

The Parable of the Marriage Feast

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Our study in the Word of God this morning will be focused on Matthew 22:1-14. Today is not only the Lord's Day in which we gather for public worship in our stated meetings appointed for that end, but many will be gathering this afternoon to witness the exchange of vows between Rick and Linda as they begin life together as husband and wife. And I believe it is appropriate that we consider a passage which deals with the subject of marriage, at least in parabolic form.

Now marriage as an institution ordained of God involves, as we saw in our study last Lord's Day evening, at least three irreducible elements. In the language of Genesis 2, quoted by our Lord in Matthew 19, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." And in that passage, we are led to understand that marriage involves at least three things: that conscious, deliberate, irrevocable severance from all previous ties ("a man shall leave father and mother"). It involves secondly, this conscious, deliberate, covenantal commitment to one person for life ("a man shall cleave unto his wife"). And then thirdly, it involves the consummating of this relationship ("the two shall be one flesh").

Now because marriage is so radical a relationship, it is natural that in every culture, certain significant ceremonies should surround both the creation of that new relationship and the declaration of it in the actual leaving, cleaving, and joining together. So every culture, no matter how primitive or how advanced, has its marriage rituals. Now this was also true of Eastern or Hebrew culture as well. And the passage that is before us this morning gives us some insight into some of the peculiar marriage rituals of culture. And in this particular passage, our Lord is primarily concerned with speaking a word to the Jews. It carries on from the previous chapter in which He reminds them of the prophecy that the stone which the builders rejected would be constituted by God the head of the corner. And our Lord was telling these impenitent Jews that the Gospel would be taken from them and sent to the Gentiles. And so there is much in this parable of the marriage feast that has primary reference to the Jewish nation and to God's dealings with them in history. However, it would be wrong to limit the principles to that exclusive application. I'm fully aware that that intention is in the passage. I'm going to bypass it for the most part in the exposition and application and draw out the larger lines of teaching and application which I trust will have very pointed relevance to those of us gathered in this place today.

As we think through this passage, this parable of the marriage feast, there are four various natural divisions of the various ingredients in the parable. We have first of all the account of a royal provision. Notice the language of the passage:

"And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast: and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready."

Here then in the first place is a statement concerning a royal provision. It was a king who made a feast in honor to his son. And because it was no common peasant nor a man of mere common wealth or possessions, but a king, everything about that feast bespoke the royalty of the one who prepared it. And perhaps two words accurately describe the predominant characteristics of this feast: first of all, the word "gracious" and secondly, the word "lavish." Notice, the king does not ask people to bring a thing. This is not a potluck supper. He doesn't say, "I have prepared a large hall. Bring your grub, and we'll share it. No, it is a gracious provision. The king is able to say in verse 4, "I have made ready my dinner. All you have to do is come and eat. I have provided the oxen; I have provided the fatlings. All things are ready." And being a royal feast, it was a feast that bespoke something of the gracious nature of the king's disposition to his subjects. To honor his son, he makes a gracious provision adequate for everyone who would come and sit down at that banquet table. But not only was this royal provision marked by things that can be underscored by the word "gracious," but we must add to that the word the word "lavish." This was not a meal that just provided staple fare. In that day the common fare would be, of course, bread and water or wine and some meat provision. But here is a feast in which oxen (plural) and fatlings (plural) have been provided, and all other necessary things. It was a lavish provision, not only a lavish provision of food. But when we come to this incident of the man who did not have a wedding garment, we must understand something of the custom of that day. Just as in certain cultures today, if you attend a funeral, the person who is giving that funeral for a deceased loved one will provide everyone who comes to that funeral with a certain form of external garment. And if you have any respect for the person who's invited you and the one deceased, you will take that garment, be it a headdress of some kind or a dark shawl, and you will wear that as provided by the one who's invited you to that occasion. Well, likewise, it was the custom of those who had the means to prepare a garment that was universal for all who would come to a feast so that there was no social distinction. You see, if you were one of the up an outers who could come with a hundred dollar dress and think you might show up someone else who had come with a dress that you had obviously seen at about fifty other weddings and look down your nose. No, no, everyone was provided by the wealthy host with a garment that the host himself had made for that occasion. And so this feast was lavishly prepared, not only in the food stuff upon the table, but in that particular garment that was necessary if you were to sit down and show that you honored your host. So two words marked this royal provision. It is both gracious and it is lavish.

Now what does this say to us concerning the great truths of the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Well, this royal provision is one of the clearest illustrations in all of holy Scripture of that which God has graciously and lavishly done in the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What joy is in my own heart this morning to stand in this place and upon divine warrant to say that Almighty God, the King of heaven and earth, has made a feast. And that feast is both gracious and it is lavish. It is the feast of the living God made for poor needy sinners, such as we are--those of us who, in the language of Scripture if we take but one chapter, Romans 5, are

described as sinners ungodly, without strength, the enemies of God. Then if we move to such passages as Ephesians 2, we are described as dead in trespasses and sins, bound by our sins, deluded and duped by the god of this world. We are by nature the children of wrath. There we are in the language of the Bible in all of our destitution, in all of our filth and nakedness. What a joy it is to announce that a royal provision has been made. Almighty God in sovereign mercy has taken the initiative to provide everything necessary for sinners such as you and such as I.

But that is not only to be reckoned as a gracious feast; it is a lavish feast. God has provided for every single necessity in order to bring guilty, condemned, vile sinners safely into His own presence for all eternity. If the king could say, "All things are ready. Come," how much more the Living God who has sent His Son by way of a virgin's womb, who subjected Him to the rejection of men and then to His own malediction and curse upon the cross, raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand and power, and has sent forth the Holy Spirit to bear witness of Christ and to convince men of their need of Christ and to subdue their rebel wills and open their blinded eyes. Surely, if the feast of this king was marked by its lavishness, the feast provided in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is more lavish than any feast provided by an earthly king. Almighty God in the Gospel comes to sinners with wonderful news. All things are ready. The grounds of a just peace with God have been made in the bloodletting of the Son of God. The grounds for acceptance as sons and daughters in the family of God has been made in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Every provision necessary to subdue the dominion of sin and to bring us into a state where we love righteousness and love the Savior and serve Him has been made in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Surely, the feast that the Gospel sets forth is a lavish feast, a feast that is gracious from beginning to end.

But then we notice in the second place, we have in this parable not only a record of a royal provision, but we have the account of a repeated invitation. Notice the facts in verses 3, 4, and 9. Having prepared the feast, we read in verse 3: "[He] sent forth his [slaves] to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast [in other words, those that had a previous invitation, he tells them now is the time to comply with that invitation has come]: and they would not come." So what does he do? Verse 4 says he carries on that work of invitation: "Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come to the marriage feast." But when they despised that invitation, he still will not be denied a full house. So we read in verse 9: "Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast." What do we have, then, in this parable? We have not only the record of the royal provision, but of the repeated invitation made at the direction, at the command of the same king who made the provision. He was not content to have a feast spread and all preparations ready. Nor was he content to simply ease his conscience: "I made the feast; I've given an invitation. If they don't want it, that's their problem--just let them be." No, no, but again and again he sends forth the invitation: "Come, the feast is ready." And when certain ones come to the point where they show the obduracy and the stubbornness to the point where they abuse the messengers, and only then cut themselves off from the invitation, still not satisfied, he sends his servants saying, "Alright, leave those who were the officially invited ones. And now go out wherever you can go and tell men, 'Come, my feast is ready.'"

Now certainly the application of this to the Gospel should be obvious to all of us. Our great King did not spread the Gospel feast and then sit back and wait for people to

discover it. This king did not spread His feast and say, "Well, let's hope that while people go by the banquet hall, they'll get a whiff of things and make an inquiry and peek through the window and maybe knock on the door. No, no, he made the feast and he sent his servants out. He took the initiative to give the invitation. And so it is with our blessed and gracious God. He did not merely (if I may use the word "merely" without being irreverent) make every provision necessary for needy sinners that they might find the just grounds of peace and acceptance with God. He did not merely spread the Gospel feast with everything necessary for life and Godliness in time and into eternity. But He commissioned His original representatives, those apostles, with a very clear commission. He said, "Go ye into the world and preach the Gospel; say to every creature, 'Come, the feast is spread.'" And throughout the Scriptures, there is this clear indication that the God who has made this gracious, this lavish provision in Christ has sent forth the repeated invitation that men should come and partake of that Gospel feast. And remember, when that command and invitation went out, this was not in a democracy. It was in a monarchy. It was the king sending an invitation to his subjects. He had claims upon them. Now, you see, somebody can send you an invitation to a wedding, and in a free society if you want to go, you go; if you don't want to go, you don't go. But if you live under a monarchy and a king sends an invitation, failure to come is high treason. That will help you to understand something of the violence of the king in seizing those who would not come.

But what does he do? Look carefully at verses 9 and 10: "Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests." What a gathering at that banquet hall. There were the moral, upright ones, and there were the immoral and the harlots and the publicans, the cultured and the uncultured, the religious and the irreligious, the bad and good as in terms human descriptions of external character. And here they were--what a motley crowd--all brought together to the door. But once the wedding garment was placed upon them and they entered one by one, you couldn't tell the up and outs from the down and outs. O, if you listen to their language, some of them might be a little cultured, some might be of these, them, and those. But by and large, what they met at the door, the king's servant who clothed them with a wedding garment, and what they met at the table was the great leveler. You got it? What they met at the door (the king's provision of a wedding garment) and what they met at the table (equally lavished for all, regardless of culture, lack of culture, education or lack of it) was the great leveler. The invitation was to come, not to parade what your status had been prior to the feast, but the invitation was, "Come and partake of the lavishness of the provision of the king himself."

And what was true then is true now to everyone sitting in this place. The Living God of heaven and earth who has claims upon you--He's your Creator. He made you; you draw breath this morning by His sovereign disposition. Acts 17 says, "In Him we live and move and have our being." You are not in a moral democracy. Almighty God is your Monarch. He made you. And He says in the Gospel, "Come!" It's a gracious invitation--it is full of grace. But it is full of regal authority and power. And when He commands you to repent of your sins, when He commands you to believe on His Son, when He commands you to take the wedding garment of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ and to sit down to all the privileges stored up and provided by the Gospel, this is no simpering, whimpering, whining king: "Won't you please trust Jesus? Won't you do the Lord a favor and decide for Christ?" Rubbish!

Almighty God says, "I've sent My Son. My Son has died. My Son has been raised from the dead. My Son sits at My right hand to give repentance and remission of sin. Believe upon Him or perish." The invitation to the royal feast comes from the royal throne. And as surely as the provision bespeaks all of the wealth of royalty, so the invitation bespeaks all of the authority of royalty. My friend, sitting here this morning, if to this day you have never heard the command issued in the name of Christ to come to the Gospel feast, to repent and to believe, you have heard it this morning, and you will continue to hear it. And you ought to leave knowing that Almighty God has laid solemn responsibilities upon you.

Well, we move to the third place. Having looked at the royal provision, the repeated invitation, now thirdly, notice the diversity of reaction. There are three categories of reaction to this invitation. Notice them carefully. Verse 3 and verses 5 and 6: "And [he] sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast [this, of course, refers to the Jews who had previous invitations through the prophets of the Old Testament through John the Baptist]: and they would not come." It gives us no insight into the rationale behind their refusal. It simply says they would not come. However, verse 5 and again verse 6 give us some indication of at least the reaction of some of these described in verse 3 if not all of them when the second invitation came. "All things are ready. Come." Now remember, it's a king commanding. "Come to the marriage feast. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise." Here's the reaction of bland indifference. They made light of it. They said, "O, the king says, 'Come to the marriage feast.' Phooey for the king. Big deal. I've got a farm to plow. I've got some money to make. I've got some goods to sell. Alright, the king's having a feast. Good, he'll have another one some time. Appreciate it. Thank you. Goodbye." They made light of it. They didn't mock him; they didn't despise him. They just were too preoccupied with their own concerns to heed the royal command to come.

But now there was another group. And their refusal we read: "And the rest laid hold on his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them." What did the servants do? They weren't coming saying, "Look, we want \$10 and then you go to the feast." Like a lot of these Christian organizations. They plan a program and then say, "Donation: \$5." That's wicked. Well, these servants didn't come and say, "Free feast. Donation: \$5." No, no, they came with a royal invitation. They just came saying, "Everything's ready. We don't ask you to do a thing but to come and eat." Some made light of it--bland indifference. Some became so hostile; they said, "We're going to take those servants. We can't stand this insistence that we come to the feast." Now notice carefully, their treatment of the servants was a revelation of their attitude to the king. The servant never came in his own name. When the servant would come, he would say, "In the name of our king, all things are ready. Come!" If they could have gotten their hands upon the king, they would have killed him, saying in essence, "Don't you bother our lifestyle with your wedding banquets for your son." O, yeah, you want to honor your son, and you want us to honor him by showing up at the banquet. But we've got other things to do other than join you in honoring your son. We've got money to make; we've got fields to plow. We're practical people. And then the others were hostile and said, "We cannot stand any expression of the will of the king that cuts across the grain of our own plans." And they show their attitude to the king by seizing his servants and killing them. There's the attitude of resolute refusal.

You see the application? I'm talking this morning to men and women, to boys and girls, some of whom have heard the Gospel times without number in this very place,

and in that little cracker box on Runny Meade Road. You've heard the overtones throbbing with divine authority and with something of human earnestness and compassion: "All things are ready, all that is needful for your sinful state has been provided in Christ. Come to the feast." And you know what your attitude has been? It's been, "I've got my field to plow. I've got my merchandise to sell." O no, you're not one who says, "Just get off my back, preacher." You say, "That's fine if the king wants to have a banquet, but I've got other things." Some of you dear young people and children, that's why you're not converted: "I've got other things to attend to. I'm too busy to pray in secret and to cry to God for a new heart. I'm too busy to search the Scriptures and to seek the Savior where alone He can be found in the pages of this holy Book." I'm speaking to young men and women and adults too busy seeking a husband, seeking a wife, seeking positions, seeking a home, seeking prestige. What do you do? You take the invitation that comes with royal authority and you make light of it.

I'm talking to some visitors who are among us today. You know what you're going to do with what you hear today? Make light of it. You'll go out and say, "Who is that guy? Some kind of professional actor or something getting all upset and waving his hand. What in the world...?" My friend, listen to me. As God is my witness, I'm dead in earnest with your soul this morning. Almighty God takes seriously your reaction to Gospel invitations. As we're going to see in a little bit, the reaction indifference will land you in hell as much as the attitude of open resolute refusal that would abuse publicly His servants. All you need do to perish is to fail to come to the feast clothed with a wedding garment. What you are by nature is such that if Almighty God does not change it by grace, you'll perish and perish forever. Are you in that posture of resolute refusal? Maybe you resent the fact that a preacher has dared this morning to look you in the eye and talk not in professional clerical tones, but in blunt twentieth century Anglo-Saxon that you can understand. You say, "I don't preachers who look at me and preach to my eyeballs." My friend, I do so because these things are the only things that matter. I'm not here on a fool's errand. I'm here on an errand for my Master, my King who says, "Tell them all things are ready. Come."

There was the attitude of resolute refusal. But secondly--and thank God for this--there was the attitude or reaction of wholehearted acceptance. Look at verse 10: "And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was filled with guests." You see, the king's intention to honor his son with a full banquet house would not be frustrated. And thank God, it never shall be. And when the Jewish nation says, "We will not have this man reign over us," God says, "Alright, go to those vagabond Gentiles, those dogs who for centuries have had no Gospel light and for centuries have had no prophets and no priests ordained of God. And from that rabble, I'll have a full house." And so this morning, in every tribe and tongue and kindred and nation, there are those who eat upon Gospel dainties as they sit in the banquet house of the King. And they honor the Son by eating at His table. You see, that's the whole rationale for this. It says a king would honor his son. He would make a marriage feast for his son. And in the interest of His Son's honor and glory, thank God, there are those who have responded with wholehearted acceptance of the Gospel invitation. They have face honestly the problem of their sin as being an offence against the Living God. They have taken honestly what God has said concerning His dear Son, that He alone is the Savior of sinners. They have taken seriously the command to repent and to believe the Gospel. And they have turned from sin and thrown themselves upon Jesus Christ as He's offered in the Gospel. They take seriously the commands to be

holy. They take seriously the language of Christ who said, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples." And they have taken seriously the issue of that wedding garment as they have stood at the banquet house and said, "What do I need to come in?" Maybe they were one described as the bad ones in rags and tatters and nothing to make them feel at ease amidst all of the regal provision. And one of the servants smiles and says, "Put your fears to rest. Look at what the king has provided from His royal tailors." And out comes a garment befitting a king, woven through with gold, spotlessly white. And those who with wholehearted acceptance embrace the royal invitation are those who are clothed in that garment and are actually seated at the table eating the provision. Thank God, there are such here this morning clothed in the righteousness of Christ because you've acknowledged you have none of your own, sitting at the table and eating of the great dainties of forgiveness and peace with God and joy in the Holy Spirit, not because of anything in yourself, but because of all that God has done to honor His Son in making this provision.

But then there's a third class. And I want you to look carefully at what our Lord says. There's a resolute refusal described in verses 3, 5, and 6, the wholehearted acceptance described in verse 10. But then there is in verses 11 and 12, the hypocritical response of this strange character who has no wedding garment: "But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding-garment." Now remember the background of this. The wedding garment was provided by the king. You didn't have to go out and save your pennies and buy one or make one. It was provided. But if you were to honor the king, you showed your honor by submitting to be clothed with that garment. And so he said unto this character, "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment?" And the next remark is critical to an understanding of the whole thrust: "And he was speechless." Why was he speechless? He couldn't say, "But O king, I'm impoverished. I don't have enough money to go purchase a garment." He could make no plea of poverty. Nor could he say, "O king, not only am I poor, but all the garments ran out. The fellow in front of me put on the last one." No, no, he had no excuse. He dared to insult the king by appearing at his table in the presence of others of his subjects without that which was essential, truly to be found there. He was speechless.

And how does the king react to this? "Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." Wait a minute, what's the big deal? The guy doesn't wear a garment. Listen, it was an insult to the king. He was saying, "I can appear on the basis of what I am in myself, not on the basis of what you will make me by virtue of your garment." And that's the picture of every single person who says, "All this business of repentance and the new birth and regeneration and a new heart--that's for fanatics. I'll make it into God's banquet house on my own steam. I've never been a lecher, I've never been a thief, I've never been a whoremonger. I've been honest; I've been upright." And when you hear of Christ and the blood of atonement and the work of the Spirit, and when you hear of repentance, these are all words and names to you. Why? My friend, it's because you're like this poor, deluded hypocrite. You think you can be found among the true people of God on your own steam. And you can't, you can't. Am I speaking to people who sit here this morning and think all is well because of what you are in yourself or what you have been able to do of yourself.

This brings us fourthly to look in this passage to what is the most sober part of the entire portion, what I'm calling the royal reckoning. Not only do we have the record of the royal provision, the repeated invitations, the diversity of response, resolute refusal, wholehearted acceptance, hypocritical response, but our Lord is very careful to give a graphic description of the royal reckoning. And there are two phases of that reckoning. One is given in verse 7 and one in verse 13. Verse 7: "But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." Now these words came from the lips of the gracious, meek and lowly Son of God. It's the Son of God who says, "The king was wroth [that's an English word for angry. He was angry with a white, hot, albeit pure and holy anger]; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." That was a prophecy of the downfall of Jerusalem, when the sovereign Lord upon His throne so disposed the Roman armies to come in 70 AD and utterly raise to the ground the city of Jerusalem and to disperse that nation to the ends of the earth for centuries.

My friend, if you've got some wispy, unfounded notion that God is all love ("He's just so sweet and kind like a nearsighted, benevolent indulgence grandfather."), you don't find that God in the Bible. You don't find it in the face of Jesus Christ. And you don't find it upon the lips of Christ. The royal reckoning time comes. Here are people who have had tremendous privilege. They had been previously informed that there would be a wedding for the son. They are the first ones to get the invitation. When they refused, the king gives them the benefit of the doubt. When the servants came back saying, "O king, we gave the invitation, but they would not come," perhaps he had some way of reasoning through, "Well, it's that time of the year when people have this concern and that concern. Go back and invite them again." And they go back with a repeated invitation. And some of them, as we saw, make light of it. There is this indifference: "I've got to go to my business. I've got to go plow my field." Some are openly hostile. But the indifferent and the hostile came under the frown of the king's wrath, and he destroyed them.

My friend, listen to me this morning, if you show indifference to the royal command to come in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ, if you show hostility to the overtures of the Gospel and the grace of God in Gospel preaching, an hour is coming when you must reckon with the King himself. The Scripture tells us that in that day men will cry for rocks and hills to fall upon them. And I quote from Revelation 6: "And they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." Who would ever think of putting those two words together: "wrath of the Lamb"? A lamb is meek and lowly. And we read of our blessed Lord in the day of His humiliation: "As a lamb before her shearers was dumb, so He opened not His mouth." He is led as a sheep to the slaughter, even so much so that the heathen authorities were amazed that He did not defend Himself. But my friend, that same Lamb who died in self-imposed weakness, that same Lamb who obediently submitted Himself to the scoffing and the spittle shall come with power and glory, and every eye shall see Him. And when He breaks through the clouds, if you have treated the royal invitation with indifference or hostility, you will know, as I can never depict with words, what it is to bear the brunt of the wrath of the Lamb. You'll wish that somehow you could go back beyond your mother's womb into a state of nonexistence rather than face the anger of the Son of God. A royal reckoning is coming. And those who are indifferent and hostile, in the language of 2 Thessalonians 1:8, to them Jesus Christ will come with flaming fire to take vengeance on "them that know not God, and to them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus."

But I direct your attention to verse 13 as well. Not only will the royal reckoning bring within its scope those who openly refuse the Gospel, those who with indifference are not concerned with the Gospel, but what about those who are found in some way among those who have responded to the invitation? That's you here this morning. In some way or another, there is some degree of interest in and identity with the Christian message, or you wouldn't be here. But my friend, the great issue is this: do you have a wedding garment this morning? Are you clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Has He been made unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption? Or do you merely have the name of Jesus on your lips, songs of Jesus in your mouth, thoughts of Jesus floating through your head? The day of royal reckoning is coming, and the language from the lips of Christ, again, is vigorous and frightening language.

Think now, you're in Palestine; there are no Edisons who have yet invented electric light bulbs. Outside of the warmth and fellowship and love and provision and gaiety of the banquet hall, everything is inky black darkness. "Then the king said to the servants, Bind his hand and foot [render him immobile], and cast him out into the outer darkness." In other words, our Lord in this figurative language is saying the state into which this hypocrite is cast is irrevocable, unchangeable, irreversible. "Bind him so that once he's in darkness, there's no escape from darkness." "Hell" is a popular word in the language of every news commentator, every man who's trying to prove he's a man. "Hell" and "damn" are acceptable now in the mass media. My friend, "hell" may be just a convenient word that you slip in to prove you're a man or to show you're "in." But to our Lord, hell was a place prepared for the devil and his angels. And weeping and gnashing of teeth are not poetic language. They simply reveal the poverty of human language to express the awful reality of abandonment from God. What was in the banquet house? There was the laughter, there was the gaiety, there was the fellowship, there was the love, there was the light, and above all, there was the king and his son. Without--darkness, darkness! And that's the hell of hells. The hymn writer caught that when he said, "

Jesus, all perfections rise and end in Thee;
Heaven itself without Thee--dark as night would be.
Lamb of God, Thy glory is the light above,
Lamb of God, Thy glory is the life of love.

My friend, listen to me, you're externally identified with Christ and His church and the Gospel, but do you have the wedding garment? The royal reckoning is coming. And in that day it will not be enough that you passed the scrutiny of fellow mortals, elders who may have interviewed you for acceptance into a church. It will not be enough that you passed the scrutiny of fellow mortals who would say, "Ah, that's brother so and so." It's the king himself who comes and reckons with this hypocrite. Anyone could mark out those who openly refuse, but now the passage says the king himself comes in and discovers him. Now there are men today that everyone knows they're not converted. They make no profession. They say, "The Gospel's alright, but I've got other things to do." They're the indifferent. There are some who openly oppose it and say, "I want nothing to do with it. Shut up! Don't talk to me about Christ." But there are some of you who are like this man. You sit at the table, and the king alone can discover you. And he's going to find you in that day. The Scripture says His eyes are as a flame of fire. And according to Romans 2:16, in that day He will judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ.

O my friend, listen, and may the Holy Spirit drive it into your conscience with inescapable power: do you have the wedding garment this morning? "What do you mean?" I mean are you joined to Christ in the bond of living faith? Have you been given a new heart in the language of Ezekiel 36, in the language of John 3 that has become so prostituted in the past few months? Have you been born of the Spirit? Not, have you had some kind of mystical experience that has the name of Jesus somehow attached? But have you received the life of God, giving you a hunger for holiness and obedience and a disposition to take seriously the Word of God and to love and serve the Son of God? My friend, if not, you do not have the wedding garment.

O, how wonderful it is to know this morning, at least while we still draw in breath, that the King has not yet determined that wrath should come. And there are few joys that can match the joy of one of His slaves. And that's all we who preach the Word claim to be, His slaves to echo the royal invitation, "Come! All things are ready." Think of it, this poor man's case was irreversible in the parable; yours is not. If you're found among the guests with no wedding garment, thank God, you can still get up and go to the door who is Christ and say, "Lord Jesus, cloth me."

All things are ready. There's a wedding garment for all who would have it. The feast is spread. Forgiveness, peace, acceptance, justification, adoption, and all the blessings conceived by the infinitely loving mind of God stored up in the covenant of grace--all of them are bundled up in Christ. And God says, "Will you have my Son?" O dear people, if you're not in Christ, will you heed the royal command today? "Come, for the feast is spread! All things are ready." I stand today not as a preacher of Moses to tell you, "Do." I stand as a preacher of the Gospel saying, "Come! All is ready." Why do you get irritated with preachers who are simply seeking to do what these servants did, to get you to come and honor God by being found at the feast made for His dear Son?

My final word of application is to you the people of God. Do you see the glory now of what real Gospel endeavor is? It's entreating men in the language of Paul to be reconciled to God through Christ, that God may be honored as men embrace the provision stored up in and on behalf of His dear Son the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why we refuse to cheapen the Gospel, to bring it down to a tawdry confidence trick. And you and I are going to be inundated with it in the next few months. This Here's Life campaign that's inundated the greater New York metropolitan area--just a sales gimmick to sell Jesus. And we'll be glutted with it--billboards and spot ads. It's all Madison Avenue. It utterly obscures the glory of the Christ of the Bible. We don't try to trick you into a decision over a telephone call. We command you in the name of the God in heaven to repent and believe the Gospel; bow down to Christ. "Kiss the son, lest He be angry, and ye perish in the way." And those of us who, by the grace of God, have embraced that royal invitation and are sitting even this morning at that royal feast, the Scripture says, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come."

We want as our closing hymn of praise to God to confess our believing response to the Word by singing that great hymn of Joseph Hart in closing. And if you're here as one who has not heeded that Gospel call, will you even now as the Word as come there where you sit? We do not ask you to walk an isle or raise a hand. We ask you to have dealings with God Himself in Christ right where you sit, right now, even as the Gospel is echoed in this wonderful hymn.

One of the old Puritans said that saving faith is nothing more but Gospel begging. O, may God grant that some of you will go to begging today, buying at the price of your pride and stubbornness those gracious provisions of God in Jesus Christ.

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