20th Sunday after Trinity
Bessemer - 1957

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 22: 14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW CHOSEN

"For many are called, but few chosen!" - What a startling declaration! What a heart-rending truth is given here in this summing up of one of our Lord's kingdom parables.

"God would have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Therefore He sent His only begotten Son into the world "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." There is not a human being of any age, race, nationality or class for whom the Gospel is not intended. The Christ of the Gospel is a Savior who stands with open arms inviting all to come to Him. He declares: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Yet, of all who are called, only few are chosen! How can it be? One thing is certain; there is no such thing as an arbitrary predestination or election to damnation. Since God would have all men to be saved, and sends forth His messengers to proclaim a universal Gospel, men alone are to blame if they fail to obtain eternal life. Nothing shows more clearly how the human heart has been bedeviled by sin than the refusal of many to accept the salvation God has made possible through Christ, and which He offers as a free gift to all, bad and good alike. Let us, then, as we examine this parable of the Marriage of the King's Son, take the Lord's warning in time that none of us may be found despising His gracious invitation.

The King in the parable, we understand, is God. The wedding feast is that abundance of grace, forgiveness, freedom, joy, strength, courage, hope, which God has made available for every man, woman, and child, through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's giving of Himself on Calvary's cross is the supreme act of that overflowing love of God by which He desires to draw all of His fallen and lost children to Himself. The Gospel is an earnest invitation to our whole race,

"Behold all things are ready: Come to the marriage feast!"

The parable presents the King as sending for His servants "to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast." To these the invitation had been given in advance. Now the King's servants are sent to remind them of the invitation and to tell them "that all things were ready." They "make light" of the invitation. These, however, are not the only ones the King would have at His Son's marriage feast. So the servants are sent out "into the highways" to bid others, not previously invited, "as many as they should find," and to gather them. "And the wedding was furnished with guests."

This parable was spoken at a time when the enmity of the Jewish leaders to Jesus was nearing its climax. These Jews and their leaders, members of God's chosen people, had been nourished upon the Messianic promises of the Old Testament. Their Messiah was now in their midst. They should have recognized and received Him; but they wanted a warrior king, not a humble, suffering Servant, and now they were about to reject Him. Jesus desires to open their eyes to the enormity of the crime they are about to commit, hoping that some of them might still come to their senses and be saved. In any event, they are not going to be able to excuse themselves and say that they had not been warned.

Applying the parable to ourselves, we who have been brought up in the Christian Church, we who have been baptized, instructed in the Word, and who have been under the constant influence of the Gospel and enjoyed the privileges of fellowship with Christian people, we are those to whom the invitation has gone out, and who are reminded that "all things are ready" and urged to "come to the marriage feast." The tragic fact is that many of us make light of the invitation, and thus bring God's judgment down upon ourselves.

Let us be frank and face ourselves honestly. There is nobody we so easily fool as ourself. Let us be done "kidding" ourselves. When the servants came to "them that were bidden to the wedding" and reminded them that "all things were ready," the invited guests "made light of it, and went their ways, one to his

farm, another to his merchandise." Some even "took his servants, and treated them spitefully, and slew them."

This is all happening today too, and among us. Perhaps not many actually do physical violence to the messengers of the Gospel. Figuratively, however, there ~~there~~ are more than enough who slay the servants of the Lord by hatefully despising their message, sneering at their words of admonition, belittling their work.

How about those who "go to their farms and to their merchandise" rather than heed the Gospel invitation? Do you think they are few? America is beset by a creeping paralysis of materialism which is ever invading the hearts of human beings who think they are sitting in the Kingdom of God. We speak about "owning" property. How often the supposed owner proves to be not the owner, but the owned! We glut and feast our eyes and hearts on this world's goods - farms, houses, modern equipment, bank deposits, stocks, bonds - and say, "All this is mine, and what is not yet mine I will surely strive with all that is in me to get!" We think of the world as a gold mine from which we are going to take more and more of the stuff we like to pile up in the delusion that it is going to make us happy. In the process we become more and more selfish, and less and less concerned for the welfare of our neighbor and the glory of God. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Rank materialism, love for the worldly has so crowded into our modern way of life that multitudes who have heard the Godpel call are now spurning it. People have little time in this day and gge to be filled with the things of the Spirit, little time for private Bible reading, little time for meditation and prayer, little time for devotion and worship, little time for fellowship and service. The Kingdom of God to which the Gospel summons us is none other than the glorious rule of the Holy God in the hearts of men. It is none other than God's actively reigning and directing the lives and actions of His people. There is no room for counterfeit gods. To have such is to despise His invitation.

It is not without deep significance that the kingdom of God is likened to a marriage banquet. A wedding stands for joy, Wedding guests rejoice with the bride and groom. They rejoice, too, with their host, and with their fellow guests. When the kingdom of God is likened to a wedding banquet, it is because the kingdom of God is joy. It is to joy God invites us. That is the reason His invitation is called "Gospel," or "Good News." To be sure, acceptance of the invitation is accompanied with the pain of repentance and the fire of shame, as we confess our sin and guilt to God and to men. But these fires are refining fires, and prepare us for the great joys that follow. Confession is indeed good for the soul. Under the shadow of the cross the burdened heart and troubled conscience find forgiveness and release, for so Scripture declares: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just tp forgive us ~~pir~~ sins. and tp cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God finds a dwelling place in the heart of the forgiven one, and His presence brings joy even in the hour of tribulation. Winds of adversity may stir up billows on life's surface. In the depths of the heart, however, is peace and joy in the consciousness that, having said "Yes" to God's call, we are His. We are His in spite of our total unworthiness. He will make all things work out for our good. Exulting in that confidence which faith has in Him, the troubled soul makes the Psalmist's words his own, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Many are called, but few are chosen! Oh, that God would help each one of you - as you once again behold your Redeemer's dying love -- to set aside everything which would hinder you from being part of His Kingdom, confess your many wrongs both to God and your fellow men, trust confidently and assuredly in Jesus' power to save and heal you sin-stained and divided heart, and finally give you renewed strength to take up you cross and follow Him, follow Him with the joy and gladness of knowing you are His very own.

Amen.