day break bread in the kingdom of God.