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Sermon preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by Mr. J. Delves on Wednesday evening, 1st. April, 1953.

Text: Luke 14.16 & 17

"Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent His servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready."

This parable is one of many that were spoken by the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh. There is no doubt that some of them gave great offence, as did His teaching to those who were righteous in their own eyes - who were whole and had no need (as they thought) of a Physician; not conscious of their sickness, which is one of the worst conditions a person can be in, to have no consciousness of a malady that is, so to speak, gradually eating away his life. Yet so it is with all who have no gracious conviction of their sinnership in the sight of a holy God, have never been made poor, know nothing of what is here described of those who were brought in to the supper - the poor and maimed and halt and blind.

Those who were first invited rejected the invitation and made excuses. The servant was sent forth again but it is to be noticed, with no different conditions; he went forth under divine command to go into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in hither the poor and maimed and halt and blind. So he did, and came and told his Lord that what He had commanded was done but "Yet there is room". Still room for more yet! The table was not fully occupied, there were still vacancies, so to speak, room for more. Then the Lord said to the servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled." This evidently goes to show that something more is needed than the general proclamation of the gospel, because although that may be so proclaimed and declared in its freeness, yet there is in the heart of man by nature, as with these Pharisees, no taste whatever for it, no desire for it. It has to be seen that the preaching of the Lord Jesus, as set forth in the parables, was despised and

rejected by the Pharisees and by many who heard the glad tidings of the gospel from His lips. So it is with all who are in themselves dead in trespasses and sins; however clear and elucidating His doctrine may have been, they despised it, resented it, trod it under their feet, turned away from it - so is the heart of man by nature. They despise Him. Do you despise Him? They hated Him. Do you hate Him? They had no desire for Him. Have you any desire for Him? They cavilled at His words. You do not cavil at His words do you? Is there not rather a falling at His dear feet and supplicating His mercy, like some of those who came to Him, of whom we read, and like the poor woman who came worshipping Him, saying, "Lord, help me"?

Of course this parable, although very separating, does bring to light the freeness of the gospel, which was ever free. If it were not a free gospel then surely we should never receive any of its precious blessings. This truth is often brought to light in the parables of the Lord Jesus, as in the parable of the two debtors. One owed five hundred pence and the other fifty, yet neither had anything to pay; and it was when they had nothing to pay that "He frankly forgave them both." O how could a parable elucidate the freeness of the gospel more than that one or this one?

"Mercy never can be bought,
Grace is free and all's the Lamb's".

Yet it is just this point that is so mortifying to proud nature, and proud nature will ever be like the proud Pharisee who turns away from it. It is just as much in your heart and mine by nature to turn away from it. If it has ever been so, and I feel assured it has been with some, that you have been brought in or have been compelled to come in, O what a wonderful portion that is!

" 'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly forced us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin."

Some have objected to that word refused but I do not object to it because it is in man's nature - it would be unless grace super-

abounded over sin in him and he was thus compelled to come in. Some of you have been compelled to come in. That is to say, by the Lord's distinguishing mercy you have been brought out of the streets and lanes of the city and have been compelled to come in. And those of you who have been thus compelled would, I feel sure, answer to the characters here described as being brought in, maimed, halt, blind, lame, dependent upon the Lord Himself to bring the remedy for these different infirmities and afflictions. Poor in yourself, that is sensibly poor, lacking what the law claims or rather what is claimed under the law. Poor - that is deeply conscious of your unfitness and unworthiness of the least of His mercies and conscious of your spiritual poverty, maimed, disabled, crippled, afflicted; maimed through sin so that you cannot run, walk or move. Halt, hesitant, often not knowing what to do, coming to a pass, not knowing which way to turn or what course to take, having to "stand still", which in some cases here in this life is necessary. Blind - dependent upon the Lord to open your eyes and His good Spirit to convey that teaching, making you "wise unto salvation". Ah! you see it is the maimed and halt who have to be dealt with, have to be brought in, brought in. There is something very sweet about this.

One point of teaching in this parable appears to me to be that those who were first invited objected and made excuses, which shows that if it were left at a mere invitation or proclamation without any divine power attending it, to lay hold of a sinner and bring him in, he would surely turn away from it, because it is in the heart of man to say "we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." You did not, I did not, no one does, by nature. This goes to show, I believe very clearly, that divine compulsion is essential to bring a sinner in. Here are invitations; but now you see, the invitation, to those who have no case, no heart, no desire, has no attraction! The world comes first. It is a very solemn consideration, but it is true; the world comes first. Does the world come first with us? There was nothing the matter with the feast, there was no fault to be found with the food. The feast was prepared and all was ready and the

invitation was clear enough, but "They all with one consent began to make excuses." How this shows that the world is in the heart of man by nature; he must be brought in. What a wonderful mercy it is for you and me that it is not left to our choice but that sovereign distinguishing grace alone decides the issue, that it does not rest with the creature. The servant was commanded to go out into the streets and hedges and highways, and compel them to come in. All this does not in any way detract from the clearness of the blessed gospel but brings it into clearer light, magnifies its beauty. It shows the inherent unbelief of man and his inherent resentment and natural propensities. He will make excuses; he will excuse himself till he falls into hell, if grace prevent not. We may mark this as being perfectly true.

Here is a remarkable parable. Perhaps we may notice one or two points to some profit and with a spiritual bearing. "A certain man made a great supper." You see the Lord has just been saying, When thou makest a dinner or supper, call not thy friends, brethren, kinsmen, neighbours, lest they call thee again and make recompense; but call the halt, the lame, the blind. "And thou shalt be blessed." One said unto Him, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." Whoever the poor man may have been, he could not have said a truer word, could he? In the Revelation we read "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." They are blessed, greatly blessed, who are thus called. Notice how it is put there. "Called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." They have to be gathered out of the streets and lanes of the city, the highways and hedges; they have to be brought in. Has the Lord brought you in? Has there been a day when divine grace effected a change? so that the things you formerly despised you now begin to seek after and instead of saying, "We desire not the knowledge of Thy ways", you said, "Lord, have mercy upon me"? O what a wonderful thing! You see, you were being prepared to be brought in to the feast, beginning to feel your poverty; maimed, halt, blind, deaf, these were the characters that were brought in and what a wonderful

welcome they received! The Lord speaks in the Canticles, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrror with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk; eat, O friends; drink yea, drink abundantly, O beloved." There is no scarcity there, is there? No, neither is the invitation a half-hearted invitation, is it? Can you feel you are one of His friends? Eat, O friends, yea drink abundantly.

"A certain Man made a great supper." The man here evidently signifies the Lord Himself who made the supper; and what is the supper? Why the supper here is the blessed provision of His gospel. It is nothing less than this and it cannot be anything more. This is the supper! With the Jews, you see, the supper was usually the principal feast. In a spiritual sense the gospel is the principal feast - in fact, it is the only feast. Your mercy and mine is that it is the feast to which poor sinners are invited. What a wonderful word it was that murmuring Pharisee scornfully said, "This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Here is the supper then. It is the Lord's rich and great provision for His people. "I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread." Have you ever been satisfied? I have! Have you ever felt in your heart that the dear Lord was all you could wish and desire and had a moment when you could feel a sweet hope that He was your Jesus? "The meek shall eat and be satisfied." He will never send them empty away. "I will abundantly bless her provision." The gospel you see, friends, is in the scripture compared to food. Our natural bodies need food to sustain us in life and to maintain our health and strength, and this is just as true spiritually for the soul. It must have food if it is living, and the gospel is that food. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the life and substance of the gospel. If you take Him out there is no gospel left. If you read the 6th. of John and could feel what once I felt when I read that, you would have a sweet moment. To feel that He, the dear Redeemer, is the Bread of Life to your soul would be very wonderful! But perhaps some of you can say He is

that to you. O then you are greatly favoured to be in that enjoyment and satisfaction. But the truth remains always the same - He must be the food. It does not matter how far advanced you may be in experience or whether the light has just begun to dawn, He must be food. Whether we be "children, young men, or fathers" He must be the food. It is very blessed reading in John 6. "I am that bread of life." How sweet it is. I am that bread, He says, and faith responding will say, 'Lord, Thou art the nourishment of my soul, bread, water, wine, everything, all I need.' This is the supper then and it is a supper that satisfies.

It is said to be a great supper. There have been many great suppers, evidently, made but there was never a supper made like this. It was a great supper. Great because of the greatness of Him who made it. The Person who made the supper was the Lord Himself - the Lord Jesus, very God and very man. Everything that the Lord has done is great. Every crumb of mercy He is disposed to give a poor sinner is a great crumb. Every token you may have got in your heart is a great token. Every ray of light is a great ray. This is a great supper. And so it is in the view of faith to a vessel of mercy. O the attraction in the gospel! What an attraction there is then, when the Spirit of the Lord brings a little of it into your heart; especially when you can feel the power of the invitation in your heart, saying, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.... Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." What are the sure mercies of David but the blessings of the precious gospel of His grace: the food, the drink, the bread, the water, the wine? It is a great supper then, because of the greatness of Him who made it.

It is also a great supper because of the nature of the provision. It is no less than His own flesh and blood which are received by faith and are symbolised by the ordinance of the Lord's supper in the bread and wine which set forth His precious, broken body and His

shed blood. All this is profoundly sacred. How many of the Lord's people have had a sweet moment under the view of faith in receiving those simple emblems, feeling their souls to be resting upon the foundation, and Him to be bread and wine to their souls.

It is a great supper too because of the nature of the food. It is all prepared, you see. "All things are now ready." It is not like someone saying, 'We will invite some of our friends to supper but I do not know when it will be, because I have not anything ready and do not know when I shall have.' No, it is not like that, for all things here are now ready, not to be got ready. But what have we to understand by the nature of the food and the preparation? Three things appear to me in the preparation of this great supper. One is the blessed incarnation of the great and glorious Redeemer of guilty man; that was a very essential ingredient in the preparation of this supper. He passed by the nature of angels and "took on Him the seed of Abraham" in order to prepare this great supper, this provision. Moreover, the offering of Himself on Calvary's cross was an essential preparation. It was by means of these fires, of suffering and affliction and the flames of divine wrath, that the Lord Jesus Christ under the figure of wheat, was ground in the mill of divine law and did thus become suitable food for His dear people. It is His broken body. His people are brought at times into just a very little fellowship with Him in His sufferings and death and this is when they partake of His divine repast. A third point in the preparation of it was His ascending up into heaven and taking our nature there, which He did. All this was done, you see, in "the fulness of time" and all according to the Lord's divine purpose in love to His people. So now all things are ready. To put it like this, it can truthfully be said, there is nothing a poor sinner really needs but is prepared and is ready for him to receive. "All things are now ready." This is not to make it all so easy but to bring to the heart of a waiting soul the bread of life and to give such to feel a welcome. Surely none ever gave a warmer

welcome than the Lord Jesus to all who by faith come to Him for mercy and life and for this rich provision! "Come; for all things are now ready." All is prepared. Ah, yes, but some may say, 'I feel like we read in one of the hymns,

"Lord, in Thy house I read there's room,
And venturing hard, behold I come;
But, can there, tell me, can there be
Among Thy children, room for me?"

There is! The parable says so. "The servant said, Lord, it is done as Thou hast commanded, and yet there is room." There is no denying all that. It is a great supper then!

Again, it is a great supper because of the number of the guests. All partakers of this will one day be with Him in heaven. John, in that chapter in the Revelation, after regarding the number of those sealed, said, "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Throne, and before the Lamb." There they were in the vision that he saw. All those had been brought in, they had been gathered by divine distinguishing grace, a number whom no man could number - but the Lord can number. It is a great supper then.

Then here is the invitation to which I have referred, "Come; for all things are now ready." He sent His servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready." Nothing is lacking in the gospel! There is no failure there, no deficiency there, no lack of provision; yet "they all with one consent began to make excuse." This is far more solemn than many realise, far more solemn, because it shows what the heart of man is; they had no room for Him. Have you got room for Him? They all made excuses, the world came first, and so the Lord said afterwards, which all has a bearing upon the same point of truth, "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." That does not mean we are to have a natural hatred to our parents and brethren in kindred ties, but that nothing must come

before Him. It must be as the apostle said, "I count all things but loss.... that I may win Christ, and be found in Him." If the world and even those in kindred ties, come before Him, then we cannot follow Him. "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." Here then, we have to see that if we are left to ourselves the world will come first; O yes, it would have the greatest attraction, the greater pull; the oxen, the land, the wife would come first; there would be no time for Him, no place for Him; the world is in the heart by nature.

It is our great mercy that it has not been left at a mere invitation, but in the cases of the Lord's dear people there has been a divine compulsion. "These poor things that were out in the streets and lanes of the city, poor, maimed, halt, blind, had to be brought in. You had to be brought in; I had. O that it might please the Lord to bring many more in. His grace superabounds over all our sins. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound". It abounded in bringing us in! The blind, the halt, - all had something the matter with them. Every one was thus given a real taste for the gospel; they must all have something the matter with them. Have you anything the matter with you? Do you feel anything like the hymnwriter who said,

"With my burden I begin,
Lord, remove this load of sin."

Does it cripple you? does it make you feel poor, halt, maimed, blind? What then? Bring them in. That was the command. They have a malady.

"What comfort can a Saviour bring
To those who have never felt their woe?"

But if you have a sin-burdened conscience or sin has been like a raging fever in your very veins, then, if under such a condition you are brought to cry out for divine mercy, there is a welcome. "All that the Father giveth to me shall come to Me." Why? Because they have been brought in and they come because they were given; they were His dear people, that is why they come. Here is the invitation, you see, "Come, for all things are now ready." But O

these poor things that were out in the streets and lanes, when they came in to the table, to the feast, and received welcome, and heard the host saying, Come for all things are now ready, how it must have gladdened their hearts! Do you feel a little like we read in the Song where a hungry sheep said, "Tell me, O Thou Whom my soul loveth, where Thou feedest, where Thou makest Thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of Thy companions?" The Lord has the provison and gave direction to that sheep; there is a welcome here, Come, for all things are now ready, all you need, Come and welcome, poor and needy one, guilty, destitute, weak.

"Weak and wounded, sick and sore,
 Jesus ready stands to save you,
 Full of pity, joined with power;
 He is able, He is willing,
 Doubt no more."

I know you will receive this in a right sense. It is for the character described, one who feels his poverty, his need, and that is his only fitness. "All the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him". So come! He gives the welcome, and there is something very very sweet about this. Have you had a moment in your life when it has been as though the Lord did take hold of you and bring you in? Then there may have been a different kind of confession, a confession of your unworthiness, unfitness, unsuitability. Yes, but then He will show you how suitable He is to you.

I must leave it now. May the Lord give us a clear light upon His Word and give us, in such a parable as this, to view, not only the freeness and sufficiency of His precious gospel but also the fact that poor, needy, hungry sinners must be brought in and when thus brought in, they receive a welcome.

"Come" it is such a sweet word, "Come; for all things are now ready."

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