

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

MOTIVATIONAL LESSONS

“Excuses”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

Excuses, excuses, excuses! We have all made them. We have all used them. But do they really help us to be better Christians in this life? Luke 14 is a perfect example of people who began to make excuses and who, when called to attend a supper, began to offer excuses as to why they could not attend. They are some of the sorriest excuses you have ever heard! Luke 14:18 says, “They all with one accord began to make excuses.” Listen to the excuses that these people made. In Luke 14:16, the call is made, “Come, all things are now ready.” But the first person who was invited said, “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused” (vs. 18). Another one said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused” (vs. 19). Still another said, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come” (vs. 20).

I would like for you to stop and think about these excuses. Here is a man who said, “I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it.” This is one of the worst possible excuses. Nobody purchases a piece of real estate without first seeing it! How would a person know that the property wasn’t in a flood plain? How would a person know that it was not eaten up with briars and brambles? A person does not buy property without first seeing it. This man was simply making an excuse. The second man said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them.” Remember that these people are being invited to a supper, which would have been in the evening time. How many people do know who would take oxen out in the dark to test them? It was just an excuse. The man did not really need to go test his oxen. He simply did not want to attend the supper. The third excuse was the worst of all. The last man said, “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” How do we know that this is the worst of all excuses? Here’s how we know. How many young married couples do you know who can stand to turn down a free meal? This man was simply making an excuse. He dreamed up an excuse that he thought was valid and that would keep him from attending the supper to which he had been invited. The sad thing about all of this is that this “supper” is indicative of God inviting people to come be a part of the kingdom of Heaven and take advantage of its blessings. But so many times people make excuses for not becoming a Christian and for not living the life that they should.

The one thing we know about excuses is that they are never pleasing to God. Remember the excuses that Moses made when God chosen him to go talk to Pharaoh? Moses said, “I’m not a good speaker. I’m not eloquent. Aaron would be better than me.” Yet in spite of all his excuses, Moses ended up doing a good job once he decided to do God’s will. When he developed the boldness and courage he needed to follow through with the task, God was right there helping him. Thus, our excuses will not please God. King Saul began to make excuses in 1 Samuel 15 as to why he did not completely destroy the Amalekites. God had told him to kill everything—all the animals and all the people. Saul was told not to spare anything or anyone. But Saul spared the king and the best of the flocks. Saul’s

excuse was, "I know what you told me to do, but I spared the best so that I could offer it to You. I was going to give this as a sacrifice to You, God. I know you told me not to, but I did it so that I could give you the glory." That was just an excuse. God said in 1 Samuel 15:21-22, "Behold, to obey is better than to sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft." God was not at all pleased with Saul's excuse.

Consider, too, the excuses in the Book of Acts from Felix and Agrippa. In Acts 24, we see the example of Felix and how the Gospel is being preached to him. Paul is presenting Jesus and salvation, and he preaches to Felix a three-point sermon of righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. The Bible says that as Paul reasoned with Felix about those three points, Felix said, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you" (vs. 25). How sad it is to see the excuse that Felix offered. "Not now, but someday." I wonder how many people have offered up that same excuse as it relates to salvation. Think about Acts 26:28. Agrippa is being taught the Gospel. Paul brings his sermon to a climax. Agrippa responds by saying, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." How sad it is that he offered the excuse, "almost." "I'm almost ready. Go away and I will be ready soon." The sad thing is that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. Our excuses will never please God. We must not make excuses for not serving God.

Why do some people make excuses? And what excuses do they offer for not serving God? We are going to examine some excuses for not serving God, and we will note how these are "just excuses" that have no validity. If we find things that we really **want** to do, then we will find the time to do them. One of the first excuses people make for not serving God is that they simply do not have the time to serve God. They suggest that their lives are so busy as they go here and there with their children, or that their marriage takes up too much time, or that they are too busy at work. They say that they just do not have the time. Do you know what is wrong with excuses such as these? We **make time** for things that we think are really important—whether it be things on the job, things with our children, or a hobby that we enjoy. Yes, we will make time for those things! God must be the most important aspect of our lives, and saying that we do not have time is a very poor excuse. Jesus put it this way in John 9:4, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." The idea behind this is that we must take advantage of **now**. We have been given 24 hours in a day, 7 days a week. We can use those to God's glory—if we decide to! It is not a matter of time; it is a matter of whether or not we choose to use our time properly. The psalmist said in Psalm 90:10, "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years." We must learn to take advantage of that time. James said in James 4:14, "What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." Yes, life is short. But we can take advantage of life now by serving God. Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." It really is not a problem of truth. Excuse making is not a problem that relates to time. The problem is that we do not take advantage of the opportunities that we have now. We let those opportunities pass by. We are like Felix or Agrippa. Our attitude is "Go away for now and return when I have a more convenient time." We must learn to take advantage of the opportunities that we have in the here and now. One of the saddest examples is found in Matthew 25 and the case of the ten virgins. They are getting ready for the bridegroom's arrival. Five are foolish, but five are wise. The five foolish virgins do not have enough oil in their lamps, so they ask the others, "Can we have some of your oil?" But they are told by the five wise virgins, "No, we will not have enough for ourselves." One of the saddest texts in all the Bible occurs in this account. "And the door was shut forevermore." We must learn to take advantage of opportunities **now**. Luke 12:15-21 is another text that teaches us the importance of serving God in the here and now. Here we find a man of whom it might be said that "he had it all." He had a great crop

that year. He therefore said to himself, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." Do you know what God said to that man? He said, "You fool. This night shall your soul be required of you." We must learn to serve God with the time we have now because this is the only opportunity that we have. It is interesting to note that if we do not take the time to serve God now, we are going to have a lot of time to think about our error in eternity. Jesus said in Matthew 25:46 that the righteous will go away into eternal life, but the unrighteous "will go away into everlasting punishment." We must take advantage of the time we have now instead of making excuses.

Another excuse that keeps many people from being good servants of God is worldliness and greed. Too many are consumed with this old world of ours and with chasing the almighty dollar so that they cannot make time to serve Almighty God. They are so busy with their jobs, trying to make the money to pay their bills, or trying to find a way to have nicer things that God never enters into the equation. James put it this way in James 4:4—"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." You cannot have the best of both—the world and God. The two will not go together. We must make sure that we do not let worldliness and greed get in the way. John also taught us this principle in 1 John 2:15-17 where he wrote,

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

These lusts do not need to be our desire and goal in life. We must not let them become our excuse as to why we cannot serve God. Think about it this way. What if you had every pleasure in this life—all the lust, all the money, and everything else that you wanted—yet you lost your eternal soul? How sad that would be. In Mark 8:36-37, Jesus asked, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Your soul is the most important thing you have. Do not allow worldliness and greed to become your excuse for not serving God. All the things of this life, including all our earthly possessions, are one day going to cease to exist. We must place our focus on things that are going to last. In Matthew 24:35, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." Peter described it in 2 Peter 3:10-12 as the Earth and all that is upon it being one day burned up "with a fervent heat." He then went on to say that we should live our lives in good conduct and holiness. May we not allow worldliness and greed to get in our way of serving God!

Another excuse that some make is that service is just too demanding. It is too time consuming. Some suggest that they just do not have the ability to give what is demanded. Romans 12 teaches us that we need to be sure that we give ourselves to God. Paul put it this way in verse 1:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

No, service is not "too demanding" of us. Rather, it is exactly what God demands of us. In fact, it is what we ought to reasonably want to do in light of all that Jesus did for us. What if Jesus had taken the attitude that service is "just too demanding"? What if He had the attitude, "It takes too much time, and it requires too much of me"? The Bible says in Hebrews 12:2 that Jesus, "for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." As I think of the great

work of Jesus, it occurs to me that we should be extremely thankful that He was willing to give Himself as a sacrifice on our behalf. Isaiah 53:5 says that He was “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities.” What if Jesus had said, “No, that is just too demanding; I am not going to do that”? The text of 1 Peter 2:24 says that He was “wounded for our transgressions, and He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” But what if, as Jesus thought about the cross that He was about to have to endure, He said, “That is just too demanding; that requires too much of me, and I just do not think I can do that”? We would be hopeless and helpless in this life if Jesus took the same attitude that many take today. We need not let laziness and a lack of desire to serve God get in our way. We need not make excuses related to that. Like Jesus, we should be people who are truly dedicated to serving God.

Did you know that when we became Christians, we decided at that point that we were going to give our lives to God and that service to God would never be too demanding of us? Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20—“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” We, as God’s children, must not think of our bodies as our own. Rather, we must be willing to give them as a sacrifice to the Lord. This is what Jesus said would be required of us. In Luke 9:23, He said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.” I think this is why Paul had such great confidence in Christ and was able to follow Him, even in times of great difficulty. Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Not only do people make excuses for not serving God in this life, but some who claim to be His servants make excuses for not putting God first. One of those excuses is that they simply did not understand that Jesus and His kingdom must come first. Some seem to think that Christianity is somewhat like a social club—something good to do **if** you have time. Others seem to think that it is important, but it not the top priority in their lives. We need to understand that Jesus and His kingdom must come first in our lives. Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33? He said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Yes, Jesus and the kingdom must be the first priority in our lives. Before we do anything else, we must ask ourselves, “Am I serving God first? Am I putting the kingdom first?” Are we, as Christ’s disciples, making sure that He is the first priority in our lives? If not, then we are simply making excuses because the Bible teaches us that God must come first. Some people make excuses for not putting God first by saying, “My family is very important to me.” Some people allow their family to get in the way of serving God. Maybe family members arrive right before time to go to worship—and so they will stay home to visit with those family members rather than going to worship God. Or maybe there is a Gospel meeting going on, or something else is happening at the church and workers are needed. But family gets in the way and they allow that to become an excuse. If someone asks us, “Why couldn’t you come to help?,” we say, “Well, my family came over.” Who is your **real** family? Should you let your earthly family get in the way of serving God? Think about what Jesus said in Mark 3:35. Jesus’ disciples had come to Him to say that His mother, His brothers, and His sisters were asking for Him. Jesus asked, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” He then looked around at the disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.” The same is true for us. Our Christian family should come first. We must not allow our earthly families to become an excuse for not serving God.

Some offer the excuse of not serving God, “Well, God won’t care. Plus, He won’t really see me anyway. I’m down here and He is way up there. He’s really not that concerned about what I do. Maybe He can’t even see me.” That is not true. Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” Yes, God **can** see, and He **is** concerned about what we are doing in this life. Nothing escapes the all-seeing eye of God. Hebrews 4:13 says, “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” Do not say to yourself that God does not see you because He does see you. We must realize that we **will** give an account for what we do in this life.

Maybe some make the excuse that they simply do not realize how important the worship of God is in seeking the kingdom. Worship is so important as a part of the Christian’s life. Putting the kingdom first, and seeking God first, means that we must be willing to worship with the saints at every possible opportunity. Jesus taught us the importance of worship in John 4:24 when He said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” Worship is not merely an option. Nor is it just “something good to do.” We need to worship God “in spirit and in truth” at every opportunity. Think about the contrast that is given in Luke 14 concerning the feast. This is the context where the phrase comes from, “They all with one accord began to make excuses.” This is set in the tone and tenor of God making the call to come and be His children, to come to the supper, to come to the feast, and to take part in His blessings. That is the real context. Thus, today there are many who, like in that context, make excuses for not obeying the Gospel. What excuses did people make then? And what excuses do we sometimes make today, for not obeying the Gospel?

Some make the excuse, “I am just too sinful. While God’s grace, mercy, and love are wonderful, I am so sinful that they could not possibly cover all of the horrible things that I have done in this life.” Maybe you have lived an immoral life by giving in to all of the passions and desires of this life. Maybe you have done something unspeakable. Paul said something in 1 Timothy 1:15 that ought to encourage all of us when he said, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” Even the chief of sinners—the worst sinner that you could imagine, such as a mass murderer or a rapist—is never too sinful to be saved if he is willing to repent and obey God’s will. That is why Jesus came into the world. Yes, “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” just as Romans 3:23 teaches. But Romans 6:23 complements that by saying, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” If you have been making the excuse for not obeying the Gospel that you are too sinful, and you feel that you somehow need to “get everything right in your life” before you obey the Gospel, that is the wrong way to think. Yes, you need to repent. But we are never going to be perfect. All of us sin and make mistakes. But thanks be to God that even the chief of sinners can be saved by the grace and mercy of God.

Some make the excuse, “I will just do it some other time.” Think again about Acts 24:25 where we see the example of Felix. Paul is preaching the Gospel to him. Felix is not the most moral man, history tells us. As Paul reasoned with him about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid. He was terrified, and said, “Go away for now. When I have a more convenient time, I will call for you.” Those are some of the saddest words recorded in the Bible. “Go away for now. When I have a more convenient time, I will call you back in here. I’ll be really to study, and I will be ready to obey the Gospel.” Do you know what often happens when excuses like that are offered? We do not call the preacher back. We do not take the time. We must realize that “doing it at some other time” is one of the most effective tools of the devil. That is what the devils **wants** us to do. He

wants us to put it off. He wants us to utter that infamous phrase: “**Tomorrow** I will obey the Gospel.” Or, he wants us to say, “The next sermon I hear, I will respond to the invitation of the Lord.” How true it is that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. How many people do you think have said to themselves, “I really need to obey the Gospel. I am **going** to obey the Gospel. When I have more time, I **will** obey the Gospel. I am going to respond to that sermon some day”? But, sadly, that day never comes. We must **obey now** what we **know now**. We must take advantage of the here and now, and make sure that we do not wait until tomorrow. I believe that one of the saddest verses in all the Bible is found in Acts 26:28, which I mentioned at the beginning of this lesson. King Agrippa, like Felix, was not a moral man. He had lived a life of immorality. He had done things that were not right. As Paul preached the Gospel to Agrippa, the king responded by saying, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” Paul, in responding, said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains” (vs. 29). Paul’s point was, “Agrippa, you need to stop saying ‘almost’ and instead become a Christian just like I am—except for my chains of bondage.” How sad it is when people say “almost.” “I ‘almost’ obeyed the Gospel.” “Yes, I believe that baptism is essential for salvation, and one day I ‘almost’ repented of my sins and was baptized.” “Almost” is going to be one of the saddest songs that people will sing in the halls of Hell. “I knew the truth, and I knew what I needed to do. And one day I ‘almost’ obeyed the Gospel.” Do you know where “almost” will get you? It will get you nowhere when it comes to obeying God, becoming a Christian, and doing the right thing.

You need to **obey now** what you **know now**. Listens to the words of 2 Corinthians 6:2, where Paul said, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” Do not wait until tomorrow. Do not wait until next year. Do not make a New Year’s resolution that you will obey the Gospel, yet not do it. You need to obey now what you know now so that you can take advantage of the opportunities that you have. God’s love and mercy is extended to you today. He loves you so much that He sent His Son to this world to die for you. Instead of making excuses, you need to obey the Gospel. If you are willing to believe that Jesus is God’s Son, confess Him as your Savior, repent of the sins in your life that you know are not right, and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins, then you can become a child of God. We are hoping and praying today that you will obey the Gospel, and that all of us will learn the lesson that excuses will get us nowhere in this life. May God bless us as we strive to serve Him.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “EXCUSES”

1. In Luke 14, what were the three different excuses offered by people who had been invited to a supper?
2. In 1 Samuel 15, what excuse did King Saul offer for not obeying God’s command to destroy the Amalekites and their animals?
3. According to 1 Samuel 15:21-22, what was Samuel’s response to King Saul on God’s behalf?
4. In 1 Samuel 15:22, to what did Samuel compare the sin of rebellion against God?
5. In Acts 24, what three things did Paul discuss with Felix as he preached to him?
6. What did Felix say to Paul in Acts 24:25 when Paul urged him to obey the Gospel?
7. When Paul spoke to King Agrippa in Acts 26, how did the king feel about the message he heard on that occasion?
8. According to Acts 26:28, what was King Agrippa’s response to Paul’s sermon?
9. In John 9:4, Jesus provided a good reason for us not to make excuses. What was that reason?
10. According to Psalm 90:10, how long (if we are fortunate) might we as humans expect to live on Earth?
11. What is the point being made in James 4:14?
12. According to Hebrews 9:27, we will never have any type of “second chance” to make things right. Why?
13. James 4:4 teaches us something about friendship with the world. What did James have to say about that?
14. According to 1 John 2:15-17, what are Christians **not** supposed to do?
15. In Matthew 25:46, Jesus discussed two different groups of people. Who were the people in those two groups, and what was their final fate?
16. What does Mark 8:36-37 teach us about the human soul?
17. According to Hebrews 12:2, what did Christ endure on our behalf?
18. What does Isaiah 53:5 say about Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf?
19. What important spiritual truth does 1 Timothy 1:15 teach us?