Don’t Miss This Offer!

First in a series “God’s Good News for Today” for Sept. 2019

# Scripture: Romans 1:16-20; Luke 13:34-14:1; 12-24

# Key Thought: God offers salvation, but will we accept?

# Intro:

Think of an offer that you received that you took advantage of that turned out great, maybe even better than you thought it would.

I think of the sales offer for my Conn 88H trombone in 1968. If I recall the price was six hundred some dollars. It seemed like a bunch of money at the time. But I have played that instrument for more than 50 years and it is probably worth three times what I paid for it still. Now that was a great deal.

I think of the offer I received from Ken Kieffer to serve as pastor here. It has been and continues to be a blessing to JoAnne and me in many ways to serve as your pastoral family. We are thankful.

# Jesus brought God’s offer of salvation

## Jesus came to this earth bringing God’s offer of salvation.

Jesus’ preaching began with the theme,

“The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15 NIV

When the heart of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, was changed by Jesus’ visit to his house, Jesus explained the event this way;

 “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Luke 19:9-10 NIV

In one of the first sermons after Pentecost, Peter made plain what the message of the church was. It was centered in the sacrificial death and the resurrection of Jesus for us.

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12 NIV

In our text for today from Romans Paul exclaims;

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: Rom 1:16 NIV

The overall message is clear. God is making to all of us an offer of salvation on account of the finished work of Jesus.

## Jesus made this offer, but most people did not respond

Jesus began to bring people back to God at the very beginning of his ministry as he preached about the kingdom of God. It seems reasonable to me that when Jesus was here, a perfect man, compassionate, teaching truth with authority that people recognized, having his ministry confirmed by signs and wonders from God; it seems perfectly reasonable that nearly everyone would accept the offer of salvation, that nearly everyone would have become a follower of Jesus. But it did not happen.

In John 13 Jesus laments that he desired to call the people of Jerusalem to follow him, but they would not. They had chosen not to do so. Why?

### Don’t understand its importance

In chapter 14, Jesus gave a parable that explains one of the reasons. The parable is about a wealthy person who is giving a big banquet. He sent his servants out to invite many people. But the reception to his invitation was not what he expected. Instead of being eager to attend, people made all kinds of excuses why they could not do so. One person had just bought a field and was on his way to see the field he had bought. Another had just bought five teams of oxen and was on his way to try them out. Still another had just gotten married. They all prioritized other things. This made the giver of the banquet very upset and he sent his servants out again to find more and more people to come and fill his banquet hall. It is clear, that the parable Jesus is telling is about people’s response to God’s offer.

There were other times when Jesus used the banquet to which we are invited as a part of his parables. One time Jesus taught:

 “Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.
Luke 12:35-37 NIV

In the book of Revelation, the great banquet that God will give is called the “wedding supper of the Lamb.” When we accept Jesus offer of salvation, we accept our invitation to this celestial “wedding supper of the Lamb.”

But the people in the parable that Jesus tells here in Luke 14 just don’t get the importance of the banquet that they are invited to. In the same way, people don’t understand the importance of listening to, considering and accepting the invitation, the offer that God has sent us through Jesus.

### Don’t understand the need

Instead, when Jesus offers us as a race the gift of salvation, we turn and say something like, “Saved from what?” We just don’t seem to undertstand our own spiritual need of God’s rescue. But in Romans 1, Paul describes the gravity of our situation in great detail. He wants us to understand as he concludes in Romans 3:10

“There is no one righteous not even one.”

Our basic fallenness, our desperate need for God’s offer, derives from how we put ourselves first, before others and before God as well. We adopt and exalt our own truth rather than God’s truth (Rom. 1:21, 25). We tend to worship the creature or creatures before the Creator (Rom. 1:23). We major in pleasures, wealth, and power without regard to God. And in all this, we tend not to get better, that is less selfish and more godly; but worse, that is more self-centered and morally obtuse. Paul says that while this is happening, we convince ourselves that we are getting wiser, while in fact, our hearts are getting darker (Romans 1:21,22). So, we also need to be saved from our seemingly inevitable slide into decadence. Paul says we get to the point where we know what is right, but we do the wrong things anyway and we approve of others doing them as well (Rom. 1:32).

## Consider Jesus’ descriptions – the images Jesus gave for what he was offering

### Gathering the people together to safety Luke 13:34

The picture of our human sinfulness and its consequences is shocking and frightening. Yet consider the comforting pictures given to us by Jesus in the Good News of what he is offering to us.

In chapter 13, Jesus uses a feminine picture of God to comfort us. Now Jesus teaches us clearly in John chapter 4 that God, in his essence, is a Spirit. So, we do not think of a spirit as having gender. But God has chosen to reveal himself to us and associate himself most often with the word Father, as Jesus taught us in the Lord’s prayer. So we properly think of him most often using the male gender. This is why I think some modern efforts to remove all gender references regarding God are misguided. But it is important to note that there are also a few times in Scripture when the Bible uses a feminine picture to help us understand the nature of God. This reminds us certainly that the greatness of our God transcends limitations of our understanding of gender. This passage in Luke 13 is one of those places where Jesus chose a feminine image to help us understand God and the offer that God is making to the human race.

Jesus is describing his own desires, which reflect God’s desires as well. He says,

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Luke 13:34 NIV

The image is a beautiful image of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings for security. I see several beautiful messages for us in this image.

▀ First, God cares for us. It is the care of a Mother-loving, protecting, nurturing. It is the kind of caring for us that caused Peter to advise us;

 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7 NIV

It is the kind of caring that led Jesus to say;

 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matt 11:28-30 NIV

▀ Second there is a message of security. The Mother hen gathers her chicks for protection. We need spiritual protection from ourselves and from the enemy of our souls. God desires to provide both. What did the wisest man say?

Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge. Prov 14:26 NIV

Psalm 91 is a Psalm about God’s protection and interesting also uses a similar feminine analogy to make its point.

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
 I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”
 Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.
 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. Ps 91:1-4 NIV

▀ Third, I observe in this passage that Jesus is offering to gather us. Human beings left to themselves tend to scatter and isolate. But God desires to gather us. Look at what is happening in our society. As we move away from following God, we are also becoming more and more a society of single people. But what is the church, it is usually described by collective words such as the family of God, or the assembly. God seeks to overcome our loneliness and gather us together.

Jesus prophesied in this passage that because they did not respond to God’s offer of spiritual gathering under the ministry of Jesus, they would be politically scattered as a nation. This happened about 70 AD when the Romans destroyed the Jewish nation and all the Jews were scattered from Palestine.

God’s offer is to gather us together spiritually in Christ’s church.

### Invited to a great celebration banquet Luke 14:16, 23,24

The parable that Jesus tells in the last part of chapter 14 is prompted by a conversation that begins in verse 14. Jesus is in the middle of teaching people simply how to be humble when they come to a dinner. People of that day were seated at dinner by rank. And Jesus noticed that the guests at the dinner were scrambling to get the best positions. He advised them simply to take lower positions so that the host could exalt them rather than taking higher positions and having to be humbled before all their friends when the host put someone else in their place.

At the end of this teaching, Jesus advises his hearers also to spend their hospitality upon people who cannot repay them, and he comments that God will repay them for their generosity at the “resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14).

After this comment one of those who was eating there quipped,

Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. Luke 14:15 NIV

This is the comment that prompted Jesus’ parable.

The interpretation of the parable seems to be quite clear. The servants are those followers of Jesus, lovers of God, who go about inviting others to God’s banquet, the feast that will be held for all God’s people at the “resurrection of the righteous.” This is the great “wedding supper of the Lamb” to which the book of Revelation refers.

It is a reminder to us that our invitation to follow Jesus has eternal implications. Our mind can hardly grasp the scope of the invitation that God is giving to us. We think of the forgiveness of sins that we receive now. We think of the peace with God that we receive now. We think of our membership in his earthly church with which we can identify now if we choose to do so. But Jesus is looking ahead. He is thinking as he said,

 “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. John 11:25-26 NIV

He is offering us a place at his heavenly table. What an offer!

# Consider how Paul describes God’s offer

## A way to right standing before God through Christ by faith

Paul describes God’s offer as a way to righteousness. When we become as John Wesley termed it, “spiritually awakened,” we also become aware that we are at odds with God, we are estranged from him by our evil deeds and our rebel attitude. The Bible even goes so far as calling us in our unconverted state “enemies of God” (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21).

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. Col 1:21-23 NIV

We need help in getting back into a right relationship with God. We need to find peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

The NRSV of Romans 1:17 can be a little confusing. But in this verse, Paul is telling us how God offers us right-standing with God.

In [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith." Rom 1:17 NRSV

The phrase “through faith for faith” in the NRSV is literally “from faith to faith” (NKJV). It may well be an idiom meaning “from beginning to end” and it is so treated in several newer Bible translations (CJB, GNT, TEV). This is a verse where a modern translation can help us a great deal. Consider the Good News Translation.

The gospel reveals how God puts people right with himself: it is through faith from beginning to end. As the scripture says, "The person who is put right with God through faith shall live." Rom 1:17 GNT

Paul is helping us to understand that God is offering us a way to right standing with God through the work of Jesus. And God is showing us the means to receive that standing. It is not earned by good works, but available through our faith or trust in what Jesus has done on our behalf. Paul will reiterate this in Romans 3.

Now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe… All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. Rom 3:21-25

This powerful possibility of being made right with God is one big reason why Paul is not ashamed of his message. This is why he was bold to proclaim it everywhere.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes. Rom 1:16 NIV

# You can accept God’s offer

The point of all this is that if you have not already accepted God’s offer, it is open to you this morning just as much as it was available to those to whom Paul wrote.

Unfortunately, the biggest barrier remains the same. It is not a lack of knowledge nor exposure to the message; the biggest barrier is the same one that Jesus encountered from the people of his day, our stubborn will. We delay, we make excuse, we somehow just don’t make the decision to follow Jesus that we know would benefit us forever.

But today can be different. I invite you to express to God your own longing to be at peace with him. Admit your failings–the Bible calls them sins–to God. He promises forgiveness and inner renewal.

I invite you to pray a pray like this with me.

Heavenly Father, I really want to be at peace with you. I admit that I have fallen short of your standards in many ways. I trust in what Jesus has done for me on the cross and desire to become one of his followers. I accept your invitation. Thank you for your help. In Jesus’ name, AMEN.

If you prayed that prayer, remember that Jesus promises you,

Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. John 6:47 NIV