

No Excuses Mathew 22: 1-14

It's been said that Jesus said more about stewardship and money than he did about heaven. When he did teach about heaven, He often used a parable, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning to illustrate His message. Our NT Scripture passage this morning contains one of those parables. Found only in Mathew's Gospel, it is a simple story with many layers of truth imbedded within. There are several characters in the story. We have the king, the king's son who was getting married, three different groups of the king's servants, the king's inner circle of friends that were invited to the wedding, some townsfolk who lived in or were travelling through the area and last but not least the most important person of the story- a man who had a problem with his wardrobe. Maybe it is not such a simple story after all.

We know from verse 2 that the lesson Jesus is teaching is about heaven. The parable centers around a wedding, and it would be good for us to remember that elsewhere in the Bible, a wedding or marriage is used to symbolize God's relationship with His people. In the OT, one of the most beautiful is found in Isaiah 61, which we heard earlier. Similar passages are found in Jeremiah and Hosea. In the NT there is that often misunderstood passage 5:22-27 in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus where we find that the heavenly marriage where Christ is the bridegroom and the church is His bride is the model for human marriage. The love that a husband has for his wife is to be like the love that Christ has for His church whom He has chosen to be His bride. Paul is less concerned about a wife submitting to her husband than he is about the church being submissive to Christ. One of my favorite verses is Revelation 19:9: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

With that idea in mind, let's look at the story together. Jesus says in verse 2 a certain king arranged a marriage for his son. In those days there were no post offices, so invitations were not mailed out but delivered in person. The king sends some of his servants out to call those that were invited to the wedding. But instead of returning with a great crowd of people, they return to the king with bad news- the guests were not willing to come.

One thing is for certain in this story, and that is the fact that the king is both patient and persistent. In verses 4-5 he sends a second group of servants and perhaps he tells the servants they need to be a little more forceful. Remind them there will be the best food, and wonderful music and great celebrations, and reunion with old friends. Tell them it is a party they won't want to miss. How could anyone turn the king down?

That is a mystery, but those who were invited made light of the invitation and soon the excuses began to flow. You have probably heard similar ones when you invite someone to church. I have to work, that's the only day I can sleep in, I made other plans, I don't have anything to wear. Even worse, in the parable the servants are treated spitefully and are killed.

Hearing the bad news, the king is furious. Look at verse 7. The Bible says he sent his armies and troops to destroy the murderers and burn up their city. Could Jesus have the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD in mind? Historians tell us the city was literally burned to the ground, with barely a trace remaining.

Yes the king was furious, but he still didn't give up. He sends yet another group of servants into the town, but this time their mission was slightly different. The guest list had changed. The king told them to go and tell everyone they met that they were now invited to this great feast. The king didn't care where they lived, what they looked like, how much money they had or what their past history was. Even Gentiles were allowed. There was no excuse for not coming, all were welcome.

Finally the servants were successful. Verse 10 reveals that the wedding hall was filled with guests, both good and bad. When I think of a good wedding guest, I think of one who arrives on time, greets the guests of honor, brings a gift or two and enjoys the celebration and then leaves when they are supposed to. When I think of a bad wedding guest I imagine one who eats too much, drinks too much and then complains about the food and cheap booze to anyone who will listen. In other words, they show no respect or gratitude to their hosts. Perhaps Jesus had in mind something different, like good people who strived to live their lives in a way that honored God and bad people who might have had a few brushes with the law.

But it didn't matter to the king what was in their past, as the servants were instructed to extend the invitation to everyone they met. No prequalification necessary. So what was the problem with the man in verse 11? Was he the only one who didn't have a wedding garment in his backpack when the servants asked him to come? Of course, that is not the case. The king would not send his servants out to the highways and byways to invite people to the feast and expect them to have a wedding robe with them. The servants would have provided that robe at the time the invitation was extended so they would not be embarrassed or ashamed at the party. The problem with this man was he did not think he needed to put it on. Verse 12- he was speechless. In other words, he had no excuse. The robe was offered to him, and he refused to wear it. He thought he could come just as he was.

Perhaps you have begun to figure out that the king represents God, the son is Jesus, the servants represent the prophets and martyrs, and the invited guests are the ancient Israelites. Because they declined the king's invitation, outsiders, on other words the Gentiles were invited in. People like you and me. Speaking of martyrs, perhaps Jesus was thinking of John the Baptist, and Stephen, his own 12 apostles, and contemporary folks like William Tyndale and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The important question for us this morning is this: what does the wedding robe symbolize? A clue is found in our OT reading from Isaiah. The robe represents the righteousness of Christ. No one can enter heaven without it. No matter how good we think we are living our lives, without Christ our works are as filthy rags.

I leave you this morning with these verses from Revelation 7:9-17.

I invite you to accept the offer the king has extended. Come not as a guest, but as the bride herself. If you haven't accepted the offer of Christ's salvation, do it now. Ask Him to forgive your sins, accept your plea of repentance and then thank Him for His mercy and grace. Say Lord, I'll be glad to come, and I want to wear that robe all the time. I'll do whatever you want, and help you any way I can. Let me know what I can do. Don't be like the man in the parable who thought he could enter his way. God will accept no excuses.