

Children's Talk and Sermon Notes
for Sunday, 19 March

Children's Talk:

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying,

"Tell those who are invited, 'See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.'"

But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding." So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. (Matthew 22:1-10)

Invited to the Wedding

A sermon by Pastor Joel Christian Glenn
19 March, 2023

When you are invited to a wedding and reception, do you accept? What if the one who is hosting the wedding is wealthy, even a king, and the only cost to attend is your time, the only requirement that you dress appropriately? Would you not most likely readily accept if possible, and even rearrange your schedule to make it work? There would be no reason not to. And to go further, what if the one throwing the Wedding were the Lord, and to enter the wedding was to enter heaven? How much more likely we would be to accept! And yet, for some reason, the Lord tells us a parable in which the obvious does not occur, in which the invitation is refused. We too live out this parable. From it, we can learn to recognize the Lord's invitations, and so choose to accept them. What this invitation is we will see in a moment.

But first we must spend some time with what the Lord is actually inviting us to. A wedding is the beginning of a marriage, a coming together of two into one. Likewise, the Lord invites us to enter into a covenant with Him. He wants nothing more than for every human being to know His love and to share that love. As we read, "He wills to save everyone and to draw him with mighty power to heaven, that is, to Himself" (*Secrets of Heaven* §1038). And of course a wedding is a joyous occasion, not a mechanical signing of legal documents. Likewise, the Lord invites us to enter into a joyous covenant with him. His sole desire is that we should feel and experience His love.

So the question becomes, if the Lord so strongly desires all of us to have a relationship with Him, and if such a relationship is so loving and happy, why is it that we are not all there already? Why does it take effort to turn to the Lord and put aside time for His Word, when the result, we are told, will be so good?

Or in other words, why did some people turn down such an amazing invitation? As we explore this question, we will see why we too do not always recognize the Lord's invitations, and find ways that we can make sure to accept when we have the chance.

Initially we receive the Lord's invitation through His truth. This is represented by the servants that the king sends out. Just as servants go out and try to bring people into the wedding, the Lord sends out His truth to us, so that we can learn of His love (Cf. *Apocalypse Revealed* §3). We might like to think that when we hear the truth we respond instantly, but we know this is not the case. Like the guests who refused the invitation, we sometimes hardly even notice the truth. Perhaps our minds wander in church when we hear the Word being read; or we put off our daily readings due to tiredness; or we simply forget to pay attention to what the Lord says as we go about our busy lives. There is no malice in this behavior: it is simply easy to forget the Lord, and so we miss what He is calling us to.

But underlying this apathy there can be something less appealing, and that is what we see in the second invitation. This time, the invitation is accompanied with a description of what awaits at the feast. The ox and the fattling have been killed, prepared to be served up for all who attend. This time the invitation cannot be ignored so easily. It is one thing to turn someone down when a tentative date is set in the distant future; it is another thing to turn them down when all is prepared and ready for you to arrive. The guests cannot escape that to refuse is not just to refuse an invitation, it is to refuse the very real food that has been prepared with them in mind.

For us, spiritually, the case is the same. The Lord understands that we cannot always have our minds on Him. We must deal with life as it happens, and if we stray

too much from Him, He gently tries to bring us back, so He offers a more compelling invitation.

That is what is represented here in the second invitation. Spiritually, an ox is external or natural good (*Secrets of Heaven* §6357). It represents the kind deeds that we do with our words and with our hands for others. And the fatling is heavenly love, the intention and willingness to love the Lord both in act and in mind (*Secrets of Heaven* §5943). To tell the guests that these have been prepared represents the Lord's reminder that His truth and His teachings are not just about knowledge: they are what lead us to treat each other with kindness and to look to each other and to the Lord with love. So while we may forget about the Lord from time to time, we need always to come back to the reality that without His teaching, we won't know how best to love each other.

Still, those who were invited did not come. Their excuses reveal the states we at times experience when we turn down the Lord's invitation, knowing full well what that entails. One group went back to their farms, another attended to their business. In us, these represent states in which we think that we are better off without the Lord.

To return to a field is to focus on what one can grow and feed oneself (Cf. *Secrets of Heaven* §3310). If this is from the Lord, it is good. But if we turn to our own field that would represent trying to cultivate a good and kind life apart from what the Lord teaches. And don't we sometimes do this? We wonder what the Word can offer, when we already know how to be kind. Or we can fall prey to the idea that the Word is old-fashioned, and while it may have some good ideas, it is not the source of the goodness in my life. We excuse ourselves from listening to the Lord because we have our own farm, or rather our own philosophy on how to be good, to tend to.

To go back to our business on the other hand is to think we have things figured out better than the Lord (Cf. *Apocalypse Revealed* §§606, 759). Business is about the back and forth of trade and commerce, reading the markets to see what will bring the best deals. We do this with truth, spiritually, when we start to think we can get further in life doing our own thing. We compare what the Word teaches with what makes the most sense to further what we want, and at times we will inevitably go with what we want over what is true. We may even say, "I know the Word says not to do this but in this case clearly I know better." We ignore the Lord's invitation, because we couldn't be bothered to turn to what He teaches us.

Now the third state mentioned is hard to understand in the literal sense. Rather than offering an excuse, these people simply killed the servants. This brutal scene makes no sense if we view it from the literal meaning. But the Lord is pushing us to understand the spiritual implication. We can look at this reaction and say that it is utterly unwarranted. But if we apply that attitude to the people in this parable, then we must also apply it to ourselves when we too do something equally unwarranted spiritually. In this case, we are killing the servants when we reject the truth out of a desire to do evil. The other people at least offered some excuse; these people simply killed the servants. Likewise, we can at times see the truth, realize that it is indeed the best course of action if we desire to be good, and still reject it. At this point, the only reason for our rejection can be a selfish love. When we focus on ourselves, hearing the Lord tell us to put others first can instill anger in us. Even if we do not get that far, we may have flashes in which we lash out at what the Word says. If you are harboring resentment, and it says to forgive. If we are jealous, and we read thou shalt not covet. If we are angry at the lack of charity in others, and we read judge not. There are times when we simply reject the truth out of hand, because we do not

want it to be true (*Apocalypse Revealed* §766). We must recognize that this is just as absurd as killing someone who invites you to a wedding. That is what the Lord is pushing us to see with this seemingly unrealistic parable: we too can fall into the trap of killing that which simply wants to lead us into joy and happiness.

In the story, these people and even their entire cities are destroyed. But remember, this parable describes what is going on in each of us. So while it may seem that the Lord will destroy people like this, the reality is that the Lord will destroy the mindsets that have us think like this. Since this mindset is insidious, it must be removed if we are to identify with the next set of people. When we stop trying to justify our rejection of what is true, we can move on to see things another way. This is represented by the people in the highways. The king, needing people to attend His son's wedding, sends out his servants to gather anyone and everyone that they find in the streets. In a general sense this depicts the Lord reaching out to anyone and everyone who is willing to listen to Him: He is not selective in who hears and responds to His truth. He wants everyone to.

For us as individuals this represents the times when we do listen to the Lord. Just as a road takes us from one place to another, our understanding of what is true moves us from one spiritual state to another. Thus, we are on the roads when we are letting the truth into our minds. So for example, when we do make time to read the Word; when we do acknowledge that there is something there for us; when we remember that the Lord's truth really is more important and even more practical than our own way of doing things. Those are the times we can hear the Lord's call. And we have to foster that. We need to remember to make time for the Lord, to push through the tiredness and read the Word, or pay attention, or bring it into our

calculations and planning for what our future will be. Then we will be ready to be invited and actually accept.

Now this isn't the end of the story. At the feast itself, there is a man who is not wearing a wedding garment. This may seem like a small matter, but the king is furious, and has him bound up and cast into outer darkness. Again, this brutal incident pushes us to see the spiritual side of the story. A garment spiritually is truth: truth expresses the goodness that is within, just as a garment clothes a person externally (*Apocalypse Revealed* §166:1). The wedding garment is specifically the truth that has to do with faith in the Lord. It expresses not just an external acknowledgment of the Lord, but a real internal trust that the Lord is God. Without this, a person who looks to the Lord merely looks to Him the same way they might look to a philosopher or a friend. This is not what the Lord is calling us to: he is calling us to really see the spiritual power that He has in our lives. If we take His teachings to be the teachings of God, then they will take us beyond a self-centered viewpoint and transform us internally. If they are just advice from a friend, they will fade when times are tough, and we will not truly understand their implications. So when someone who knew the truth was seen without any real faith in the Lord, He was cast out.

This is the final step we need to remember when we accept the Lord's invitation to listen to His Word. It is not enough to merely accept it as factually true. We must also internalize it, and let it shape our deepest loves, both to the Lord and to the neighbor. Then we will not merely be with the Lord at the wedding feast, we will be joined with Him, as a member of the wedding feast.

When we develop this conjunction with the Lord, then we finally receive the blessing of that wedding. That is what it is to listen to the Lord's truth, to let it shape

our lives, and to truly love it. This covenant is what the Lord invites us to through a life of wisdom and love. As we read,

The Lord's conjunction with man does not exist except in love and charity, for the Lord is love itself and mercy. He wills to save everyone and by His mighty power to draw them towards heaven, that is, towards Himself. From this anyone may know and conclude that it is impossible for anybody to be joined to the Lord except by means of that which He Himself is, that is, except by acting like Him, or becoming one with Him - that is to say, by loving the Lord in return, and loving the neighbour as oneself. In this way alone is conjunction brought about; this constitutes the very essence of a covenant. When conjunction results from this, it quite plainly follows that the Lord is present. (*Secrets of Heaven* §1038)

This is a perfect description of our marriage with the Lord. We listen to His truth, we act as He would have us act, and so are joined to Him. And far from being an arduous task, we enter into a joyful relationship, far superior to any life we could have cobbled together on our own.

As the story ends, we read, "many are called, but few are chosen." We all have the opportunity to hear the Lord's truth, to be called into His heavenly home. And each and every one of us who hears that call, and follows in a life of genuine charity, will be chosen. *Amen.*