

**Matthew 22:1-14**

It's a good thing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah did not take place in our day. Can you imagine all the disaster relief efforts? Rescue workers would be there for months searching for survivors. Billions would be spent in humanitarian aid. But the final tally would show that only three survived. It makes us a little "edgy" to talk about God's punishment upon those cities. That's not how we like to picture God. We imagine Him as a "grandfatherly" type who would never hurt a fly. We've learned our whole life that God is love. And somewhere along the way we've picked up the idea that God is only love. That's why Old Testament stories like Sodom and Gomorrah bother us. But in today's Gospel Reading, Jesus tells a parable where we see a similar picture of God.

When a parable like this one comes along, we're not quite sure how to handle it—because the King (who is God) becomes enraged when His invitations are rejected, and kills those murderers and burns their city...sounds like Sodom and Gomorrah. And when a man is found in the banquet hall who does not have on the proper wedding attire, God the King says, "bind him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness"...which is hell. All this from a loving God?

The truth is, we cannot ever say that God is love apart from the cross of Jesus Christ. God's love is seen only in Christ, and apart from Christ there is only wrath and punishment. Let me repeat this...in Christ we see only God's love; without Christ, a person will only see God's wrath. Which is why the King became enraged at those who rejected His wedding invitations.

What makes God angry? When we sin? If that was true, God would constantly be angry at us. God is never angry at those who are in Christ. Jesus felt God's anger for us on the cross. We are safe and secure by faith in Him. But to despise the Son...to reject the cross of Christ, is to bring upon oneself the righteous anger of God. John 3:18 says, "he who does not believe (in Jesus) is judged already." That was the fate of those in the parable who refused to come to the feast. To reject the Son's banquet feast is to reject the Son; and to reject the Son of God brings judgment and condemnation.

But some had good excuses. They were too busy to come. It's not that they hated the Son—they simply had other things to do. Not all of them murdered the King's servants. Only some did that. The others respectfully declined the King's invitation because they were simply too busy. And yet, they shared the exact same fate. The doors of the banquet hall were closed to them all. One does not have to actively hate Christ and persecute His Church to be shut out of heaven. One only needs to refuse God's invitation, because refusing the invitation is called unbelief—and unbelief is the only thing that condemns one to hell.

And so here you are today—and the feast is spread out for you (no, not the one downstairs—that's just for your stomach). The feast of heaven is laid before you. And you, friend, are invited. God's words to you through His Son are sincerely offered: "He who believes in Me shall be saved." "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink." "He who comes to Me, I will in no way cast out." "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." "I am the Bread of Life, he who comes to Me shall not hunger." "I am the Resurrection and the Life, he who believes in Me shall live even though he dies."

He's talking to you. You are invited. God has opened the vault of heaven, and all its treasures He freely gives you in Jesus Christ. He places them in the water and Word at the baptismal font. He places them in the bread and wine at the Table of Christ's body and blood. He places them in His Word which reaches your ears. "Behold," He says, "I have prepared My dinner." It's His dinner, not ours; His banquet; His feast—but He invites you to come.

God Himself prepared everything for you. He chose the "food" for the table. He did the butchering. "My oxen and fattened livestock are all butchered," He says in the parable, "everything is ready." It was made ready on a bloody hill called Calvary. Jesus is the ox. He is the Food, the Livestock butchered for you. He is the Lamb led to the slaughterhouse. With His dying breath He cried, "It is finished!" The butchering is over. No one else need be slaughtered in hell. He endured it all for every sinner. It is finished. The meal is ready. And you are invited.

Those in the parable were invited, but they had reasons why they couldn't come and receive God's blessings in Christ. They were busy with their lives. They were busy living—too busy for Jesus and His salvation. We're busy, too, aren't we? Our schedules can get very hectic. But we're not too busy for Christ...are we?

You know what the King said of those who did not come? He said, "they were not worthy." Why not? Why weren't they worthy? Because they didn't believe they were worthy. They were worthy. God had invited them. He would not have invited them if they were not worthy of His feast. But they didn't believe they were worthy, and so they rejected the invitation.

Are you and I worthy? Are we worthy to receive the food of salvation God has prepared? Yes. God says so, for He invites us. "God loved the world so that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." You and I are "whosoever." We are worthy. God would not have invited us if we were not worthy.

But why are we worthy? We're sinners, you and I. We do wrong, so much wrong every day of our life. We turn aside from following God's will. We live for ourselves. In the text, the King said, "go and invite all you find, both bad and good." He didn't say, "only invite the good." He said, "invite both bad and good." Our worthiness to come to heaven's feast does not depend on us. It does not depend on whether we're bad or good. Our behavior does not make us worthy or unworthy. Our offerings don't make us worthy or unworthy. Our willingness to work at a Sausage Supper does not make us worthy or unworthy. We're worthy, friends, because God declares us worthy! On the cross Christ died for you—that makes you worthy!

Martin Luther puts it like this, "he is truly worthy who believes these words, 'given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'" Do you believe that Christ's blood was shed for your sins?...that He gave Himself for you?...and gives Himself to you in Word and Sacrament? Then you're worthy, and you're invited. Those who don't believe it are not worthy. And they, by their lack of faith, reject His invitation to the wedding feast. But the thing is, to be worthy they only need to believe it!

None of us deserves to go to heaven—to partake of the food of salvation God has prepared. But God doesn't look at our sinful lives when giving out invitations. He looks at His Son on the cross and says, "He died for you...therefore, you're worthy...you're invited."

Now we can't forget about that man who was thrown out of the banquet hall because he was not wearing the proper clothing. You see, he was not dressed with Christ. He had no faith. You cannot wear your own clothing into heaven. The only clothing God allows is the robe of Christ's righteousness, which was given you in your baptism. If you try to enter God's heavenly feast wearing the clothing of your own good works, you will be cast out. You are invited to come, but only in Jesus Christ. That man was cast out because he wasn't worthy. He had no faith in Christ. Christ, alone, makes us worthy. Nothing we do can make us worthy. It's all Jesus' doing, not ours. And that truly is comforting, because Jesus has done it all for you. He suffered for you. He was crucified for you. He was slaughtered, butchered for you. He rose again for you.

You, friend, are forgiven. You are worthy to enter God's heavenly feast, for Christ died for you, and by the grace of God you believe it. And so, enjoy the feast which God has prepared for you—the heavenly feast which God gives you in His Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.