

The Greatest Invitation

“The master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full’” (Luke 14:23).

Scripture: Luke 14:16-24

Song: “The Table”

A White House state dinner is considered one of the most distinguished events in society. With the president hosting as head of state, government business is discussed and important connections are made. So coveted is an invitation that there are instructions available, suggesting how to make the guest list. It would be unthinkable for someone to decline such an honor.

A more significant invitation has gone out, however, and those of us who have accepted it have been granted entrance into God’s kingdom. And now while there is still time, we have the privilege of inviting others. Sadly, there will be those, as in Jesus’ parable, who refuse the invitation. They will politely (or not so politely) give their reasons for refusing. They will say they have other ideas, other plans, other priorities that take precedence. But there will also be those who will accept the invite, and Jesus said there is great rejoicing in heaven over each one (John 15:3-7)!

What an honor we have to extend these invitations! Let’s renew our readiness today to do our master’s bidding. The feast prepared for us in God’s kingdom is an event we don’t want anyone to miss.

Father, lead me to someone today who is ready to receive Your invitation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

August 22–28. **Sherri Langton** is a magazine editor and workshop speaker at Christian writers’ conferences. She plays drums at her church and lives in Denver, Colorado.

Washed Clean

The LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes” (Exodus 19:10).

Scripture: Exodus 19:9-15

Song: “Nothing but the Blood”

When I was growing up, Sunday was never just another day of the week. It was the Lord’s Day, the time set aside to worship God and fellowship with other believers at church. Mom made sure our clothes were clean and that my sisters and I had a bath every Saturday night. Dad put on a shirt and tie, and Mom wore a freshly pressed dress. Our parents believed that taking such pains with these preparations was a way of showing respect for God and His house.

Cleaning clothes and taking baths did nothing to cleanse our hearts, of course. That had been done by Jesus’ blood shed on the cross—a gift that the Israelites didn’t have in Old Testament times. When God announced in Exodus 19 that He would come down on Mount Sinai to meet with His people, they were commanded to prepare themselves. God’s holiness required it. The Israelites were even warned to stay away from the mountain. Anyone touching it, or even approaching it, would die.

Understanding what the Israelites went through before Jesus came to make final atonement for sin makes me grateful for the new covenant today. Now we can come into God’s presence with confidence, our hearts made clean by the blood of Christ shed to save us (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-22).

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to die so we may live and enjoy Your presence forever. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Seeing the Savior

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him” (Revelation 1:7).

Scripture: Revelation 1:3-8

Song: “When We See Christ”

My father lay in the emergency room, complaining of severe pain in his hip. He’d just celebrated 91 years of life two months before. Dealing with a number of medical issues, Dad often talked of wanting to go be with Jesus. Now as my sister Sue stood beside him in the emergency room, Dad’s eyes suddenly widened and fixed on the ceiling. “Yes! Yes! Yes!” he yelled. “Am I dying?”

Sue patted his arm. “No, you’re still here.”

When Sue told me this story later that day, we wondered if Dad was hallucinating. But looking back, we believe he may have been seeing something significant. Was it a glimpse of Heaven? The open arms of the Savior? Five days later, Dad entered Jesus’ loving embrace and finally saw with new eyes what his earthly eyes had tried to take in.

The apostle John wrote in Revelation of a day when seeing Christ won’t be limited to believers who have died. Everyone who is alive when Christ returns will see Him coming in the clouds (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). For those who have been cleansed by His blood, it will be a time of triumphant rejoicing. May we be looking for and ready to welcome the sight of our Savior when He comes. Yes! Yes! Yes!

Father, I am so blessed by the hope that I will see Your Son, whether in death or at His return. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Knowing the Future

“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” (Isaiah 46:10).

Scripture: Isaiah 46:8-13

Song: “All the Way My Savior Leads Me”

Leo. Pisces. Taurus. These zodiac signs are printed on T-shirts hanging in a local store window. When I walk by them, they speak to me of people’s fascination with astrology today. *Pew Research* reports that nearly 30 percent of Americans believe in astrology. But that’s not the most disturbing news. The data also says that nearly the same percentage of professing Christians look to the stars for guidance.

This, of course, is unbiblical, and Isaiah 46 is one proof of it in the Bible. In this chapter, God tells the future of Israel, whose people have been in captivity because of His judgment against them. Deliverance is coming, God says. He will summon the “bird of prey” (v. 11) to destroy Babylon, allowing the Jews to return to their land. Through His prophet Isaiah, God declares that salvation will come to Zion. Omniscient and unbound by time, God knew the details long before they would be fulfilled. The “bird” was King Cyrus (45:13), who was not even born at this writing.

There are many unknowns and fears of tomorrow, and we naturally desire to know what will happen and how to plan. However, we must not look to the creation but to the Creator to guide our future. Since He’s known the end since the beginning, we can always entrust our way to Him.

Father, You know my past, present, and future. I will seek You alone for wisdom and direction in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Divine Companionship

“You will . . . remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband” (Isaiah 54:4-5).

Scripture: Isaiah 54:1-5

Song: “Grace Greater than Our Sin”

In the span of just a few years, 12 women I knew lost their husbands. Seeing their adjustments to widowhood broke my heart. On top of the sadness were things like settling the estates, managing household repairs, and attending functions alone. Each woman was experiencing the agony of separation from her life partner.

Imagine the pain, however, of being spiritually widowed from God. That is where God’s people—specifically Israel’s southern kingdom of Judah—found themselves as described in Isaiah 54. In response to the nation’s descent into idolatry, God had sent His prophets to warn of punishment. When the people’s wickedness increased and their hearts grew so hard they would not listen, God gave them over to their enemies, sending them into exile. Separated from their maker, Judah sat in Babylon, disgraced and alone. But this spiritual widowhood would not last forever. The good news of Isaiah 54 is that Judah’s days of exile would end. Restoration and blessing would come, and God’s beloved would once again be united with their husband. What a picture of grace and cause for celebration!

We have cause to celebrate too. Though we all have sinned and been separated from God, His compassionate heart reaches out to everyone and longs to bring all into His fellowship. May we always stay true to Him.

Father, thank You for grace that doesn’t cast away forever. Help me remain in fellowship with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Try to Remember

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope (Lamentations 3:21).

Scripture: Lamentations 3:21-31

Song: “It Is Well with My Soul”

In 2012, darkness shrouded my world: a lump near my thyroid was diagnosed as Stage 1 lymphoma. It was treatable, but the journey to good health would require a hard regimen of chemotherapy. For many days I was in a daze over the direction my life had taken. Fighting depression, I endeavored to remember past challenges when God showed mercy and delivered me from difficulty. I had to trust that He would be faithful to me in this new, unwanted season.

It seems Jeremiah would have understood my mood. He spends a good portion of Lamentations venting his own despair over current events. Due to the people’s sins, God had allowed Babylon to invade and destroy the holy city. The sight of Jerusalem’s desolation was more than Jeremiah could bear. But after pouring out his pain, he rouses himself to hope (Lamentations 3). It isn’t hope from what he sees in the present but hope because of what he remembers from the past: God’s compassion, goodness, and faithfulness. This lifts Jeremiah’s heart from despair to hope.

Although we may see nothing that gives us hope in our current circumstances, if we can recall God’s faithfulness to us in the past, we can renew our trust in His unfailing mercies.

Father, thank You for faithfully caring for me with new mercies each day. Help me remember these so I can keep my hope in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Final Arrangements

“Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done”
(Revelation 22:12).

Scripture: Revelation 22:10-21

Song: “The King Is Coming”

Now at retirement age, I am at a stage of life I never thought I’d reach. Things I’ve put off for decades are staring me in the face. I need to review my will and decide how my estate will be divided. I must pay closer attention to my savings for when I’m no longer employed. And I must make “final arrangements.”

As the book of Revelation wraps up, the content focuses on final arrangements of a different kind. All of Revelation deals with the end times, but this last chapter adds an exclamation point. “I am coming soon!” Jesus declares. In preparation for what follows this age, the Lord designates who will have access to the tree of life and gain entrance to the gates of the eternal city . . . and who won’t. There is an invitation to drink of the water of life, and there’s a warning against adding to the words of Revelation’s prophecy. Everything has been made ready for Jesus’ return.

As we consider what lies ahead, the Lord doesn’t want anyone to delay the decision to come to Him for eternal life. Now is the time to prepare (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:15). And for those who are ready, there is peace and security in knowing the best is yet to come.

Father, before Your Son returns, help me stay secure in my “final arrangements” with You. And empower me to help others know You. In Jesus’ name, amen.