

“They Made Light of It” St. Matthew 22:5

October 25, 2020

SERMON 1945

by Michael David Henson

Our sermon text is from Matthew 22:5, “But they made light of it and went their ways....”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In today’s parable the Triune God teaches us about the Kingdom of God, which is His Christian Church on earth. The picture which He uses is that of a wedding and the accompanying wedding feast. To compare the church to a wedding is the most endearing and comforting analogy.

A wedding is a celebration of the love of a man and woman who have found their life-long partner. As they begin their wedded life on earth, the hopes and dreams of the possibilities are all fresh and awaiting to be fulfilled. The joy of celebrating puts a smile on people’s faces. It causes the giving of gifts and the throwing of parties.

Jesus’ parable reflects the ancient custom of an arranged marriage. This custom fits well for the Scriptural marriage of the perfect Son of God and Christ’s bride, the church. The church having fallen from her created position is dirty and sinful. She is completely undesirable and unmarriageable. Nevertheless, we see that the heavenly Father graciously seeks out that very bride and arranges a marriage for His Son. From eternity our God saw our sinful condition and determined to remove that sinful impediment to our marriage. His Son lovingly came to suffer and die to atone for our sin, and then applied those blessings in the waters of holy Baptism so that we might be a holy bride. He washed away our sin and give us a bright and shiny white wedding garment. Through faith in His Son, He considers us to be a holy saint in His eyes.

Our heavenly Father acts like the earthly family who throws a lavish party to celebrate a cherished wedding. Our heavenly Father is so pleased with the joining of His Son to a forgiven and renewed wife—holy and blameless and without stain, wrinkle or blemish. Our God desires for us to rejoice in this arrangement. He will wash away your sins on account of the suffering and death of His Son, and you will receive the blessings of forgiveness of sins and eternal life. You will participate in a heavenly marriage that will last forever. The parable speaks of a dinner of all good things, which teaches us about the multitude of eternal blessings which our God desires to give those who are united in this heavenly marriage feast.

It would seem that despite the endearing picture of a joy-filled wedding describing the Christian church on earth, **three-fourths of this parable is about those who reject the invitation.** Who does that? Who makes light of a wedding invitation? Who would rather go about a back-breaking day at the farm? Who would rather put in another day at the office, than to go to a wedding?

If that response, seems ridiculous and quite improbable, then you will be

astounded when you hear about those who get violent over this wedding invitation. Some of those who received an invitation violently murdered those who brought the invitation! Now if these messengers were serving a subpoena, then there might be reason for resistance. You may not want to tell the truth before a court. Messengers who are serving a warrant for someone's arrest at least expect that there might be violence. Not everyone comes along quietly. You may not want to be incarcerated in jail. **But this is the invitation to the joy and blessings of a wedding!**

I know that there are those who don't consider Christ's church to be a joyful wedding feast.

--Some consider the church to simply be an unnecessary distraction in the pursuit of happiness and living. You might as well call the church **a hobby** which some engage in to pass the time. When the text says that they made light of religion, they simply mean that they don't consider the church to be of much use for their daily life, or really any part of life.

--Some speak of the church as **a cult or brain-washing institution**, which indoctrinates its members with antiquated myths like creation. Meanwhile they consider higher education to be an exemplary teacher of a godless evolution.

--Some consider the church to be **a guilt-producing machine** that clings to outdated morality and gender inequality, while seeking to suppress freedom. On the other hand, secular society has left behind the sin of adultery for all who live outside the faithfulness of marriage. It continues to allow any and all behavior which comes from the vilest desires of man. And those who welcome immoral behavior are considered to be enlightened and loving.

--Some consider the church to be **a work camp**, in which God threatens his inmates who tremble in fear and submission. Those who desire to be saved are kept in a kind of dysfunctional family, in which his children seek to please a passive-aggressive and perfection-seeking Father. Those are just some of the views of the church.

The end of Jesus' parable speaks of a man who comes into the wedding feast, without a wedding garment. This part of the story teaches about the person who claims to be a Christian but refuses to believe in Christ. This man neither repents of his sins nor trusts in Christ for the forgiveness of sins. He hangs around with the other believers here on earth, but he himself is not a believer at all. What we find is that those who try to redefine the church according to their own ideas will not be saved. They may have fooled others, but on the last day they will cast out.

So three-fourths of this parable deals with those reject the church. **One group makes light of it.** It's fine for others, but they are either too enlightened, or too busy with business or pleasure to give it any thought. **The second group outright fights against the church** and tries to murder it's messengers. They can't stand the church's witness because it offends their sinful pride and reminds them of their guilty conscience. **The third group claims to be the church** but has redefined the church to be an amorphous love-fest of anything goes. They outwardly do churchly things but they are not church at all.

What are we to make of this? When Jesus says, "For many are called, but few are chosen," he means that **despite God's patient and repeated invitation for all to come to believe in Christ, in the end, there will only be a small number who truly see the church as a wedding feast.** Only believers in Christ will confess their sins and

put on Christ's righteous wedding garment, which forgiveness of sins. Only believers will lead joy-filled lives enjoying the blessings which God is giving out in the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacrament. Only believers in Christ will be free of a guilty conscience and strive to lead God-pleasing lives according to His Word. They will do it not because they must, but because they are returning the love of their Husband Jesus, who married them. It is a joy for them!

So why does Jesus tell us this parable? In other places Jesus speaks about the church as a marriage feast in order to preach the Gospel and bring in believers to His church. However, today's parable is told to warn believers lest they be tricked by the large number of those who reject the church.

In today's Epistle, St. Paul gives guidance to us who live in the church. He says, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16). **True believers, members of the Church and who are faithful to the Word of God, will find that there are temptations all around.** The devil doesn't care whether you make light of the church or you violently fight the church or you redefine the church. You can view the church an irrelevant hobby, a suppressing cult or a free association of love. It doesn't matter to him, as long as you don't seriously consider the invitation to the marriage feast of His Son.

My dear Christian friends, not long after today's Epistle from Ephesians 5, St. Paul describes the church in terms of a marriage. And then in verse 32 he says, "This is **a great mystery**, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Through the teaching of God's holy Word, you have come to learn about this great mystery that the church is like "a certain king who arranged a marriage for his Son, and sent out servants to call those who were invited...." We, Christ's believers, walk circumspectly, that is carefully so that we do not lose this view of the church. It is because only the true church can impart the invitation to eternal life with saves.

Do not be misled by worldly wisdom in order to deny God's church. Do not get drunk on the pleasures of this world. They cannot give you happiness nor will you find purpose in this life. Do not follow your own ideas but understand what the will of the Lord is. The Lord fills with His Spirit, all who come to believe and trust in His Son. **Come and join with us as we rejoice as if at a wedding feast.** We will be singing with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Gather with us as we give thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Join us in serving our neighbor and submitting to one another in the fear and love of God.

The holy Christian Church is indeed an endearing marriage feast! This church is not a hobby for some, but the gate of heaven for all. This church is not a work camp, for the doors are open and we have freely answered the call, "Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat." It is not manipulation, but freedom from the slavery to sin. We ask all to consider, "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy?" In the Word and the Sacraments, the church is giving out the best of meats and the finest of wines. "Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance." Our service to the Lord is the lightest of yokes. The temptations and the troubles and persecutions seem light and momentary, because our life as a Christian in His holy Christian Church can be compared to the joy of attending a wedding feast! Come to the Feast!