

SERMONS ON THE GOSPELS
FOR THE SUNDAYS AND CHIEF FESTIVALS OF THE CHURCH YEAR

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May God bless you and keep you, help you, defend you, and lead you to know the depth of His love. *Amen.*

55. Twentieth Sunday After Trinity. Who Are The Elect? Matt. 22:1-14.

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth; other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden, were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in, hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him in outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

Beloved Congregation:

As you have heard, the kingdom of God is like a king; who made a marriage feast at the wedding of his son and invited many guests. But his invitation was scorned by a large number, and even among those who finally did come from the by-ways and cross-roads not all had put on the proper clothing which he had provided to grace the occasion. The parable teaches that there is a bridal between heaven and earth in the person of God's only begotten Son, and that a precious spiritual feast is prepared to which mankind is invited. God sent out servants to call the Jews, who were His peculiar people in the old dispensation, and they would not come. He sent out other servants, when all was ready, and the Jews still refused to accept the invitation, some giving themselves wholly to their earthly avocations, and some even persecuting and killing the Lord's servants. Then, as those first called counted themselves unworthy of everlasting life, He turned to the Gentiles. A goodly number of guests were thus gotten together, but not all of them were in decent garb. There was one who had not on a wedding

garment, and he was cast out into everlasting punishment. The obvious meaning is that the gospel call is rejected by a large proportion of those who hear it, and that even among those who do seem to accept it there are some who inwardly decline it. There are thus many invited, but few who really accept the invitation and enjoy the rich feast which God has prepared for their souls. This our text expresses in the closing words, "Many are called, but few are chosen." There is thus an election of grace. Do not shrink from the expression. The Bible teaches that there is a predestination to eternal life and an election to the inheritance of the saints in light. It tells the saints that God has:

"predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." Eph. 1:5:6.

It speaks of believers as the:

"elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 1:2.

The Bible does not teach a predestination and election of some men to life and salvation, and of other men to death and damnation, without any reference to their relation to Christ by faith or unbelief. That is a Calvinistic figment, which contradicts the whole tenor and teaching of the Gospel. But there is a divine election of grace. Our text shows us how it is, and it gives us the needful warning, that we may make our calling and election sure. Let us then devoutly, for our admonition and comfort consider the answer which our text gives to the question,

WHO ARE THE ELECT?

It teaches us that *1. They are among the called; but that 2. Not all the called are elect; and that 3. Those are elect who have on the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness by faith.* May the Lord grant us such faith and preserve us in it, that we may not be rejected when He comes!

[I] *The elect are among the called.* There are none in this number who have not been invited to the Gospel feast; but the invitation is designed to be given to all, as the feast is prepared for all; and whenever the call is given it is sincere and earnest, and it is designed to place those who hear it in the number of the elect.

[1] The Lord has chosen none whom He has not called. That is plain on the face of it. No one will come to a great King's feast without an invitation, and no one has the right to extend an invitation but He who gives the feast. There may be called persons who will not come and partake of the royal dainties, but none can come and partake who are not called persons. Therefore we say in our Catechism that:

“the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith, even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth.”

That He knows from eternity who, when the grace unto salvation is offered, will be led by that grace to believe in Jesus and persevere in faith unto the end, it is not necessary to tell you. You have learned that He knoweth all things. Therefore St. Paul says that:

“He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” Eph. 1:4.

He knew before He made man what would become of him, and knew who by His grace would accept and who by his own sin would reject the offer of salvation in Christ. Therefore He knew the elect from eternity. In His eye they were therefore elect long before they were called. But they were so because the whole history of man was known to Him before the events were actually performed, and His election takes into account those events which He foreknew. He chose none who rejected Jesus; He chose all who should not reject His grace and salvation offered in Jesus.

Those of whom He foreknows that they will not reject it, are to be brought into the possession of the life and salvation prepared for them in Christ, and this can take place only if they come to Him. If they were not invited, they would not attain the faith which He foreknew.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him, in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

Rom. 10:13-17.

As only he who gives the feast has the authority to invite his guests, so too the great King alone who makes the marriage for His Son has the authority to call men to partake of His bounties. And He alone has the power to induce them to come and to furnish the suitable garments for the royal feast. The Lord will not choose those whom He has not called at all, and such have not the qualifications to be chosen, even if the choice would otherwise fall on persons who are not invited.

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” Rom. 8:28-30.

While then God foreknows His people, and foreknew them from the foundation of the world, so that in His eye those who die in faith were elect before they were called — elect in His omniscience from eternity — for us, who can not foreknow, the chosen are always among the called. The elect are those who come to the marriage, not those who have no invitation.

[2] But the invitation was designed for all men, and has in fact, in different ages, been extended to all men. It was given to the Jews, who were first bidden, and when these would not come, it was given to the Gentiles in the highways. Thus we read that when the Jews:

“spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming, then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” Acts 13:45-46.

This was in accord with God’s plan that all the ends of the earth should see the salvation of our God. So the commission was given to the disciples of Christ,

“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15.

The salvation in Christ is prepared for all men, and it is the will of God that all should hear the tidings and come to the Savior.

“As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” Ezek. 33:11.

But how should the wicked man turn from his evil way and come to a Savior of whom he never heard and to whom he was never called? That all men might hear it, the gospel was commanded to be preached unto all nations, as it was announced at the birth of Jesus.

“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”

So the apostle declares that God our Savior:

“will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” 1 Tim. 2:4-6.

We would therefore be ungrateful to the gracious purpose of God as revealed in the gospel, and to the express command which He has given to His people, if we declined to labor for the spread of the good tidings among all nations.

“Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.”

How can you suffer millions to go down into everlasting death, when God has in mercy given you the means to save them? Least of all should we permit the thought that only few are chosen even when many are called, to cool our ardor in the missionary work. That is but a subterfuge of the flesh. Give the perishing souls a chance, and if only one of a thousand should hear and come to Jesus, that causes joy before the angels in heaven and should cause joy in your souls for ever. God wills that all men should be saved; the Savior died for all; the command is given to bear the precious tidings into all lands. Let the gracious will of the Lord be done, that all may hear the call to the feast that is spread for all!

[3] Nor need we have any fears that the invitation is not sincere and earnest when it comes to us, or is brought through us to others. There is no more horrible impeachment of God’s holiness than that which lies in the heartless heresy spread by Calvinists concerning the insincerity of the divine call of grace. It is the dreadful outburst of the dreadful error of absolute predestination, and is in

itself sufficient to excite in the devout soul a horror of that product of human speculation. If it were true that God desires only a portion of the human race to be saved from the misery into which sin has plunged it, and that He has pleasure in the death of the larger portion, whom He therefore has no will to save, it would be true also that when He sends men out into the highways to bid to the marriage as many as they shall find, the invitation could be seriously and sincerely meant only in the case of those whom He really wants at the feast, while in the case of those whom He has no will to bless it would be all sham. But it is false. When God calls you to life and blessedness, He is not trifling with you and mocking your misery by giving you an invitation in sound that is a rejection in sense. If that were the case, how could we trust Him in anything?

“God is not man, that He should lie, neither the son of man, that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” Num. 23:19.

He gives us the blessed comfort that His Word is sure as He is faithful, and that when He calls us to the blessings of grace and glory, He means it all. Only come. For thus saith the Lord:

“Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you.” Is. 55:3.

He that trusts in the Lord’s invitation can never be deceived. Therefore come, then extend the invitation to others. You can make no mistake in the persons. He would have all men come to a knowledge of the truth and all men turn from their evil ways. He would have all to be saved, and commands us to proclaim the great salvation in Christ to all men. Therefore be assured that His call is sincere, be the persons to whom you bring it what they may.

“The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” Rev. 22:17.

It is sincerely offered to all; let all take freely, for all are seriously and earnestly called.

[II] *But not all the called are also chosen.* This is not because God did not desire that all should equally enjoy the blessings to which they are called and did not call them with equal sincerity and efficacy, but because, as our parable

shows, many would not come. Our Lord's complaint against the holy city explains how it is:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.” Matt. 23:37.

The Saviour was willing to bless them, but they were not willing to be blessed. So in our text. Many were called, and called with the sincere purpose that they should sit at the feast and enjoy the sumptuous dainties of the king, but those that were bidden would not come, and those who did come from the highways were not at all loyal to the bounteous Benefactor. The text leaves us no room for doubt as to the reasons why not all the called were chosen. Some treated the call lightly; some even persecuted the messengers who brought the call; some came outwardly, but inwardly rejected the invitation.

[1] The king:

“send forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding, and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.”

That is a sad account. The Lord calls condemned men to the pardon and peace and blessedness which He has provided, and which He alone can give, and they prefer their lands and their business to all the blessings He offers. It is marvelous. But it is the fact. Nor has mankind become wiser since then. It is the same story all along the line of history down to our own times, and is the same today. Do you not witness it still in your own congregation and your own surroundings? Are there not many even now who are so absorbed in their worldly affairs, so intent upon pushing their business and gathering their dollars, that they have no time and no taste for the concerns of their souls? They are called, and perhaps recognize the need of heeding the call, or even intend at some convenient season to comply with it; but they are too busy now. And the farm and the merchandise — must not that claim a diligent man's attention? Conscience is but too often quieted with the delusive thought that duties such as these justify the neglect of the great salvation. It is a delusive thought, because it is not a duty to attend to anything, not even the wants of father or mother or son or daughter, in preference to the one thing needful. Nor can father or mother or

son or daughter even suffer by reason of our seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. The performance of this chief duty secures the proper performance of all the rest. It is therefore a mere attempt to cheat the soul when it is urged that the farm and the merchandise demand such attention as to justify the refusal to come to the feast when the Savior calls. And yet men have thus made light of the call in the past, and are making light of it now. Examine yourself, whether you are not one of this unwise and unhappy class. Are you sure that you are not giving this world with its riches and its pleasures and its cares more earnest attention than the things which pertain to the eternal interests of your soul? Are you sure that you never let your business affairs interfere with your spiritual privileges and duties? If you are not, see that you turn from your ways and make your calling and election sure by giving more earnest heed to your Savior's voice. You cannot comfort yourselves that you are among the elect if, instead of heeding the call to come to the gospel feast, you go to your farm and your merchandise, as if these could deliver you from sin and supply your spiritual needs.

[2] Some who will not come are bolder and array themselves in open hostility to the Lord and His call.

“The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.”

Sin is the same in all human hearts. They are altogether corrupt. All are totally depraved, so that they are dead in trespasses and sins. In that respect there is no difference between those who, when they are called, go to their farm and their merchandise, and those who treat the servants spitefully. By nature all are against the Lord.

“The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Rom. 8:7.

But the manifestations of that carnal mind are not the same in all. Some are externally genteel, and seem to appear reasonable and upright; others give the reins to their base passions and seem rude and rough. It is still the same today as it always was. When the call of grace is presented to an assembly, some of those who reject it will preserve a decent appearance, so that the only indication of their enmity is the fact that they will not come; others are not so careful to restrain the expression of their hostility, and direct their persecution against the

preachers. They are not by nature worse than the others, but they are more vulgar in the utterance of their wickedness. They will not come to Jesus that they may have life, and make no effort to conceal the enmity that is in their hearts against Him and His Church. Why such persons are not chosen is plain to all. They remain in their sin and obtain its wages.

“When the king heard thereof he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city.”

The reference evidently is to the destruction of Jerusalem, whose iniquities brought upon it such a dreadful doom. God often visits temporal punishments upon people who boldly revel in wickedness, that men who will not believe may see that:

“God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Gal. 6:7.

But whether it is seen in this world or not, the wages of sin is eternal death; and those who reject the call of our Lord, who alone can cleanse from sin and save from death, must eternally perish, whether their rejection has seemed to be due only to preoccupation with other important matters, or has appeared in its true character as bitter enmity to the Lord and His way of salvation. Such people are called, but how could they be chosen when they would not come?

[3] But there is still another class mentioned in our text. Some do come apparently, and still are not chosen. I say apparently, because what seems obedience to the call by reason of external compliance, is not always really obedience. Coming to Jesus is a matter of the heart, and when that is not turned to Him, all coming to Him in outward form is only apparent and deceptive. It may deceive others; it may even deceive ourselves; but it never deceives God, who trieth the heart. How it is, our Lord describes in the parable. When those first called would not come,

“Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

All sorts of people come to the church when the Gospel is preached, and although none are received into membership without the profession of faith in Jesus, the profession is not always sincere. We cannot see into the hearts of men, and when some bad people come among the good and outwardly witness the good confession, they too must be received. Because so far as we can see they belong to God's people. But the Lord is not deceived. He examines the heart, and He rejects those who in their hearts reject Him. It would be a vain thought if any of you supposed that your outward membership in the church makes your election sure. There you have the means of grace, and there you make confession of Christ before men, and this is necessary. But it is not all that is necessary. These means are given us that we may have faith in Christ unto salvation, and the confession is required that the faith which we have may be made known for the glory of God and for a witness to others, that they too may be induced to come. But where there is no faith, the means of grace effect no salvation and the confession profits us nothing. Let us take warning. The guests are all examined by the Lord, and only he that believeth shall be accepted; he that believeth not shall be damned. No unbeliever can be chosen, even though he outwardly heeds the call and presents himself at the feast to which he and all men are invited. He has not a wedding garment, and is therefore cast into outer darkness.

It has become evident, my brethren, that the chosen are among the called, but also that not all the called are chosen. The question has thus still received no definite answer, Who are the elect? But it seems to me that in view of all this the answer is easy.

[III] *The elect are those who have the wedding garment.* For those who would not come when called, and those who externally came and had not the wedding garment, are not chosen. Therefore those who appear at the feast in the requisite garment are the chosen few from among the many called. Let us in conclusion look more particularly at this point.

[1] First of all we must ascertain what is to be understood by the wedding garment in our parable. It designates that which is essential for acceptance with God. The prophet says:

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." Is. 61:10.

We are not ignorant of that salvation and of that righteousness. Christ is the

Savior; His righteousness becomes ours; we are saved through faith. Thus St. Paul says:

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Rom. 1:16-17.

When we have Christ, we have His righteousness and the great salvation which He wrought, and we have Him with all His merits and gifts when we have faith. We are thus clothed in His righteousness. That is the wedding garment which is necessary for acceptance with God.

“Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Gal. 3:26-27.

Baptism is the means of conveying to us Christ’s robe of righteousness, and faith is the means of appropriating it. Those who believe have put on the wedding garment which the grace of God provides and offers. They that continue in this faith unto the end shall be saved. They are the elect.

[2] For not having this wedding garment the rejected are responsible. It is their fault, not the Lord’s that they are found without it. The thought is all wrong — it is blasphemous — that God has from eternity resolved that He, who alone can furnish the wedding garment, would give it only to a few, and would then condemn to everlasting misery the many for not having it. If there were any truth in such a doctrine, the man without a wedding garment would not have been speechless when asked how he came there without a decent dress. He would have replied that he came with the best he had, and the Master of the feast had not supplied him with a better. But he had no such excuse and no such justification. He was speechless because it was his fault that he was not robed in royal garments, like the rest. He came there with his ragged garment all bespattered with the mire of the world’s highways, and he refused to put off his filthy rags and put on the white raiment of Christ’s righteousness. The Lord offered him all that was needful, and he would not accept it, though when he rejected it the Lord gave him the power by which he might have accepted it. The fault was wholly his, and therefore his conscience smote him when he was called to account, and he was speechless. And so all are guilty now who are not among the chosen, though they have been called. What more could the Lord do for you? He has prepared the feast and called and offers the wedding garment freely. Why

then do you not come, or coming, why do you appear without the wedding garment? Why will you choose death rather than life? “And he was speechless!”

[3] Whilst those who foolishly neglect the things which belong to their peace, and decline the call to salvation, or only seemingly accept it, those who come to the feast in sincerity, clad by the King in the garments befitting the royal marriage, enjoy the blessings of grace and glory that surpass all imagination to picture and all language to describe.

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” I Cor. 2:9.

It is no common earthly feast that is prepared. It is not even such a feast as the kings of this world spread for their noble guests, though many would think themselves highly honored if they were permitted to sit at such a table in such a company. But the Lord has nobler gifts for His guests than such as kings of earth are wont to give or able to offer. They are the gifts which our perishing souls need, and which only the Lord God, merciful and gracious, can bestow. He offers the wedding garment that fits us to sit down with angels forever in our Father’s house. Few enjoy those blessings, but it is because the many will not come to Jesus that they might have life. But those who come and are arrayed in the garments of Christ’s righteousness are happy for evermore, enjoying His blessings on earth and dwelling with Him in the unending bliss and glory of heaven. The elect of God are blessed for ever.

Ye are all called, ye who hear my voice today; for the gospel invitation is extended to you now: why will you not be among the chosen? Some of you trouble yourselves with thoughts about the election of God, because He foreknows it all. But there is no need for that. Do what He now asks you to do; and that which you do is the thing that He foreknows. Come; the feast is prepared for you now. Come; the call is extended to you now. Come; The wedding garment is ready for you now. The Lord wants you to come and bids you welcome. The needful grace is offered you in the Word which calls you. There is no respect of persons with God: He wants you all to come and be forever blest. Hear the Word of invitation; heed the gracious call. And continue in these things. The same Lord that calls you supplies the needful grace for perseverance. Be thou faithful unto death and thou shalt receive the crown of life. Amen.

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To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Jude 1:24-25

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