

Sermon on Matthew 22:1-14, October 8/9, 2011 – Many Called, Few Chosen

God's grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Again this week we find ourselves hearing a parable from our Lord Jesus. Over the last few weeks we have heard a number of parables, and the one we just heard is kind of like the “icing on the cake.” To give you a better sense of what Jesus is thinking about here when mentioning this wedding banquet, I want you to imagine a wedding reception so over the top, so luxurious, so expensive that it would make national headlines. Or if you want a real life example, imagine yourself at the recent wedding of Prince William and his wife Catherine – beautiful wedding dresses, men dressed in the finest tuxedos, limousines, block after block of the most beautiful flowers, and of course, a huge stone cathedral. This is the kind of scenery that this parable is inviting us to be a part of.

So we have this beautiful beginning to this wedding feast, but we also have this rather gruesome ending to it with someone getting bound up, hand and feet, and tossed “into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In between that, we see a number of characters. And as this sermon goes on, I want you see yourself in this parable, like the other ones. I'm only going to focus on three groups of characters, but which one of these characters would best describe you?

The first group of characters we'll focus on is the group of people who were first invited to this wedding banquet. You'll notice that they have been invited to this grand feast, this grand celebration, but, as the Bible says, “they made light of it and went away, one to his farm another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them” (vv. 5-6). The

best way I can describe people like this in our day and age would be people who are too busy to worry about God. Maybe even a better way to put it is that these people have known all about God their whole lives, they know all about what God has done for them, what Christ's cross means for them, these are people who know all the "facts" about God but now, since they think they know everything, find it pretty trivial or unimportant to listen to what God wants to say to them week in and week out. These people would be the ones who say, "You know, I've heard all of this before and it just doesn't do anything for me. I can stay at home and paint or clean or do my laundry, I can go into work for an extra shift, I can do this or that, I can do anything else that will make better use of my time than going to church. Besides, I can always go next week, and if I'm busy next week, I can always go the week after that. Or if I don't go this month, maybe I'll go sometime next month – then I won't be so busy. Hold on, let me just pencil it in here...there we go, now it's on my schedule. I'm so proud of myself; I just made time for God."

The next group of characters we see are the ones who weren't invited to the wedding in the first place, kind of like people like you and I who didn't receive an invitation to Prince William's big bash. We see in the parable that these people are the ones who the king had to scrape the bottom of the barrel to invite. We are told that some are good but some are bad...but it didn't matter how good or bad they were, the king had a wedding hall to fill up. And as the old saying goes, when life gives you lemons you make lemonade, and so the king makes some lemonade and invites this motley crew to have that lemonade and even more. Perhaps the best way I can describe these people would be that these are folks who are rather dull and ordinary. There's nothing really special about them, other than they, like the boy in Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory, now have a golden ticket to attend the beauty and splendor of the wedding banquet and

now get to taste all the finest meats, cheeses, and chocolates. Some of them are good people, not great people, but good people. Others are bad people, not evil people, but still bad people.

These are people plodding along their daily lives when all of a sudden they get word of something so grand and awesome, and not only do they get word about this, but now they are also invited. This is like Prince William sending a convoy here to Escanaba to invite us to his wedding because all of the Brits are too “blooming” busy to go.

The next character in this parable we see is the one is invited to the party, but when the king sees this person at the party he gets furious that they weren't prepared, tells the servants to bind this person hand and feet, and commands this person to be thrown out into the darkness where there will be heard weeping and gnashing of teeth. Kind of harsh for just not wearing the right clothes. However, what's important for us to understand here is that in antiquity, if you were invited to a wedding you would be given clothes to wear by the host. That's why in this parable the king is so furious that he would kick someone one out for wearing the wrong clothes – the king gave him the right clothes to wear, but this person thought it not that important to wear what the king had already given him. To put it simply, this guy, whoever he was, good or bad, he disrespected the king by not wearing what was given to him. The best way I can describe these people is that these are people who could be best described as counterfeit Christians, they are Christians in name only – they come to church but could really care less what goes on in it. They listen to the Word that is preached, but they don't really hear it. These kinds of people are kind of the like the first group. They don't take seriously the invitation that has been given to them and in the process, disrespect the king. Only, this time they disrespect the king right in front of the king's face.

Like I said at the beginning, which one of those characters would best describe you and your situation? (Pause for a bit) Which one of those characters would describe you. Maybe none of them do, that's a possibility. Maybe all of them do, that's a possibility too. Let me explain.

If I were to look at my own life I would look at my high school and college years as the first group. I know about God. I was raised in the church for the first 12 years of my life. I could always blame my parents, but once I became more mature, all the blame falls on me. My parents can't have faith for me my whole life, that's something I needed to take ownership of myself. I can also see myself in the 2nd group too. It may have taken a while, but the invitation finally came to me, as unthankful and undeserving as I might have been. This invitation came to me through a number of people of course, but the invitation was still there waiting for me. Here lays this invitation right before me saying, "Come Chris, you're invited too. Don't you remember? Come back. In case you're wondering who it is, this is God. So quit being a blockhead and get yourself back into My house and hear the Good News of my Son who died and was raised for you." But also, on the other hand, I could see myself as that last person. And this happened, interestingly enough, during seminary. My time in seminary was a really good time of growth and spiritual maturity, don't get me wrong. However, there were so many challenges put in front of me. And not only were there challenges, but there was some bad stuff that happened during those 4.5 years that really jaded me. My mother-in-law, who worked at our home church, was fired because of budget cuts. And so were a number of other people. My wife also had a miscarriage that didn't sit too well with me. I would be so stressed out from school, from working 2nd shift, from working with people who, even though were my friends, drove me nuts, and I would end up bringing all that baggage home and say things to my wife or daughter that I

regretted. So when I went to the Lord's house it was more like going through the motions. I would go just because. Never mind the fact that I got to hear some great sermons, I was so caught up in everything else that paying attention to what God wanted to say to me was irrelevant. In a very real way, I felt like I was cast into the outer darkness, where I would weep and gnash my teeth in frustration and resentment.

So maybe you can see yourself in a number of the characters. Or maybe you can see yourself as the first one who constantly ignores the invitation, or maybe you see yourself as the 2nd group of characters who are just happy to get in, or maybe you can see yourself like the last character who makes it to the banquet, but could really care less why you're there. Where ever you fall, the promise that Jesus gives here today in this gospel is the same – “Many are called, but few are chosen.” Does that promise worry you? That many are called but few are chosen? For those who don't have Christ Jesus as their Lord this passage is sheer terror and bad news, but for you who believe in Christ Jesus, the Son to who we are married to in Baptism and in Communion, this is one of the sweetest promises in all of Scripture. For many are indeed called, but thanks be to God that He has chosen you. And if maybe you ask yourself, “How do I know if I've been chosen?” Well, I'm just one of God's servants letting you know you've been chosen and invited. How you choose to respond to God's free invitation is up to you. You can reject it, though I don't know why anyone would. You can accept it, and then think of it as not really that important. Or you can believe it for all that its worth – that God has chosen you, not because of who you are or what you've done, but simply because that's why Christ came to live, to die, to be resurrected – to choose you as his own, as his spouse, as his beloved, here and now and in eternity. Come to think about it, that's not much of choice now, is it? Amen.