

“Let the Feast Begin”

Matthew 22:1-14

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It happens in nearly every medieval period movie. At some point, the king, queen, or lord stands up as the people gather in the banquet hall and declares, “Let the feast begin!” That’s the cue for the guests to dig in and begin the merriment and enjoyment of filling their bellies with the delicious spread that lies before them. Because who doesn’t love a good feast, right? That seems to be the mentality of the king in the parable Jesus tells us this morning. He has prepared all of the finest dishes for his dinner—his oxen and fattened calves, and all the things that go along with it. All that is left to be done is to declare, “Let the feast begin!” But there is one small problem. The invited guests have not arrived. And not only have they not arrived, they have refused the invitation of the king to come and sit at his table, going about their own business, and even killing his servants whom he sent out after them.

This parable is much like the one we discussed last week. The people of Israel, who have been invited to the feast of the Lord, have turned to themselves and their own laws instead of looking to the truth of the Messiah who has come into the world. For centuries, the Lord has sent His prophets, His servants, to proclaim that the feast is prepared and that His people are invited to come. But they chose to go to their farm, and to their business, rather than heed the call of the Lord. As Jesus says in Matthew 23:37, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” They chose the slavery of the Old Adam over the freedom of the new man that comes through Christ. They have chosen to have their own feast, instead of hearing the proclamation of the king to let the feast begin. Because of their insolence, the king destroys those murderers and has burned their city.

By looking to themselves instead of the Lord, they have chosen to be cast out of the kingdom, and have given their place at the table to others whom He has called out of the roads of the world. The people of Israel have given up their place to the Gentiles as the Word goes out to the world and all hear the call of the King. And yet, even the ones who are called and show up for the feast are not all chosen. There are those who have not put on the wedding garment. The man who is cast out into the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth is a man who still clings to the sinful flesh. He is one who has not truly put on the robe of Christ’s righteousness as one who believes in the vicarious work of the Savior for all mankind. He wears his own clothes, instead of the

clothes of the bridegroom, and thus relies on his own works for his salvation instead of the work of Christ.

But that is the problem with the sinful flesh that all bear in this life. It wants you to look to yourself and wear your own clothes as you come to the great wedding feast, because all the work you put into looking so good needs to be noticed. That's works righteousness in all its false glory. Everything has to be about you and your works, and that is the problem the Pharisees to whom Jesus is speaking have in our text this morning. They refuse to put on the wedding garment because it isn't one of their own making. Their sinful flesh, just like yours at many times, wants to focus on itself over God, and itself over the promises of His Word. It's tempting to listen to that Old Adam and the musings of the evil one as they work in tandem to fulfill the desires of your lustful heart. The flesh breeds nothing but evil thoughts and desires, and is all too willing to let those feelings take over and turn you away from the truth of why you are even at the feast to begin with.

You aren't present there because you deserve it—because you have worked so hard to make your own shining garment. The devil wants you to believe that is true but only because in doing so, your faith is being strained and weakened. By making you focus on your own works, he is pulling you away from the One who truly matters in terms of your faith. And that is never you. It is always and only ever Christ who matters for your faith, and Satan knows that all too well. He knows that if you are able to focus on Jesus alone, then you are safely cared for and not vulnerable to his flaming darts which he so frequently throws. So, your sinful flesh agrees with him in that regard and makes itself a dartboard for his flaming darts. But you are not just in the flesh, for you are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, and are thus of the Spirit by water and the Word. Paul says this plainly in Romans 8:2-4:

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The answer is not to get your flesh up to par so that you are worthy of entering the banquet hall. The answer is simply that you have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and made to be righteous for His sake alone. Be thankful that your entry into the feast is not based upon your own ability to make your garment acceptable. Thank and praise the Lord your God that He has made the wedding garment for you and placed it upon you

because of the work of Jesus. By the vicarious atonement that He has appropriated to you in Baptism, you are worthy to be at the table of the King.

Despite the fact that you would otherwise be unworthy, you are welcomed at your Lord's table. He has opened the doors of His banquet hall for the wedding feast of the Lamb and His bride the church, and by virtue of your faith in Christ, you are on the guest list and have received the appropriate clothing of Jesus' righteousness. As long as you are held in the faith, the work of the Holy Spirit in and through you keeps you securely in the graces of Your loving King. The Father has given you the righteousness of His Son, adopting you as His own dear son, equal to Christ with respect to His humanity. Paul tells us as much in Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." The grace of God keeps you in the faith, and brings you the blessings of the Lamb's High Feast.

Here, in a few short moments, you will partake of the foretaste of that Feast which awaits all believers in the one true God. You will share in the meal of Christ's body and blood alongside all the saints who now dwell in the banquet hall of the King. They, along with all of you, are waiting for the day when the King will proclaim, "Let the feast begin!" Revelation 6:10 tells us that the saints under the altar await the coming of the Lord, asking as the Psalmist does in Psalm 13, "How long, O Lord?" When Christ returns to inaugurate His everlasting reign in the new heaven and the new earth, all believers in Christ will partake of the Lamb's High Feast, the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom which will have no end. As the bride of Jesus, the Church will be eternally wed to the righteousness which He gives us here in this meal. By giving us His body and blood, He is promising forgiveness, life, and salvation to all who believe. There is no reason to despair of weeping and gnashing of teeth as one who has faith in the Almighty God who has sent His Son to redeem the world.

Your salvation is assured in that blood that He has shed and now gives you, and He has made the destination for you utterly certain by His resurrection from the dead. Your end is not one of being cast out of the wedding feast. Your end is to be the honored guest at the King's feast, having been invited by the blood of Christ which has washed you clean and given you His white robe of righteousness. The glory of God awaits you in the heavenly dwelling place, and you can rest assured that your place in His kingdom is certain because of His love for you and the work which He has done. The wedding garment has been placed upon you, and when the glorious day of the wedding feast arrives, and Christ comes on the clouds of heaven to declare, "Let the feast begin," there

will be nothing but joy, peace, and the love of God in Christ Jesus to surround you for all eternity.

And that is the joy we declared in the hymn we just sang. I leave you with verses 1 and 6 of that beautiful and joyous song:

At the Lamb's high feast we sing
Praise to our victorious King,
Who has washed us in the tide
Flowing from His pierced side.
Alleluia!

Now no more can death appall,
Now no more the grave enthrall;
You have opened paradise,
And Your saints in You shall rise.
Alleluia!

Amen.