

“Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen”
(Matthew 22:1-14)

In last week's sermon, as well as at our Congregational meeting, we saw how important it was that we reach out to the lost. The people of this world are heading straight toward eternal destruction. It won't really be that long before they stand before the Lord to be judged. And for the most part, they are completely oblivious to the danger they're in. They are sleeping the sleep of death. They don't know what's coming. If they are to have any hope of escaping, they must be told about their danger, and how they can be rescued from it in Christ. But who's going to tell them? Certainly no one who's sleeping. It must come from someone who's awake, from someone who believes what the Bible says and has embraced that truth. But who is awake? We are, if we have truly believed in Christ. We are part of that small group of people who know what's going to happen and who know what to do about it. That's why it's important that we do something. If our neighbor's house was burning down in the middle of the night, and we were awake and saw it, wouldn't we go and try to save them from being burned along with it? How much more then, when our neighbor's soul is in danger every minute of being cast into the eternal fire, must we go to them. We can't continue to stay quiet. We must do what we can to reach them. If we love them at all, we must. If we love the Lord at all, we must.

But as we prepare ourselves to reach out to them with the Gospel, we need to realize everyone will respond differently to it. There will be those who couldn't care less about it, who will continue to live their lives as they did before without any change. There will also be those who will hate you for it and who will try to hurt you, because their hearts are hard. The Gospel won't have any saving effect on these two groups. These are the ones Jesus was referring to by the seed which fell by the wayside, on the hard ground, where the seed wasn't able to penetrate and where the devil snatched it away from them. But on the positive side, there will also be those who will listen to what you have to say, who will accept it and begin to follow it. But among these there will also be differences. Some will seem to accept Christ and walk with Him, until they have to face some kind of trial, and then will fall away. These are the stony ground hearers. Others will only seem to accept Him, until He gets in their way – until there is something in the world they can't have as Christians --, and then they will fall away. These are the thorny ground hearers. But thankfully, there will also be those who will hear the Word and receive Christ on His terms, who will love Him and love His people and serve Him all their days in holiness. These are the good soil hearers who bring forth the fruits of righteousness, “some a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty” (Matt. 13:23).

Our text this morning tells us something about the different kinds of responses we can expect as we go to others with the Gospel of Christ. And I hope that it will encourage us that as we go, though we will have to face opposition and perhaps even some persecution, the Lord will still use it to bring His people savingly into His kingdom.

Jesus now tells the leaders of Israel another parable about what the kingdom of heaven is like to rebuke them, probably because they didn't repent after the rebuke they received from the other two. But I want you to notice that this parable is broader than the

last two. The last two parables threatened just the leaders, but this one will threaten the whole nation, as well as those from among the Jews and Gentiles who will later come into His church, but not be true believers. Now instead of summarizing the parable and then going through it again, I will explain it as we go through the first time.

Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son.” The king, of course, is the Father, and the son is Christ. This parable refers to the wedding and the great celebration banquet which the Father has planned for His Son and His bride the church from all eternity and which will take place at the end of human history, after the final judgment. Now in this particular parable, the bride doesn’t appear, because the church isn’t the bride, but the guests invited to the wedding. The reason Jesus explains it this way is to show us something of the character of those who will and will not enter into His eternal kingdom from outside the local church, as well as from inside.

Now while the feast was being prepared, or perhaps while Christ’s work of Redemption was still not complete, the king sent his slaves to call those who had been invited. This probably refers to the Father sending His prophets through the years, ending with John the Baptist, to His covenant people, the Jews, to invite them to receive the One they had heard about and seen through the Old Testament types, shadows and prophecies. He was calling them to the feast, through faith in the One who was coming, but they would not receive Him. He again sent out other slaves, when the feast was ready, but they still wouldn’t listen. Some went back to their worldly business, but others took the slaves and mistreated and killed them (vv. 5-6). This probably refers to the sending of the New Testament apostles and prophets after the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Now the feast was ready -- Christ had finished His work. But they still weren’t interested. Some of them seemed unconcerned and went about their normal business. But others became enraged and persecuted and killed the prophets and apostles. Stephen was stoned. James was killed with the sword. Peter was imprisoned. Paul was beaten several times, stoned once, imprisoned several times (2 Cor. 11:23-27), and eventually put to death for his faith in Christ. Now when the king heard about what they had done to his slaves, he became “enraged and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire” (Matt. 22:7). Jesus here speaks about what was to happen in 70 A. D., when He was going to send the armies of Rome under Titus against the Jewish people to destroy them and their city, and to scatter them throughout the world. The Father was going to set them aside, and give the kingdom to another nation, one made up of both believing Jews and Gentiles, one which, as we saw last week, would bring forth the fruits of righteousness. Jerusalem had for so long been called the city of the Lord (Ps. 48:8; 101:8), but now Jesus calls it “their city.” They would not have God to rule over them, and so He will finally give them up. Jesus will later say to them, “Behold, *your* house is being left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:38).

But now what is the king to do? Everything is ready, “but those who were invited were not worthy” (v. 8). And so he decides to send his slaves out to the main highways, the public streets, to invite as many as they found there. They are no longer sent to the city – the city has been given up --, but out into the open areas, wherever people may be found, to gather together guests to fill the hall. And so they went out and gathered all they could find, both the evil and good, and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests (v. 10). This refers to the mission Jesus sent His disciples out on after His

resurrection. They were no longer to go just to the Jews, but now also to the Gentiles. He said, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus told them that as they went out, they were to preach the Gospel indiscriminately, to both the outwardly wicked, as well as the outwardly moral, to call them to the great wedding feast of the Lamb. And the response was good. The church was being filled with worshipers. “But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’” (vv. 11-13). Those who were invited to weddings in the Middle East were given special clothes to wear at the ceremony and banquet. Wedding clothes are also required to attend the feast that will be served on the day of Christ’s marriage; they are the robes of Christ’s righteousness. They are also supplied by the Host, the Father, who gave His Son for us that we might have them. Apparently, the man who didn’t have the wedding clothes represents those who are in the church, who profess to be Christians, but who are unconverted. They don’t have the righteousness of Christ, and it usually shows by the fact that they live ungodly lives. When the king asked the man how he came in without wedding clothes, he was speechless. He really had no excuse. Everything had been there for him. The Gospel had been preached to him again and again. He knew the righteous requirements of God. He knew what God wanted. But he never embraced Christ in faith. He never began to live for His glory. His own conscience condemned him. This represents the Day of Judgment, when all who have ever lived will stand before the throne of Christ to be judged just before the wedding and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The sheep will be clothed with the white robes of Christ’s righteousness, which will be seen through the works that they had done out of love for Him. The goats, on the other hand, will be naked. Not only will they not have Christ’s righteousness covering them, but their own works will also be lacking. There will even be some among them who had belonged to a church, perhaps all their lives. They will be cast away into the outer darkness, into hell, where the pain will be so intense that they will weep and gnash their teeth throughout all eternity. But the sheep will enter into their eternal union with Christ and will sit down at the Great Supper, and rejoice with Christ throughout eternity.

Finally, Jesus sums up all He has said in these words, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (v. 14). Many are called by the Gospel. The Gospel is to be preached to everyone in the world, to both Jews and Gentiles. But few are chosen, few respond to that call. And of those who do respond and who even join a church, there are still some who are not chosen. Just as there was a man found among the guests without the proper clothing, so there will be those found in the church who will never see heaven, because they really did not believe in Christ.

In closing, I would remind you of two things. As you go out with the Gospel to your family members, friends and neighbors, remember that there will be a variety of responses. There will be those who won’t listen to you. There will also be those who will hate you. But, praise God, there will also be those who will listen to you, believe in Christ, and be saved. Jesus told us ahead of time that if we believed in Him and lived the life He calls us to live, we would be hated. Don’t let that discourage you, but rather

encourage you that what Jesus said is true. If we never risk being hated by anyone, we will never tell His truth to anyone. But if we never tell His truth to anyone, no one will ever be saved. Don't fear man, but God. Be bold for His glory. He won't let anything happen to you that ultimately He won't sanctify to your blessing.

But secondly, make sure that you are truly in His invisible kingdom and not just His visible kingdom. There are many in the church who will never enter into heaven. The Scripture warns us again and again to examine ourselves to make sure that we are in the faith. Those who are truly Christians trust in Christ for their salvation. They have received His perfect robe of righteousness. They have the proper clothing for the wedding feast of that great day. But those who are Christians also show that they are Christians by the things they do. Their lives are marked by love – love for Him, for His kingdom and glory, as well as love for others. That love shows itself in many different ways – toward Him in worshipful obedience; and toward others in deeds of kindness; in words of encouragement where needed, as well as rebuke; in showing mercy and forgiveness; and in reaching out to the lost. Make sure that you're not trusting merely in your profession or membership in the church to save you. These won't have any value in God's eyes, unless your life is renewed by His grace. Trust in the Lord Jesus. Turn from your sins. Live the life He calls you to live. Reach out to the lost with the Gospel of grace. As you do, you will not only give glory to God, you will also assure your heart that you are truly one of God's children (2 Pet. 1:5-11). Amen.