

Are you prepared to meet your Creator?

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Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

We live in a fallen world no one escapes the effects of sin. Due to Adam and Eve's disobedience to God, sin entered the world and all creation suffers from the curse that came through that one act of rebellion. We are all born and shaped in iniquity (see Psalms 51) and the only hope of redemption is through believing and accepting the sacrifice Jesus Christ made when he offered his blood as payment for our redemption.

Today I want to speak about the parable that is found in Matthew 22:1-14. Last week I spoke of Esau and his indifference and disdain concerning his birthright which he willingly sold to Jacob for a bowl of soup. Afterwards he regretted his rash decision and though he sought it with bitter tears, there was no way for him to get it back. His brother, Jacob, had stolen his inheritance and bargained for the birthright and there was no way to reverse those transactions. (Hebrews 12:17)

In Matthew 22, the chapter begins by Jesus saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son." He sent his servants to announce the occasion to those who had been invited to attend when the feast was ready, but when the servants approached them, they refused the invitation. He then sent more servants to let those who had been invited know to "come for the feast is ready. I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle have been butchered and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." But they paid no attention at all. One went to his field and another went to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. He then told his servants "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go into the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find." So the servants went into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. "Friend", he asked, "how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man was speechless. The king told his servants to bind the man's hands and feet and to throw him outside into the darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are invited, but few are chosen.

To understand this parable, you must understand the characters involved. The king is God the Father, the bridegroom is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In John 1:11 it tells us that Jesus came to his own and they rejected him. The Jews were God's chosen people but when the time came for the kingdom to appear (Matthew 3:1), they refused to believe. Many prophets, including John the Baptist had been murdered. (Matthew 14:10) In 70 AD, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem just as Jesus prophesied. (Luke 21:5) There is also a vengeance that God's word speaks about in the book of Revelation. God is patient

and not willing that any should perish, but he will not tolerate wickedness forever (Obadiah 1:15). His judgment will come to those who have rejected him and his offer of salvation. (Hebrews 10:29-31.)

Luke 13:34 indicates that the guests could have come, but they provided excuses instead. Their own concerns took precedent and they didn't consider the invitation important. In Acts 13:46, there is a passage where Paul told the Jews, "I was compelled to bring the gospel message to you first, but since you have rejected it and don't consider it worthy of your consideration to have eternal life, I will take the message to the Gentiles. The Gentiles received it gladly and the word of God was spread throughout the regions. The Jews were not worthy of hearing the message, so the Gentiles' hearts were opened to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The man who was confronted by the king for not wearing proper clothing represents those who try to enter the kingdom by other means that a garment of righteousness. Self-righteousness is as filthy rags in the sight of God.

In Romans 10:3, it speaks of those who refused to submit to God's righteousness and they sought to establish their own righteousness. These people had a zeal for God but it was not based on knowledge. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. In Isaiah 64:6, it says that everyone is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We must be clothed in garments that are spotless and provided by Jesus Christ and his holiness. "Without holiness, no man shall see God." (Hebrews 12:14). Salvation means being separated from our past, being freed from the bondage of sin and being joined to a holy God. John 14:6 tells us that Jesus is the only way to way to God and to eternal life. In Genesis, Adam and Eve made clothes to cover themselves with leaves, but God removed them and gave them clothes made from sacrificed animals. (Genesis 3:7, 21). There has to be a blood sacrifice to cover sin and Jesus was the only one worthy to offer his blood for our sins because he was sinless. It is sad that so many people reject his bountiful gift of salvation. Many people hear the call of God but few (in comparison) answer the call and receive the blessing. We must take heed that we follow God's path to eternal life and not depend on our culture, religions, or our good works to enter into the kingdom of God. See Matthew 7:23 for there you will find that there will be many who are expecting to enter the kingdom of God, but because of their iniquity, they will hear, "I never knew you."

If you read Exodus and Leviticus, you will find the blueprints of what God's plan for mankind was from the beginning. God instructed the Israelites to build a tabernacle for God to dwell in. It was a tent wherein the people could worship God and He would dwell among his people. In Ezekiel chapter 10, there is a passage that describes the Holy Spirit leaving the tent because of the sinfulness of the people. God had commanded the people to be holy as he is holy and that commandment has never been changed. Leviticus 20:7. God made the promise to Moses that he would pitch his tent and dwell among the people, but their sins caused him to depart from them. In John 1:14, John spoke these words, "He's

back! God is pitching his tent among us once again.” Jesus Christ who is the word dwelt (skenuo-meaning tent) among us. We beheld his glory! In Acts 2, wind and fire are symbols of the Holy Ghost as seen in the vision of Ezekiel in chapter 10 of Ezekiel. There is a big difference between heroism and holiness. Heroism is an extraordinary feat of a person. Holiness is an ordinary act of the spirit. One brings personal glory; the other gives glory to God. The Bible gives clear instructions concerning the process of sanctification. A person who accepts Christ as their Lord and Savior is willing to be baptized in his name, take on his character and follow the plan God has for his life. Jesus was our example that even though he desired to have the cup of suffering removed from himself if it was possible, he was determined to do the Father’s will rather than following his own will. See Luke 22:42. Notice that an angel came and strengthened him. We will not go through anything alone; Jesus will be beside us to strengthen us and to see us through the tough times. He will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we can endure and he will always show us a way of escape. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Paul gave some specific instructions for living a holy life. Here are some of them:

Lay aside falsehood and speak the truth.

Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.

Let the person who steals, steal no more and work for a living.

Let no unwholesome word come from your mouth.

Be rid of bitterness and wrath and malice.

Be kind to each other, forgiving one another

Walk in love.

Be careful so you will not even be accused of immorality, greed, or impurity.

Engage not in silly or coarse or filthy talk.

Do not practice idolatry in any form nor associate with those who do.

Abstain from sexual immorality and conquer lustful passions.

Do not lead weaker brethren to sin.

Holiness is obeying God- Finding ways to help those in need.

Be sure of this! You will reap what you sow. Search the Scriptures and use them as a mirror to reflect how God’s words compare with your thoughts and actions. Holiness begins with thinking as God thinks and adjusting your will to conform to his will. We are dead to sin as we abide in Christ, but sin is a reality and we must be on guard at all times that we don’t stray away from the commandments that God has given to us. The Bible says that to love God is to obey him. (1 John 5:3)

Decisions lead to habits and habits lead to lifestyles. Those small decisions you make every day determines your destiny. When Leroy and I considered marriage, we sat down and made a plan on how to make the marriage work. Both of us realized that we each contributed to the downfall of our first marriage and we truly wanted to repent of the wrongs we had done and to ask God to help us live a life pleasing to him. We made a list

of ten things that we wanted to achieve in ten years. These included placing God first in our lives; making amends with our former spouses and our children for the breakup of our homes; getting our finances in order so our credit would be at the top of the scale in order to honor God; share our income and resources with those who needed them and to support the church that we attend; treat all of our children with love and respect and accept each other's children as our own; buy a house that we could share with others who may need a haven, a place to come to rest or share a meal with; and most of all to tell the whole truth, nothing but the truth, and be loyal to one another . We also wanted to work at secular jobs together so we could retire with a secure income. At the end of ten years, we looked over our list and during that time we spent time praying that God would help us to achieve our goals for his honor and glory. I worked to get a degree in ministerial theology and counseling to prepare myself for the position of being a pastor and God has definitely blessed our efforts, our home and our church. This group of people has stayed by us and it has been an anchor for me as I was struggled to correct the errors of my past. I was accountable to our congregation as well as to my husband and to the Lord who rescued me from sin and bondage. On our 10th anniversary, we vacationed to the spot where we made our vows and looked over the list we had made. We realized how much God had worked miracles in our lives and had walked with us each step of the way. When you desire to do right, you are never alone for God is with you and he is the one that provides strength for the journey and the Bible is there to give direction, exhortation, rebuke, and correction. I praise God for all the wonderful years that I have had in his presence. Leroy and I are very grateful and thankful for the work God has done in our lives. From where we started to where we are now has been a journey of blessings. Did we ever wonder why we went through trials and struggles? Yes, we did, but we didn't let go of the hand of God and has supplied all of our needs, has given us work to do for his glory and I know someday we will be even more amazed at how God has used the little bit we had to offer him in faith and multiplied it to bless others. He took two broken lives and mended, healed, and polished them to reflect his love, grace and mercy. It is no secret what God can do. What he has done for us, he will do for you. With arms wide open, he'll pardon you. It is no secret what God can do. AMEN