

**Big BUTS of the Bible**  
***The “But” You Need to Lose***  
**April 2, 2017**

**PRELUDE – Rejoice**

**Worship Songs – Rejoice / Whom Shall I Fear**

**Announcements - Video**

**Drama – Eggshells Break Out**

**Feature – Excuses**

Good morning everyone.

Welcome to week three of our series *Big BUTS of the Bible* where we’re looking at several passages of scripture and discovering how a very small word – “but” – can make a huge difference.

For instance, as you know, we live in a world in which everything we earn and acquire is, at some point, going to wear out, break down or be taken from us (either by a thief or by death). So, it’s kind of pointless to spend all your time and effort

trying to add to your own personal pile of treasure  
...

**... which is why Jesus advises us not to do it.**

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. BUT store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”*

*Matthew 6:19-20 (NIV)*

“You can do what the rest of the world does,” Jesus is saying, “but there’s another option. Instead of spending it all on this temporary life, you can use your financial resources in a way will benefit you *eternally*, in the life to come.”

And we talked about how that works and how to do it in the first week’s message, “The BUT That Lasts Forever.”

Then last week, we talked about “The BUT That Nobody Wants” which comes from a fascinating story recorded in the Old Testament Book of Daniel where three young men find themselves in great danger because they refuse to bow down to an idol set up by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon.

**“Your Majesty,” they say ...**

*“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from your hand.”*

*Daniel 3:17 (NIV)*

**“BUT,” they continue ...**

*“Even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”*

*Daniel 3:18 (NIV)*

And that’s the “but” that no one really wants:

“even if He does not” ... the fact that God could deliver us *from* the furnace – from trouble or danger or crisis – but for reasons unknown to us, He chooses not to. Instead, He delivers us *in* the furnace. He goes *with* us into the trouble, danger, or crisis and gives us the strength to endure.

Now, if you missed either of those messages, just a reminder that every week we post the video, audio and text in the media section of our website and app.

**<pic> In addition, we’ve recently started podcasting our messages.**

So, fire up your favorite podcast app and subscribe to our feed (“North Heartland Community Church”) and every week, the audio from Sunday’s message will automatically show up in your app’s inbox.

Now, this week, as Shannon said, we’re going to talk about “The BUT You Need to Lose” and it could be that for your own spiritual health and

well-being, you need to lose *several* of them.

So, let's get started.

## **The Great Banquet:**

In *The Gospel According to Luke* chapter 14, we read that, one Friday evening (which is the beginning of the Sabbath in the Jewish culture), Jesus, along with several others, is invited to dinner at the home of a wealthy and prominent Pharisee. (Remember that the Pharisees were the overseers and interpreters of what it meant to be a devout person in that culture).

From the very beginning, it's clear that this is not going to be the most sociable of gatherings because there's an ulterior motive, one that presents itself as soon as Jesus enters the home. *Jesus is going to be tested.*

The Pharisee and his friends have arranged it so that when He enters, He immediately encounters

a man who is suffering from some kind of an illness. Word has it that Jesus has, in the past, performed a healing on the Sabbath which, in the mind of the Pharisees, was “work” and thus violated the Law of Moses. So they want to see for themselves what He will do.

Luke tells us that when Jesus sees the man and realizes what’s happening, He looks around at everyone and says, “So, what do you all think? Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

No one says anything.

So, Jesus heals the guy and then He says to everyone, “If one of your kids or one of your animals fell into a well on the Sabbath, you’d pull it out, wouldn’t you?”

Again, no one says anything. And the tension just hangs in the air. “Welcome to dinner, Jesus. Gotcha.”

The tension breaks a bit as everyone begins to move to the dining area. And as they do, Jesus looks around and notices the wealth of the crowd that's been invited and also how everyone is jockeying for the most prominent positions near the head of the table.

When everyone is finally seated, Jesus plays a little “gotcha” Himself.

- First, He makes a comment to the guests about the lack of humility he has just observed.
- Then He turns to the host and says, in essence, “You have spared no expense on entertaining your guests, which is very nice of you. However, all of these folks will soon pay you back with an invitation to *their* homes and *their* banquets. And that will be your reward for what you are doing tonight.”

“But,” He says (and this is actually a form of the *first* big BUT we looked at – storing up treasure in Heaven instead of on earth) ...

**“If you were to give a banquet like this and, instead, ...**

*“Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, you will be blessed [but not by them]. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid [by God] at the resurrection of the righteous.” [i.e., in the life to come.]*

*Luke 14:13-14 (NIV)*

When Jesus finishes speaking, the room is again filled with tension. The Pharisees have tried to make Him look bad, but He has just exposed the shallowness of their spirituality.

Now, you know how it is when you’re in a situation where people have said hard things to each other and everybody is watching and listening in disbelief? Where everybody’s thinking “awkward”?



Whenever you're in one of those situations, a lot of times someone will try to take the conversation and steer it in a more pleasant direction which everyone can agree with. *That's what happens next in this situation.*

### **Luke tells us that ...**

*When one of those at the table with him heard this [Jesus' statement about the resurrection of the righteous], he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."*

*Luke 14:15 (NIV)*

And, immediately, everyone in the room breathes a huge sigh of relief.

*"Thank God!"* they all think.

And they think that because what this guy is doing is raising a toast to a prophecy of the future rule of God on this earth which is recorded in

Isaiah 25. Isaiah wrote:

*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines.*

*On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations: He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth.*

*The Lord has spoken.  
Isaiah 25:6-8 (NIV)*

And, in the Hebrew culture of the first century, whenever there was talk of this “Day of the Lord” – the day in which God would renew, restore and regenerate all things – it was customary to pronounce a blessing and, if eating, to raise a toast.<sup>ii</sup>

“Here! Here!” everyone would say (in Hebrew, of course). And they would raise their glasses and drink to the coming Kingdom of God in which they all hoped to participate.

And in this tension-filled room, it just so happened that Jesus’ awkward statement to the host about “the resurrection of the righteous” had provided a smooth transition to that toast. And this quick-thinking guest had jumped on it, much to the relief of everyone else.

“Maybe now,” they thought, “we can all loosen up a bit and enjoy this dinner ... *if* Jesus will just give the traditional response to the toast” (which was to say, “O Lord, may *we* be among the righteous and be counted worthy to sit with men of renown on that great day.”)

But, as you might expect, Jesus doesn’t.

**Instead, He says, “Let me tell you a story.”**

*“A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’”*      Luke      14:16-17  
(NIV)

Now, a quick timeout here to explain something about how “great banquets” worked back then because everyone listening to Jesus understood it, but we don’t. And it’s important to the story.

Back then, because they had no refrigeration or running water and because there was no HyVee or Price Chopper, it was a long, drawn-out and tedious process to prepare a banquet, especially a “great” one with “many guests” like the man in Jesus’ story was planning.

So what they would do is to give out a two-stage invitation. The first invitation would tell you the location, but not the time (and sometimes not even the day) because *they just didn’t know* how

long it would take to acquire and prepare the meat and everything else involved.

That made your response to the first invitation exceedingly important. If you said, “Yes, I will come,” it meant you were willing and able to arrange your life so you could stop whatever you were doing and immediately go to the banquet location when the *second* invitation came. And that’s what you would do unless something really big or really bad prevented you ... so big or so bad, in fact, that in the rare cases when it did happen, it was customary for the host to send food from the banquet to express their condolences.<sup>iii</sup>

And all of the people listening to Jesus’ story would have understood this. And now, you do, too. 😊

So ... the first invitation has gone out to a great number of people. And now, Jesus says, the man sends his servant with the *second* invitation: “come, for everything is now ready.”

“BUT,” Jesus says ... and this is the big BUT we’re going to talk about today ...

**“But,” Jesus says ...**

*“... they all alike began to make excuses.”*                      *Luke 14:18 (NIV)*

I can imagine Jesus pausing just a bit here to let that statement sink in because everyone listening would be thinking, “Wow, *that* is one big BUT. *That* is a *big* deal. To do that to a man and his staff who had prepared a massive feast? For everyone to say ‘I’m sorry, I’m not coming’?”

They would be thinking, “I’ve never heard of such a thing happening. All I know is those better be some *pretty good excuses.*”

**... which Jesus then expounds in his story:**

*“The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please*

*excuse me.”*

*Luke 14:18 (NIV)*

I can imagine some of those listening to Jesus chuckling and groaning because this is a bit like “the dog ate my homework” kind of excuse.

- First of all, in that culture no one ever bought land without a thorough investigation beforehand.
- Second, banquets were evening affairs so it would soon be dark. How much is the guy going to see once the sun goes down?
- Finally, the land’s not going anywhere overnight. It’s dirt. This guy is turning down a great banquet to go look at dirt?

That’s nuts.

**Jesus continues:**

*“Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’*

“Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’” Luke 14:19-20 (NIV)

And, again, the listeners are thinking “come on, this must be a joke. No one would buy 10 head of cattle like that without taking a test plow in advance! Plus, again, it’s going to be dark. How’s he going to see?”

Now, as to getting married, well, that might be a better excuse because there were actually laws that said a newly married man could opt out of serving in the army for a year in order to be with his wife.

- But the invitation this third man was declining wasn’t to war – it was to a party.
- And his wife *could* come with him.
- And if being “with” his wife (“trying *her* out” so to speak – which, if you read carefully, is the phrase Jesus leaves out of the excuse but everyone in the room is thinking<sup>iv</sup>) – if being



with his wife was so urgent, he could have turned down the initial invitation. He knew he was going to get married.

So this excuse was more than just a bald-faced lie. It was an insult.

Clearly, this is one crazy group of people and one crazy story that Jesus is telling!

### **He continues ...**

*“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Luke 14:21 (NIV)*

He tells his master these three ridiculous excuses (which are samples of all the excuses given by everybody who was invited) and gives him the bad news: “none of your guests are going to come. Sorry, boss, but it looks like you’ve gone to all this trouble for nothing.”

### **As you might expect ...**

*Then the owner of the house became angry ... Luke 14:21 (NIV)*

And everyone listening – including you and me, I think – would say that his anger is a just anger. It’s a righteous anger. His effort, expense, kindness and generosity has been treated with, at best, indifference and, at worst, contempt.

Now, if those listening to Jesus thought that the behavior of the guests was bizarre, what happens next in the story would really blow their minds.

*“Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’” Luke 14:21 (NIV)*

“The party will go on! We will not cancel this event! Every seat will be filled!” the owner says. “But they’re going to be filled by the most

unlikely people” – the people Jesus had just told them about before he launched into this story!

And the language here is interesting: this particular group was not to be *invited*. They would have to be *brought in* because they understood how it worked in that culture. Author and researcher Kenneth Bailey writes that “in the Middle East the unexpected invitation must be refused. And the refusal is all the more required if the guest is of lower social rank than the host”<sup>v</sup> – which is exactly who these people are.

So, the owner says, “bring them in.” They will have to be strongly persuaded because it was so against the way things were done.

But it gets even more bizarre.

**Jesus continues:**

*“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’*

“We got all the people we could from the poor section of town but there are still some seats at the table.”

*“Then 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  
14:22-23 (NIV)*

In other words, “go find the lowlifes who aren’t even allowed in the city; look for the thieves and criminals who are hiding out from the law; go to the people who are the spiritual outcasts and riff-raff of this community and *compel them to come.*”

*Compel them*, he says, because it’s going to take even more work to persuade them they are truly welcome and it’s not a trap. It’s going to take even more work to convince them that they don’t have to somehow reciprocate and pay back his generosity.

# The Great Surprise

Now, let's call timeout for just a bit here because a lot has happened in a very short time.

- Jesus is dining with a group that is barely cordial to Him, if that.
- He's been set up to make it look like He doesn't honor the Law of Moses.
- And He has exposed the hypocrisy of both the guests and the host – upstanding members and leaders of the religious community of which He is a part.

And then, instead of giving the traditional response to the blessing and toast, He tells them this crazy story; a story that would never in a million years happen in that culture:

- A story where wealthy, upstanding people ... invited to the “party of the century” ... wouldn't come after accepting the first

invitation (which was absurd) ...

- A story which then takes a turn to an equally absurd idea: that the man would then invite the “scum of the earth” to take their place!

And if you’re sitting in this wealthy Pharisee’s home at the banquet table with Jesus and you’ve experienced all of this, your head is about to explode. And you’re thinking, “This needs to come to an end pretty soon.”

And then it does.

### **Jesus concludes by saying ...**

*“I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.”*

*Luke 14:24 (NIV)*

Now, notice something very interesting about that statement.<sup>vi</sup> There’s a shift in the direction of Jesus’ language. To this point, everything has

been stated in the third person:

- There's a man giving a dinner.
- He sent his slave.
- The people made excuses.
- Then he did this and that.

But now, at the end of the story, Jesus speaks in the first person – “I tell you.”

As pastor and author John MacArthur points out, this means that Jesus is no longer telling the story. *Now, he is giving the application of the story:* “I (Jesus) am telling you (who are in this room with me).” Jesus is directly pointing the story at his audience.

And we know this is true because that phrase, “I tell you,” appears multiple times in the gospel of Luke and each time it does, it's when Jesus is applying a story to His audience.

So when Jesus says “not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet” we're no

longer talking about the man in the story and his huge dinner party. We're talking about the great banquet God will provide at the "resurrection of the righteous." We're talking about the coming Kingdom of God on the Earth (which is what Heaven will truly be).

Jesus was telling them a story about *them* and, in fact, the whole nation of Israel, which was rejecting Him and would soon hand Him over to the Romans to be crucified.

**And the story goes like this:**

- Someone was throwing a huge banquet but that someone was not a man. It was God Himself.
- Through Moses and the prophets, the People of Israel had been invited to salvation, the eternal kingdom of God, the resurrection of the righteous, the heavenly celebration, and the lavish banquet in glory.



This was the first invitation which meant to be ready for the second.

- Then, at just the right time, God sent His servant Jesus to issue the second invitation: “come, for everything is ready. The king is here and the kingdom is now.”
- *But ... But ...* in the words of Jesus’ parable, “they all alike began to make excuses.” They said “yes” to the initial invitation – to the promise God made of a future Messiah – but then they said “no” to God’s Son. “Yes” to the original invitation, “no” to the invitation to come.
- And in response, God was saying to them, “If that’s how you want it, then OK. You’ll not get even a taste of my banquet.”

## **Getting Personal**

Now, at this point, I know some of you are thinking, “Wow, this is a pretty intense story, Rick. And the application that Jesus was making to the Jewish people of His day is pretty sobering. But what does all of this have to do with us?”

Well, how about this?

**What excuses are *you* making right now, today, that are keeping *you* from “the feast”?**

And when I say “the feast” I mean it in two ways: first of all, in the way that Jesus and the other guests were thinking of it on that Friday evening.

- I mean it in terms of your eternal destiny, your salvation.
- I’m talking about the invitation extended to you – as one who is on the roads and country lanes of Jesus’ parable (which is where Gentiles like you and me would have been).
- I’m talking about your opportunity to be part of the coming Kingdom of God when

Jesus returns and makes all things new, including the bodies of those who belong to Him.

What excuses are you making that keep you from saying yes to that invitation? From trusting Jesus as your Messiah? From professing your faith in Him (which is what baptism is for – and we'll be doing one in May)?

And to be clear, I'm not talking to anyone who isn't a Christian because they're not sure Jesus is who He said He is. I understand that there is a process of investigating to see if all this is real and makes sense.

Instead, I'm talking to people who have answered those questions and do believe but have not yet made a commitment to Him.

And my question is ... what's your excuse? What's the big BUT?

**Chances are it's one (or more) of the things on this list. These are the things I've heard and seen over the years as a pastor.**

- My family and friends won't like it. They're all Catholic or Baptist or Wiccan or nones.
- I'm not good enough. If you knew my story ...
- I have other priorities in my life right now. Maybe one day.
- I'm not sure I can live the life God wants me to live.
- I'm afraid I'll have to give up too much.
- I'm not sure it's all that necessary to make an actual commitment to Jesus. God knows what's in my heart.

Now, I could spend a lot of time giving you an answer to every one of those excuses. For example ...

- Your family and friends probably won't like it. But they also don't love you enough to die

on a cross for your sins. So why stake your eternity on them?

- And you aren't good enough but Jesus is. Trust His righteousness and not your own.
- As important as those other priorities might seem, you are not guaranteed tomorrow. When you go, those will go, too. Why let them stand in the way of what's most important?
- And you're right. You can't live the life God wants you to live. That's why He gives you inexhaustible grace and the Holy Spirit and the Church to remind you, guide you and empower you.
- And you might have to give up some things to be a Christian. But as a wise man once put it, "he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."<sup>vii</sup>

- And finally, I would be very hesitant to think it's not that important to make a commitment to Jesus. Given what Jesus said about the master's anger at those who refused to follow through, I think that's a bad idea. He rejected the "chosen people." What makes you think you're better or more special than they are?

Friends, there are good answers to every big BUT you can think of. But, in the end what it comes down to is illustrated by something that happened to me last summer.

One Thursday morning in the middle of August, I got a spur-of-the-moment invitation to go play *the* best golf course in Kansas City – Shadow Glen – for free. Furthermore, the friend who invited me (and who was covering the cost) said that we would be joined by Cairos Santos – the guy who is the kicker for the Chiefs.

Honestly, I was in shock. It was probably the

single best invitation I've ever received to play golf somewhere.

BUT ... and these are my big BUTS that almost kept me from going:

- That particular day was forecast to be the hottest day of the summer – 102 degrees in the shade.
- And I'm not the most confident golfer in the world, so I knew I was going to be nervous and would probably play terribly.
- And since it was spur of the moment – I had to decide right then – it would mean changing my plans for the day and the next day.

But I decided to lose those big BUTS and go anyway. You know why I did? Because I love golf and I love the kind of people who play golf.

**In the end, it always comes down to what and who we love most.**

See, it's not that it's wrong to love our family and friends. It's not wrong to buy things and have things and even love things like fields and oxen (if you're into that).

And it's not even that we love them too much. It's that *we love God too little*.

As an old English preacher once put it:

“Why is it that when Jesus says, ‘come to Me, and I will give you pardon, peace, purity, power, hope, Heaven, Myself,’ – why is it that there is no responsive desire kindled in the heart?

Why do I not want God? Why do I not care for Jesus Christ? Why do the blessings about which preachers are perpetually talking seem to me so shadowy, so remote from anything that I need, so ill-fitting to anything that I desire?



There must be something very deeply wrong.”<sup>viii</sup>

There is. It’s called sin.

And that’s why we need a savior. That’s why, if you’re not a Christian, you need to lose every big BUT excuse that is keeping you from what God is preparing for those who love Him – the great banquet, the feast.

And here’s how you do it:

- Agree with God that you’re a sinner; that the excuses you have really come down to the fact that you don’t love Him like you should. Name it for what it is.
- Believe that Jesus died for you and rose again.
- Come to Him. Learn from him and follow him; become part of his movement which He called “the church.”

And in just a few minutes, if you have never made a commitment to Christ, I'm going to give you the opportunity to express those things in a prayer.

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But, earlier I said that when I talk about “the feast” I mean it in two ways: first of all, in the way that Jesus and the other guests were thinking of it on that Friday evening.

But I'm also talking about partaking of what God is offering to you right now, today, because He is interested not just in your eternity but also in your everyday life. He wants you to live in his abundance in this life.

Jesus literally said that, “I've come that people might have life and have it in abundance” – a feast every day, in your heart, in your mind, in your soul, in your body. After all, His main message wasn't about the Kingdom that is coming one day

in the future. It was about the Kingdom that is here now and that we can be a part of and experience.

“The Kingdom of God is near and it is now,” he would preach. “So, repent – change your thinking – and believe this good news.”

So, here’s the question. If you’re among those who *have* made a commitment to Christ as your savior, what keeps you from experiencing everything God has for you in this life?

**Again, what excuses are you making right now, today, that are keeping you from “the feast”?**

For most Christians I know, it comes down to one of two things and sometimes both.

- I’m just too busy.
- God can’t use someone like me.

“I’m just too busy. So many things demand my

time: work, kids, spouse, etc. So when it gets to Sunday I just need time for myself – I need to go play golf or fish or sleep. I just don't have any time or energy left for worship or serving. And being in a small group with other believers? I'm exhausted when I get home from work because I have so many things to do.”

“And God can't use someone like me, anyway. I'm not gifted. I don't know enough. I'm too old. I'm too young. I'm an introvert. I'm an extrovert. I'm too this, not enough that. I probably won't fit in very well.”

Can you relate to any of that thinking? I can.

Now, here's the deal. You can go on saying those things. You can go on making those excuses. But the truth, as we heard in the song before the message, is that all those excuses have done for you is ...

- To keep you stuck

- To keep you blocked
- To keep you small
- To keep you locked in your own cell.<sup>ix</sup>

Very quickly, I'll give you a practical and current example. For several weeks now, we have been promoting the "I'm a Fool for You" event for married couples which takes place this next Friday evening.

And more than a few of you have thought about this and you've said to yourself, "you know, I'd really like to get to know some people in this church. It would do me good to get to know some people in this church. It would probably do our marriage good to have some fun with some of these people."

"Ah, but this week is just too busy and we'll probably be worn out on Friday night. And besides, we're not very spiritual. We're new in our faith and never really done anything more than come to church Sundays. So we probably won't fit

in very well with that crowd” (which is totally wrong).

And your big BUT (or BUTs) is going to keep you from enjoying, quite literally, the feast that’s going to happen this Friday night. And that’s sad because it doesn’t have to be that way.

... which is why I am challenging you – and all of us – once again: *what excuses are you making right now, today, that are keeping you from “the feast” that will happen in eternity and the feast that will happen even this day.*

It’s time for us to kick those big BUTs in the butt and tell them to get lost.

Let’s pray together.,.

Case 1:

- Agree with God that you need a savior. You’re a sinner. You don’t love Him like you

should.

- Believe that Jesus died for you and rose again.
- Come to Him. Learn from him and follow him; be baptized as a sign of your belief and become part of his movement.

Case 2:

- I'm just too busy. ... change our schedule; we're the ones saying yes.
- God can't use someone like me – you always use ordinary people like us.

## **Feature – The Right Thing**

### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

1. Next week – “The But That’s Hard to Believe”

### **2. Project Update**

### 3. Offering @door

## Endnotes

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i A great exposition of this passage by John MacArthur which helped me prepare is found at <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/42-194>

ii <http://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/the-great-banquet>

iii Steve R. Benedict, The Parable of the Great Supper, Calvary Baptist Theological Journal, Spring 1994

iv Bruce W. Longenecker, *A Humorous Jesus? Orality, Structure and Characterisation in Luke 14:15-24, and Beyond*

v Quoted in Benedict

vi Huge observation by MacArthur!

vii <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/jimelliot189244.html>

viii [http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/maclaren/excuses\\_not\\_reasons.htm](http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/maclaren/excuses_not_reasons.htm)

ix Alanis Morissette, *Excuses*