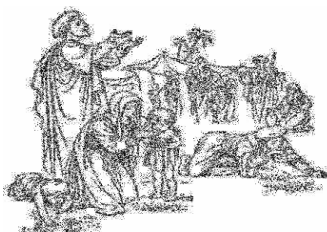


**“And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.” (Luke 14:18)**

**I CANNOT COME**

The individuals who were making their excuses in Luke 14 (quoted above) had been invited to a great supper. Not wanting to attend, they used all of the normal activities of life as an excuse; one had just gotten married, and others had purchased some real estate or cattle.



This account is a parable and the real lesson is obtained when we consider the spiritual meanings. The great supper is the marriage supper of the lamb that will be held when Jesus returns for his bride. It is God that is inviting individuals to honor Him by attending His son’s wedding feast. Many are called, many are given opportunity, but a great number refuse to answer the call or continue in their commitment. They are too busy, there are so many things to do in this life and they always seem to be much more important than seeking a seat at the Lord’s table, in his Kingdom.

Perhaps some of you are familiar with the Sunday School song that was inspired by this parable.

*I cannot come to the wedding, don't bother me now,  
I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow,  
I have fields and commitments that cost a pretty sum,  
don't trouble me now, I cannot come.*

It is a cute song with a catchy tune but it reveals a very sad truth; “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” Many individuals are given the greatest of all opportunities, to eat and drink at the Master’s table in the kingdom, but only a few are willing to set aside the cares of this life to seek the Kingdom of God first.

We each have choices to make in this life. If we have been fortunate enough to hear the Master’s call and understand the invitation, let us make the right choice; seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness must become our **TOP PRIORITY**. Let us honor the Lord with the firstfruits of our increase; let us respond with joy and without excuse to the invitation to the wedding feast, maintaining our faith in God and His promises.



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# Things Concerning

The Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ

**“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33)**

**The Sermon on the Mount**

Jesus provided some of his most powerful teachings during this one event, often called “the Sermon on the Mount”; it is recorded primarily in Matthew, chapters 5-7.

In this issue we want to concentrate specifically on his words in Matthew 6:33, as quoted above.

Jesus is speaking about all of the material things that we normally seek after in this life.

In verse 31 and 32 he states: “*Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*”

It is in this context that he continues by telling them to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”



**PRIORITIES and FAITH**

This is an exhortation from the Master to establish priorities in our lives. There are many things that we want and need, and God knows our need. **IF** we learn to seek His kingdom and His righteousness first, He will see that we have the necessities of life and more.

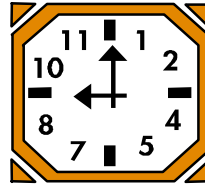
We must have faith and trust in our Heavenly Father. Jesus told his disciples, “*Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*” (Verse 30)

Let us learn to have faith in God and make His kingdom and righteousness the **TOP PRIORITIES** in our lives. He has our welfare in mind. Eternal salvation is much more important than whether we have food and clothes enough to live another day. If we spend all of our time and energy on the cares of the present life, we may well lose out on any hope for a future life in the Kingdom of God.

**“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” (Matthew 6:34)**

### ONE DAY AT A TIME

Jesus continued his sermon, reminding his disciples that they must not spend their time worrying about what might happen tomorrow. There are enough problems, concerns and yes, enough evil for today. So, let us concentrate on each moment of each day to seek first His kingdom and righteousness.



Evil is a deceptive term. We tend to minimize our connection with evil deeds and prefer not to think of anything we do as evil. It is a good thing that we do not want to be associated with evil, but we must also recognize both good and evil for what they truly are, if we hope to choose the good and refuse the evil.

Remember, the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” was at the beginning of the troubles for mankind. You would think after the mistake that Adam and Eve made (and the consequence of that sin, including separation from God and mortality) that we would have learned much about good and evil, so that we would not make the same mistakes in our lives.

We have an opportunity today, through the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus, to have our sins forgiven and to be reconciled to God. Through the grace of God we may be allowed to *eat of the Tree of Life in the midst of the paradise of God*. If this is our hope, it is important that we learn to truly *discern between good and evil*. (Hebrews 5:14)

### EVIL and WICKEDNESS

Wickedness, like evil, is another word that we would prefer not to be associated with. The Prophet Malachi provided us with insight concerning “wickedness” that may help us better understand the words of Jesus concerning evil. Malachi was inspired to write:

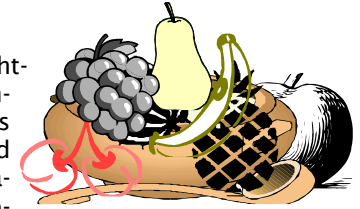
*“And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” (Malachi 3:15-18)*

Consider this: Those that feared the Lord and thought upon His name will be remembered and spared. They apparently sought after God’s righteousness and served Him. The wicked however, served Him not! **It is not necessarily what we do that makes our actions good or evil, it is whether we are doing these things in service to God, or for ourselves.**

**“Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” (Proverbs 3:9-10)**

### THE FIRSTFRUITS

Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness involves not only our time and energy, it also involves our substance. God has blessed (and will bless us) with many good things. It pleases God when we show appreciation for these gifts. We can show our appreciation with thanksgiving and praise, and by honoring Him with the firstfruits of our increase.



In a practical sense, what does this mean for us? In Bible times, they brought an acceptable offering of their harvest and livestock to the tabernacle. Today, most of us receive the increase of our labors in the form of money. To honor the Lord using this medium, we should use a portion of our money in His service; not just any portion, it should be the firstfruits. This means that we ought to set aside a portion of our money for the Lord, on the first day of the week, or as soon as we receive it. ( Example—“*On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up.*” -1 Corinthians 16: 2. NIV) We should not wait to see if there is any of our substance left, after we have taken care of all of our own personal needs, we should honor the Lord first.

### TITHING

Jacob offered a positive example for what is now called “tithing”. We learn about his commitment in Genesis 28:22: “*And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.*”

Our theme verse from Proverbs 3 provides us with an important principle. if we honor God with our increase, He will reciprocate. “*So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.*” This same promise is expressed by the Prophet Malachi, “*Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*” (Malachi 3:10)

Malachi rebuked Israel for cheating on their offerings. “*And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts.*” (Malachi 1:8)

Many try to fool the Lord; they pretend to honor Him as an investment, hoping that He will indeed restore and multiply their substance. Others offer deceitfully, bringing only a “widow’s mite”, when they have an abundance. The blessings associated with remembering God first, with energy, time and substance, are only for those with a good heart and pure motives.