

nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

In Luke 14:16–24 we are given an allegory to help us understand this gracious and most loving invitation and to know how to respond to it:

1. Who is invited? Nobody will be excluded by God. This is the inconceivable message that God will lovingly accept anyone who comes to Him, no matter what your origin, profession, nationality, colour, age or educational background. There is no wider scope anywhere.

2. How often does God invite? There isn't only one invitation. God will invite several times. In our parable there are three invitations. But the emphasis is on Today: *"Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts"* (Hebrews 3:7–8). We should not presume upon God's grace by delaying our response.

3. How will this happen? The three invitations in Luke 14 are incremental in their urgency. The first one says: *"Come, for all things are now ready"* (verse 17); the second invitation is stepped up to *"go quickly"* and *"bring in"* (verse 21); and the last one says *"compel them"* (verse 23). In the New Testament the Greek word *'anagkazo'* is mentioned nine times, five times it is rendered as "compel" and four times as *"force someone to do something"*. In these expressions we find more than just a half-hearted plea. The king's servant commits his whole personality, exercises all means of persuasion, truth, love, meekness, politeness, perseverance and resilience; and in some instances he must indeed be clear-cut to warn people from going to hell.

4. What about the attendance? Those mentioned in the parable unfortunately have all rejected the invitation, not because of general objections, but because of having set the wrong priorities. Verse 24 tells us the sad and bitter truth about those who have reject-

ed or ignored the invitation: *"For I say unto you, that none of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper."* They were called but they didn't come. Now the feast will take place without them. They will be excluded for all eternity; the Bible calls this exclusion hell. God's invitation is still valid for each one of us. How will you decide? The supper will be filled with people in any case. The Bible speaks of a certain number ("the fullness of the nations", Romans 11:25), already known to God. When the last seat is occupied no further invitation will be given. In Jeremiah 8:20 this is illustrated in the picture of the harvest: *"The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."*

5. Why are we invited? The reason for God's invitation to us is easily found because in 1 John 4:16 it is written: *"God is love."* His very being is love, and His love is the source of all human love. In Ezekiel 33:11 God directly addresses us: *"As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live!"*

6. How is the invitation accepted? Jesus is responsible for issuing the ticket to heaven because *"God has set Him forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood"* (Romans 3:25a), and without Him nobody can come to the Father (John 14:6). He forgives all our sins and cleanses us from all iniquities if we confess them



to Him with a sincere heart (1 John 1:9). A simple prayer of repentance and faith will submit all our sins and transgressions to Jesus, and thus we accept the invitation: *"As many as received him, to them gave He the right to be children of God to those that believe on His name"* (John 1:12).

This great heavenly supper/feast is a wedding celebration for Jesus and his bride (the church, His people). It's a beautiful way for us to understand our eternal close union with our loving Lord. Those who accept the invitation are given a wedding garment to wear, a symbol of purity. Only by receiving this pure wedding gown in this way (Mathew 22:11; Revelation 3:4; 7:9; 7:14 and 19:8) will we be accepted to enter heaven. The love of God is all-inclusive. There's no partisanship, no prejudices and no selecting love according to sympathies. His love reaches out to everyone. But while God's invitation is inconceivably wide, the response to it also demonstrates a narrowness that the Bible doesn't conceal: whoever rejects this invitation and does not trust the Lord Jesus Christ will get lost for eternity. The well-known Dutch author of directive Christians books, Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983), wrote (in: *"Captive He made free"*) very accurately:

*"We can all get to heaven
without health, without wealth, without fame,
without scholarliness, without education;
without being beautiful, without friends,
without 10 000 other things,
but we can never get to heaven
without Jesus Christ."*

If you have realized after reading this tract that Jesus is the only way to your salvation and you want to follow Him whole heartedly, then you can do this confidently with the help of the following prayer, as long as you are genuine before God:

"Lord Jesus, today I have read that you are the only way to heaven. I hereafter want to be in heaven with

you. Please save me from hell, which is what I deserve because of my guilt. But because you love me so much, you died for me on the cross and paid the punishment for my sins. You see all my sins – from my early childhood. You know every sin, things that I still know and even things that I have forgotten. You know all the thoughts and feelings that are in my heart. In your eyes I'm like an open book. I cannot get to heaven in the condition I am now, because till now I have lived without you. I ask you and pray to forgive all my sins, which I deeply regret. Please come into my life now and make it new. Help me to get rid of all that is not right and replace it with new habits that you can bless. Give me access to your Word, the Bible. Help me to understand what you want me to know and give me an obedient heart so I can do what is pleasing to you. I want you to be my LORD from now on. I want to follow you. Please show me the way that I should go in all walks of my life. I thank you that you have heard and answered my prayer so that I may be a child of God now, who hereafter will be with you in heaven. Amen."

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Original Title: Die größte Einladung
Author's home page: www.wernergitt.de
Translation from German:
Günther Schwalb
Editing: Kym Holwerda, Australia

Publisher: Bruderhand-Medien
Am Hofe 2, 29342 Wienhausen, Germany
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Nr. 128-3 – Englisch/English – 9th edition 2022

The Greatest Invitation

A love letter to us



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The Greatest Invitation

God's love letter to us

There's no one in the world that wouldn't be happy to receive a personal letter with a loving invitation. Do you know that we have all received such a letter? It is called the Bible. The Bible is essentially God's love letter to us – and in it He gives us an extraordinary personal invitation.

The written letter is the most private and personal way a person can send a written message to someone he loves and cares for. It's not just some calculated list of facts and figures like a book of law or a business manual. Nor is it like a dry old textbook or encyclopaedia, merely relating the facts. It is a way persons who know and esteem one another convey their most intimate feelings to each other. You share sorrows and joys in the confident hope that the recipient will understand you. The letter is a symbol of personal interest and love.

And so it is with God's letter to us. The New Testament, and in fact the whole Bible, is *a letter of love by God to us*. God loves us and He knows each one of us person-



ally, so He has chosen to communicate with us in the form of a written letter ... a letter of love.

People have many differing views about the Bible, and healthy reasoning is always a good thing. But every discourse about the origin of the Bible is futile in the end if the Word of God doesn't speak to us in a personal way. Even the hasty reader of the Bible will immediately notice that the character of the whole New Testament is that of a personal letter. 21 out of the 27 parts of the New Testament are even declared as letters: e.g. the Letter to the Romans; the Letters to the Corinthians, the Letter to the Galatians. As it's clear from the beginning verses of (for example) the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles that these books are composed as letters. Even the last book of the Bible contains several short letters known as epistles/messages (Revelation 2 and 3). It is surely no coincidence that the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ was revealed to us mainly in the form of a letter. God knows when we are disheartened and in need of encouragement, consolation and advice.

- HE knows when we are in danger and therefore HE will give us admonition, direction and guidance.
- HE knows how much sin and guilt burdens us and therefore grants us forgiveness of sins very personally.
- HE knows how every man and woman is aimlessly straying around and therefore is preparing us an eternal destination.
- HE knows about our being lost and therefore is offering us eternal life.

His Word (His letter) to us is always precise, direct and helpful for our very existence. It therefore should be read with a loving heart and a prayerful attitude. Everyone who approaches the Bible in this way will get a rich blessing; a person who reads it with a disbelieving and critical attitude, on the other hand, will go away empty-handed.

God's concern

God, the originator of this letter, sends it to us for only one reason: He wants to win back the people who separated themselves from Him by their falling into sin. His will is that no man will get lost and He implemented *the greatest rescue operation in history*. The bridge to the house of the Father is Jesus Christ. Now He is searching for those among us whose desire is to help show the way. He needs witnesses who can tell others how they got saved. He needs coworkers, praying and ministering people who will become ministers of joy. He needs beacons of hope in a world full of fear and perplexity, of resignation and hopelessness. He is looking for bearers of His love in a world of hate, quarrelling and war. He is looking for missionaries who will proclaim the Good News in their neighborhood, and those who will go to the ends of the world. He is looking for teachers, shepherds (pastors) and evangelists. He is looking for speakers and writers of His Word. In short: there is no unemployment and everybody is needed.

The sender of the letter is waiting for our response

How much do we look forward to get a reply after having sent a letter? How much more does God? He has shown His love to us not only by writing a letter but also by what He has done. Will you reply?



The price paid to redeem us from sin was extremely high: *"Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins, that he might save us"* (Galatians 1:4). We are redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:19). The letter to the Hebrews reminds us earnestly to bear in mind: *"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?"* (Hebrews 2:3). So God is waiting for our personal response. What do we say to His offer of salvation? With our prayer we can grasp the stretched-out hand of God in Christ Jesus and call on His name that will save us (Romans 10:13). The only appropriate response to His Word (His letter to us) is that of thanksgiving and praise. If we continually read His Word (Joshua 1:8) and let it direct our lives, we ourselves will be turned into living letters which will be read by others and draw them to God: *"You are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart"* (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Only when we read the Bible as a love letter to us will we live in close relationship with Him. Knowledge is good but love is better. Jesus talks about this relationship in John 10:27–28: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."* Whoever has heard the voice of the Good Shepherd (Jesus) will know that it is incomparable. Everybody who is following this shepherd has passed from death into eternal life.

We are expected!

In the course of our life we receive many invitations. This begins with our children getting invitations to children's birthday parties. As adults we are invited to different kinds of celebrations like birthday parties, anniversaries, garden parties and wedding ceremonies. Even more highly prized are invitations to those

rare events such as state ceremonies, Nobel Prize awards, or a king's/queen's coronation. But no matter what the occasion, the following is always true:

- they only last for a short time; often only for one day or even a night,
- the more personalized a ceremony is, the more we appreciate the invitation,
- there will always be a limited number of visitors.

Do you recall that we spoke earlier about a very special invitation offered to us in God's love letter, the Bible? Unlike the celebrations we're invited to here, the ceremony He invites us to is an eternal one. The host is the Most High and the greatest person ever: *it is God himself*. God is staging a huge wedding feast, a feast of joy. This is the very character of heaven: eternal joy, eternal fellowship with God, the eternal presence of Jesus. Heaven therefore is not a kind of a worldly condition, not a political federation of peoples, not a national system ordered according to economic rules or even a monasterial ascetic life. All these are results of human systems of thinking. But God wants us to experience life and full satisfaction. He gives us a foretaste here on Earth, but it doesn't even compare with what He has in store for us beyond in heaven. It is so perfect that it is inconceivable. The Apostle Paul could only express it this way: *"What eye has not seen,*

