

33. Excuses, excuses, excuses

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Like all of you, I have used many lame excuses when I was in tight corners before. But I can't top the excuse I've heard from my classmate of the junior high. He was the kid who always came into the class late. He had to commute by train from a long distance. He could get up earlier and come to school, but he'd rather sleep an extra half hour and get punished for his tardiness.

One day, the homeroom teacher got really tired of punishing him everyday. He asked the student, "Tell me one good reason why you were late today again. If it was a good reason, I won't punish you." So the student replied with all the sincerity, "The train had a flat tire. That is why I was late." The teacher thought that was a good reason and told the student to go take a seat. Then, it dawned to him that the train couldn't have a flat tire, because all the wheels of the train made out of steel. So the student got punished more for his lame excuses.

Here is another good lame excuse from a true story: On the Highway 405, Irvine, CA, a California State Trooper saw a vehicle flying by. So, he flipped his patrol car light on and chased after this guy. This Speedy Gonzales was dodging in and out of the traffic, but finally pulled over to one of the exits. The upset State Trooper asked him, "What was the reason you speed and didn't stop when you saw the light?" This traffic violator sheepishly answered, "My ex-wife married to a State Trooper. I thought you were that guy and wanted to return her back to me."

Our first human excuse goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve: "The woman you gave to be with me..." and "The serpent deceived me..." In other words, "The devil made me to do it."

In most of times, an excuse is a skin of the reason that stuffed with lies. George Washington said once, "It is better to offer no excuse than bad one."

We find the same kind of lame excuses from the religious leaders of Israel.

A. AN INVITATION TO THE WEDDING FEAST

Matt 22:1-14 And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' But (1) they made light of it and went their ways, (2) one to his own farm, (3) another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

The parable is rather simple to interpret: The 'Certain King' is God the Father; 'his son' is "God the Son Jesus Christ"; the 'Marriage' is the marriage supper of the Lamb; his 'servants' represents the early preachers of the Gospel like the OT prophets; the 'people' who were invited originally were Jewish people; the outcasted ones were the Gentiles.

When the first invitation went out, everybody agreed to be at the wedding. However, when the second and third invitation went out, they were coming up with flimsy and lame excuses which brought insults to the king.

These are the same excuses people still use why they wouldn't come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. I asked you to underline three things:
(1) they made light of it and went their ways - People think that they are righteous and good enough to get to heaven without accepting Jesus as their Savior and Lord. they don't take God's warnings in the Bible seriously.

(2) one to his own farm - People think that their wealth are more valuable than their eternal destinies.

Matt. 16:26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

(3) another to his business - People think that their careers are more important than their eternal lives. What a tragedy!

2 Corinthians 4:18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We often come up with real lame excuses why we cannot do daily devotion and prayer. We say, "I just don't have time." No, we DO have time for them. We have time to read newspaper that filled with all the bad news of murders and frauds. We have time to get on the phone to chat with our friends and families. We have time to watch stupid TV programs. But we choose not to have time with God. That's all. Whatever we put higher priority in our lives, we will do that first. So, is God in our highest priority?

Jesus is looking for men and women who would follow Him thick and thin, not just 'fair weather followers.'

2Chr. 16:9 For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.

It is the Holy Spirit's job to bring people to Christ. Whenever people reject the invitation of the Holy Spirit, they are rejecting the very God's invitation and someday it will and literally haunt them.

B. NOT BY OUR OWN

Matt 22:11-14 But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

The man considered his own garment good enough, and refused the covering freely offered by the king. Like the majority people around the world, he thought there are more than one way to get to heaven. He is finding out that he was dead wrong. And notice that he could not come up with his own excuse? That will be like on the Day of Judgement.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

There are many people who call themselves as Christians in America. But not every one claims as Christian will go to heaven. Because their hearts are not for Jesus. Indeed, many people are called to be Christians, because they refuse to follow Jesus, few are chosen.

C. COUNTERATTACK No. 1 FROM POLITICAL SIDE

Matt 22:15-22 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way.

Here the Pharisees and the Herodians work together. This is a testimony to their great hatred of Jesus, because they are willing to put aside their own differences for the sake of uniting against Jesus.

Jesus' dilemma with this question is simple. If He said that taxes should be paid, He could be accused of denying the sovereignty of God over Israel (making Himself an enemy of the Jews). If He said that taxes should not be paid, He declared Himself an enemy of Rome.

Again, with His wise answer, Jesus shows that He is in complete control. He rebuked the wickedness and hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Herodians. Jesus affirmed that the government makes legitimate requests of us. We are responsible to God in all things, but we must be obedient to the powers that be in things civil and national.

D. COUNTERATTACK No. 2 FROM THEOLOGICAL SIDE

Matt 22:23-33 The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her." Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of

God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

Since all seven brothers were dying like flies, somebody should have checked the food she had cooked for these brothers.

The Sadducees were the ancient equivalent to modern liberal theologians, only accepting the first five books of the OT as known as 'Torah' or 'Pentateuch.' The Sadducees asked Jesus a hypothetical question, hoping to show the idea of the resurrection is nonsense. Based on the law of marriage described in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, if a married man died childless, it was his brother's responsibility to impregnate his brother's widow and account the child as the deceased husband's descendant.

Jesus didn't say, "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He was quoting, "I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." from Ex 3:6, one of the Books they believed. Jesus was telling them these ancestors are alive and God is their God in heaven and earth. Heaven is real.

Jesus' reply stunned the Sadducees, the educated men of His day. We can be highly educated, still be ignorant to the most important things in the world - God's Word and God's power.

E. COUNTERATTACK No. 3 FROM JUDICIAL SIDE

Matt 22:34-40 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The scribes had determined that of the 613 commandments in the Old Testament, 248 were positive injunctions and 365 were negative prohibitions. No doubt hoping to spark a controversy, the lawyer asked Jesus which of the 613 was the greatest commandment.

Jesus went right to the heart of the law: the Shema. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." (Deuteronomy 6:5). The Jews knew this was the Great Commandment. Orthodox Jews wrote it out and put it in their mezuzahs - the small, elongated boxes they fastened to their front door posts. They wrote it out and put it in their phylacteries - the leather pouches they wore on their foreheads in obedience to the command to keep the Word always on their minds. They would do outward obedience, but the inside of their hearts were a different story.

There has been much confusion about what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. This doesn't mean that we must love ourselves before we can love anyone else. It means that in the same way we take care of ourselves and are concerned about our own interests, we should take care and have concern for the interests of others.

Jesus painted a picture when He said that the law and the prophets hang on loving God and loving our neighbor. As I look to heaven and love God; and I look to my right and left and love people, I see the picture of a Cross. Who hung on the Cross? The One who loved His Father with all of His heart and soul, mind and strength; the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

F. THE MESSIAH FROM THE LINEAGE OF DAVID

Matt 22:41-46 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David." He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool" '?" "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

This time Jesus asked them a question regarding the identity of the Messiah from Psalm 110:1. The Pharisees identify "the Son of David" as the lineage of the Messiah. In the Jewish culture, one would never call his offspring "Lord". Truly, David is referring to Someone greater than himself. If Christ be merely the Son of David as they suppose, David would never have called him Lord.

The scribes and Pharisees, who prided themselves on their deep knowledge of Scripture, were slumped. Using the written Word, Jesus Christ who is the Living Word had beaten them at their own game.

The Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees tried to corner Jesus, so that they could come up with excuses of the reason why they would not believe in Him. But Jesus systematically eliminated their lame excuses.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) We must put our God in the first priority in our lives.

If we believe the first commandment of the Ten Commandments, we must act upon it. In our logical sense, if we take time to read the Word daily and pray daily, we may not have time to do the rest. Trust God, He will give you wisdom to get the other things done a lot faster.

2) We must remember that we ought to perform our civil duty as faithful Christians.

That means not only we must pay taxes, follow traffic laws, but also doing jury duty. Stop coming up with some silly excuses. I am the first one to repent from this application.

3) The Bible verses should not be in our heads only, but they should be in our lives.

It doesn't matter how much we go through the Bible, but it matters how much the Bible goes through our lives.

4) We should not come up with any excuse why we don't follow God with all of our hearts.