

## The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep

*Rev. R. DeRuiter*

Psalter 52:1-4

Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

Psalter 88: 1-3

Psalter 152:1, 2, 5

Psalter 284:1-3

We often hear stories from families about the time they left a son or daughter at church, and didn't discover it until they were on the way home. Sometimes we can also lose a child at a store, or a shopping mall. When this happens, a parent has a very uneasy feeling. Often the mind thinks the worst in these situations. "What if they were abducted?" Or, "What if we never find them?"

It can be even more unsettling if the child has been lost in a large forest. And there are accounts in history where children really do get abducted and even lose their life, or never get found.

Well, this morning we shall look at a parable that Jesus told about a lost sheep. Our text is Luke 15:3-5.

*And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

Our theme is: **The Shepherd Seeking for the Lost Sheep**, with these three thoughts:

1. A necessary search: "if he lose one of them, doth

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he not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost?" (verse 4)

2. A persevering search: "until he find it" (verse 4)

3. A rejoicing rescue: "and when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing" (verse 5)

### I. A necessary search

Congregation, this parable of the seeking Shepherd is the first of three parables given in Luke 15. There is also the parable of the lost coin, and the lost son. All have as their theme the recovery of the lost sinner. All speak of the Lord Himself bringing back the lost sinner to the kingdom of heaven. All address the fact that the Lord brings back the lost sinner by the way of repentance. Also, all tell of the joy of the Lord and of His angels. The shepherd rejoices in finding his sheep, the woman over finding her coin, and the father in the return of the son.

Each parable emphasizes a particular aspect of the repentance of the lost sinner. The parable of the lost sheep emphasizes the truth of the seeking Shepherd. The parable of the lost coin focuses upon the conscious conversion and repentance of the sinner and his return to the kingdom and to the church. The parable of the lost son specifies the willingness of the heavenly Father to receive His wayward children.

The setting for these parables is given in the first two verses of the chapter. Jesus Christ attracted publicans and sinners to Himself. They are especially drawn to Him because of His gospel message, and eagerly wait to hear His words. The scribes and Pharisees were looking for such occasions when these publicans and sinners would draw around Him, that they might accuse Him.

The publicans were tax collectors, under the hire of Rome. These publicans were often greedy people, extortioners, and covetous. The Jews despised these publicans. They considered them traitors to the cause of Israel.

The sinners referred to were the common people of

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the land. They did not regard the Mosaic law, and the Pharisees and scribes regarded them as the scum of the earth. To these self-righteous Pharisees, these people had no right to the promises to Abraham.

The Pharisees did not think that Jesus could be the Messiah if He ate with these people for that would pollute Him. Oh no, the kingdom was theirs only, they thought. The Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

It was just this murmuring that occasioned the three parables. Jesus opens before these Pharisees and scribes the way things are before God.

The ninety-nine sheep are Israel; they are the ones of which the Pharisees and the scribes are included. He shows to these Pharisees that His eating with publicans and sinners is not discounting but validating that He was the true Messiah.

The Shepherd undertakes a necessary search for a sheep that is lost. It is a sheep that has lost his way. Oh, it is so necessary that we, spiritually, see that we are like this lost sheep due to our lost state, our deep fall, and our most corrupt depravity. It is not that we earn or merit conversion by seeing our lost condition, for that would merit nothing before God. No, it is coming to the awareness of the reality of our lostness, our hopelessness, and our helplessness that is necessary.

This is a necessary search, for there is a real need. Those who are converted in their own eyes apart from Christ, shall forever be lost through their self-deceit and presumption, if they see not their hopeless condition.

Many today quickly assume themselves to be converted to God, yet have nothing more than an imaginary Christ. You shall not save yourself with a delusion of presumption.

Have you ever been truly lost? Then there is a necessary search for you, and not before then. Have your

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eyes ever been opened to see what you really are before God as a sinner deserving hell?

The ninety-nine sheep did not see this. They were contented into assuming they were God's elect. They had no need of repentance for they were never truly lost. It is the lost one that got the Shepherd's attention. The lost one was the need for the search.

It was a necessary search because it was a search that was decreed from eternity to take place. It was not a search that was necessitated by the goodness or any quality of the sheep. The qualities of the sheep were only depravity and waywardness. That was the corruption that brought him to his lost estate; there is nothing desirable in that. Rather, it was a search that was necessitated from the goodness of the triune God.

It was the Good Shepherd that gave His life for the sheep, not the Shepherd who came for the good sheep. The triune God from eternity, out of His sovereign good pleasure, decreed to seek and to save that lost sheep. The Shepherd leaves the ninety and nine and He goes after the lost one.

Oh, by nature we care not to see our lostness. By nature we think we do God service; we are so beneficial to Him. In our deep fall in Adam we think ourselves to be something, when we are nothing. We are like the hypocrites of Isaiah 65:5, "which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou."

What a great self-deception this is, to think yourself to have something; yes, to think yourself to be something that you are not, nor ever were! True children of God do not only see their lostness one time, but repeatedly.

It is the Pharisee that declares, "We have Abraham to our father" (Matt. 3:9). It is the Pharisee that says, "We be not born of fornication; we have one father, even God" (John 8:41). Yet, if one has God as his Father then he knows Jesus Christ, for He is His Son, who came forth

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from God. He knows Him not merely as a fantasy of his mind, but he knows Him personally, really, in truth.

Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you not just know about Him, but do you know Him, personally? If you have never been lost, you have never come to know Him either, for He came not for those who see themselves as imperfect, or with a few minor errors, but He came for the lost sinner.

It is a most necessary search that the Shepherd engages in. God created man originally good, and after His own image, in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. There was nothing lacking in that original and first creation of man; but Adam willfully partook of that forbidden fruit. He disobeyed his Creator.

We are exiled from Paradise, estranged from the garden, lost, and condemned, dead in trespasses and sin. By nature, you do not see your sin as you are in your deep fall in Adam. You are blind to your fallen, corrupted, and deadened condition. You care for none of these things. You wish not to see it! You don't wish to admit, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way," as Isaiah 53:6 says. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost, and it was, secondly,

**II. A persevering search**

Our text tells us that the Shepherd left the ninety-and nine and went after the lost until He found it. He did not stop the search until that sheep was found. The Shepherd seeks the lost sheep amidst all obstacles, in spite of all difficulties and dangers. A sheep that is away from the fold was in a most dangerous predicament. There were many perils that faced a lost sheep. There were wolves and other predators that could destroy them. There was the open exposure to the elements and climate. There was the danger of starvation and disease. There were hazardous terrain, steep cliffs, quicksand, and desert areas.

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Sheep are very dumb and unaware of their danger. So we, too, are the same way. We see not our dangerous and condemnable condition. We see not that any moment our life may end and we can be sent to an eternal hell. At any moment, like a sheep that stands upon a cliff can turn and fall headlong to its destruction, so can each one of us.

I once read of a man that had gotten lost in a mine. It was all black and dark. He could not see where he was going, so he stopped and cried out. A man passing by heard the cries of this man in the mine, in the dark. When that passerby pointed a light in the direction of the cries, the light displayed that one inch from where that man was standing was a huge drop of several hundred feet. Had that man moved one step, he would have perished.

That's how we are also by nature. We see not our danger. We know not of our predicament in sin and its dark sway. We are blind to our hell-worthy danger. We are hardened to our perilous condition.

The Shepherd also travels these conditions. The Shepherd also meets with dangers along the way in search for the sheep, yet out of His love for the sheep, He does not mind them.

The Shepherd shall send a light to show us what we are by nature: the light of His law and gospel, by the power of His Holy Spirit. His law is given to show us what we are, and how greatly we have wandered and strayed from the fold. His gospel is given to inform that there is a way out, there is a remedy for our sin.

Often a sheep would wander off from the rest of the flock to find some green grass of the mountains to graze upon. Sometimes these wandering sheep would jump down ten or twelve feet in order to have what they wanted. The problem was, they couldn't get back up, so when the shepherd heard the bleating of the lost sheep, bleating in distress, he would go to where the sheep was

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located. However, he would not attempt to rescue it. He would leave it there for two or three days. He would leave it there until it had eaten all the grass that was there, and it was so weak that it couldn't stand on its own.

After that the shepherd would manage to get a rope around the sheep and pull it to safety. The reason that the shepherd would wait until the sheep was so weak it couldn't stand up, is because if the shepherd would try to rescue it any sooner, the sheep would have resisted and would have endangered itself even further.

This is also how Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, deals with His sheep. He waits until they learn their desperate need. Often it is that when a sinner has tried everything this world has to offer, he comes to an end of himself and the grazing remedies of this world. He learns that he is weak in himself, that he is undone, and worthy of judgment and just condemnation.

It is at these times that Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, reaches down and places His arms around him, and draws him back to Him with cords of everlasting love.

Oh, but the Shepherd persevered, enduring the cross, despising the shame! He left heaven. He condescended to men of low estate. He knew all the feelings of our infirmities, and more so for He suffered on behalf of His sheep. He suffered all the torments of hell on behalf of and in the place of His sheep.

The Good Shepherd gave His life for His sheep. He came for the lost sheep of the tribe of Israel. The Pharisees were not lost in their own eyes; they were all saved. He came for repentant ones, made to see they have offended the Holy One of heaven and earth. Can you look at the blood-stained crown of thorns upon His brow, the whipped stripes upon His back, the nail prints in His hands and feet, and yet say, "I can save myself, my free will will merit it?"

Will you be blind and say, "As long as I do my best, as

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long as I don't hurt anyone, as long as I am approved by others, I may still be acceptable before God"? Oh, you are not acceptable before God; the best Pharisee shall not be able to stand before the holy God! All of our righteousnesses are filthy rags in the sight of a holy God.

Yet Jesus Christ, the Shepherd of His sheep, became a sheep like them. It was Jesus Christ who was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7). He went as a sheep to the slaughter that He might bear the sins of all His sheep that are lost.

Jesus Christ came for sinners, for those who say with Psalm 119:176: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments."

Of this Great Shepherd, 1 Peter 2:22-24 states: "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." This Shepherd loves His sheep with an everlasting love, and gave His life for His sheep, that they should not perish. As 1 Peter 2:25 says, "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

It is this Shepherd who saw the multitudes and "was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

So the Shepherd perseveres for His sheep. He is moved with compassion for them. He suffers for them. He bears all for them, even their sin, and their punishment, that He might rescue His own from the slave market of sin. He does this on their behalf that they too might persevere with a life of gratitude for His great de-

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liverance. His sheep in return gladly say to Him, "Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter" (Ps. 44:22).

It is a glad time, a time of rejoicing, when a sinner repents unto salvation. This then is our third thought.

**III. A rejoicing rescue**

The shepherd, when He finds the sheep, our text says, "He layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." A sheep that has gone astray will never return on its own. The shepherd, tired and weary from the journey to find his lost sheep, still lifts this lost sheep and puts it upon his shoulders.

It is said that when a lost sheep is found, it will lie down helplessly and refuse to budge. The shepherd is forced to carry that animal over a long distance. Yet, knowing that much hard work is ahead of him, he rejoices.

Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd, moved only by His everlasting love and sovereign good pleasure, delights in bringing many sons to repentance. David would not have returned had not God sent Nathan to him saying, "Thou art the man." Peter had gone astray in denying his Lord, "he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak," when he was identified by a maid (Mark 14:71). He also would not have repented had not the "Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61). It was then that he went out and "wept bitterly."

Oh, when a child of God has sinned against his Lord, and he is convicted of his sin by that look of love by Christ, he cannot do otherwise! His heart is melted into bitter tears of lamentation. His eyes are opened to see he has offended his loving Shepherd! He realizes that he deserves all the punishments of hell.

When he knows by experience his guilt for sin, his just condemnation due him, and he finds that holy, pre-

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cious Shepherd covering his sin, paying his debt, enduring his denials, his failures, his selfish neglect, he cannot but repent. It is a godly sorrow unto repentance, not to be repented of. It is the goodness of God that leads him to repentance.

This brings great delight and rejoicing to the Shepherd. If it brings such rejoicing, can you not repent? If His love is bestowed upon you, can you remain in your sins? Can you continue in your rebellion?

You may say, how do I know if His love is bestowed upon me? How do I know that I am not as the ninety and nine that were left?

Well, let me ask you, "Do you feel yourself a sinner hopelessly lost in all that you are and do?" Do you detest the utter thought of being as one of those self-righteous ninety and nine, content with your self-righteousness? Do you agree with your just condemnation and well deserved punishment in hell for your sins? Are you lost, and do you see that you are as a hell-worthy Pharisee? Does it disturb you greatly that you are lost and estranged from God?

The Good Shepherd seeks His own. Can you live another moment without Him? Christ seeks after each sinner, and when He finds him, He gives Himself to that one as if it were the only one He should rescue. He lifts that sheep up from the earth where it has fallen and puts it upon His heavenly shoulders.

The Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, proves His love by His actions. The weight of the sheep is upon the shoulders of the Shepherd. He bears it up. In His incarnation, coming to earth, taking to Himself humanity, He came after His lost sheep. In His life lived here on earth, He continued to seek out His lost sheep. In His death He laid the sheep upon His shoulders, bearing the weight of all its sin. In His resurrection, He gives it justification and life. In His ascension, He brings it home rejoicing,

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and continues to intercede on its behalf at the right hand of the throne of God.

Oh, what glorious rejoicing this is! He has found His sheep which was lost! Notice that “when He found it” He rejoiced. He put it upon His shoulders. That is a great burden indeed to bear but the great Shepherd bore it! The Shepherd joyfully puts it upon His shoulders, as if to exclaim, “I am glad to have it on My shoulders.”

A great sorrow was upon Christ when He bore the burden of His people’s sins, but a greater joy flashed into His mind when He considered the redemption He would bring for His sheep. That day of salvation, when a wretched sinner repents, is a day of rejoicing for the Great Shepherd.

He comes home and calls together his friends and neighbors, telling them, “Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

This is how it is in heaven; there is great rejoicing over one sinner that repents. It is not that it is a good thing to go astray and to sin against God. We all have done this. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” They that be ill need a physician. It is with publicans and sinners that Jesus eats and dines.

It is better to be scoffed at and mocked by the Pharisees of this world while angels rejoice than to gain the whole world and lose your soul. Many from this earth shall scorn the righteous justified in Christ, but such a conversion fills heaven with joy.

This parable leaves us with the question, “Have we repented ourselves?” God is not impressed with lip service when there is no converted life service.

Smite the Shepherd and the sheep shall flee was the prophecy of Zechariah 13:7 fulfilled. Jesus Christ referred to this prophecy in Matthew 26:31, and it was fulfilled when He was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. But when Christ arrived, the false shepherds, such as the scribes and Pharisees, had scattered

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much of the flock. They were the hirelings that cared not for the flock.

Ezekiel 34:11 tells us, “For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.” The Lord leads His sheep and feeds them by His Word and Spirit. He carries them away on eagle wings from the pollution of this world.

We have scattered ourselves from the Shepherd by our sins, but to those that are found in Him, there is much rejoicing. “So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations” (Ps. 79:13).

To the ninety and nine that needed no repentance because they thought themselves to be sheep, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. On that great day of days when the Great Shepherd shall come for His sheep, there will be the judgment, and at this judgment, “He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:32).

Then shall we see the true possessors and the false professors. Then there shall be joy in heaven over the one sinner that repented, more than over the ninety and nine, which need no repentance.

Then the ninety and nine shall repent, but it shall be too late. They shall cry out but their time shall be past. As Proverbs 1:28 says of the one who has sinned away his day of grace, “Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.”

Then they shall call unto the mountains and rocks, and say, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev. 6:16-17).

Lost ones, repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, before it is forever too late! Amen.

## The Wedding Feast

*Rev. D. Lipsy*

Psalter 53: all  
Matthew 22:1-14  
Psalter 65: all  
Psalter201:1-4  
Psalter 204: all

You begin sorting through your mail. “Free vacation—five days, four nights to...” into the garbage it goes. “Come to such and such resort...”—more garbage. “Grand opening of new museum”—interesting, but I don’t have time.

Normally people don’t feel bad tossing advertisements from strangers. Most companies expect a fair amount of their ads to be thrown away. They know only certain people will be attracted enough to follow up.

But what if a wedding invitation came to you from a dear friend? Do you think you would as quickly cast it into the trash unopened? How do you think the persons getting married would feel if they knew you tossed away their specially prepared invitation unopened? We all agree there’s quite a difference between junk mail and this, right?

At one time Jesus told a parable, a story, in which He taught that *God* sent a personal, a very special invitation to man. Many to whom it was sent despised and rejected it. Can anything compare to *that* kind of insult, considering how unworthy we are to receive an invitation from God, and considering how great and merciful God is to send it?

It is this surprising invitation and *our* response to it

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that we want to consider at this moment from the words of Matthew 22:2, 3, 10, “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.... 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.”

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1. The wonder of the feast
2. The invitation to the feast
3. The rejection of the feast
4. The celebration of the feast

By the time the events in Matthew 22 took place, the Jewish leaders were nearly exasperated with Jesus. He had told parable after parable with a few of the latest ones particularly directed against the unbelieving leaders. After talking about the two sons—the one doing the father’s will and the other not—He concluded by saying, “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.”

The very next parable was about the householder sending first his servants and then his son to receive fruits from his vineyard. The servants were mistreated, even killed, and the son was murdered as well. Jesus ended this parable with the application, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”

We read the leaders’ response in Matthew 21:45, “They perceived he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude.” They wanted to remove Jesus (much as the wicked servants in the parable wanted to destroy the owner’s son) but they felt paralyzed by the presence of the listening

**Matthew 22:2, 3, 10**

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multitude. Jesus began yet another parable, this one about a wedding feast.

**I. The wonder of the feast**

This would be no ordinary marriage feast. It was for a king's son! What an honor it must have been to be invited to such a marriage! The king personally arranges everything, overseeing all the details. He carefully considers what privileged persons would be invited and directs his servants to bring them the invitation.

Finally the day comes. It's time! Send forth the servants with the glad tidings! Congregation, friends, we are the ones who have been invited! Perhaps you think, "Me? I've received no such invitation. First of all, I don't know any kings. I've not seen anything like an invitation in the mail, not received any phone call concerning it. No king's servant came to our door with such an invitation!"

This may all be true enough, but you've been invited nevertheless. I think you know just what I mean, what *Jesus* meant in this parable.

The King, children, is God Himself. The Son whose marriage is being celebrated is the Son of God, Jesus. But who is Jesus marrying, you ask? He marries the vilest of sinners, total outcasts, wretched persons.

"What?" you respond. "God's Son marry such rabble? I hardly think so." In Luke 19:10 we read, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32). "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick" (Ezek. 34:16). Are you perhaps still doubtful? Consider Hosea 2:19-20: "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD."

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Why, some of you are holding the very invitation in your hands! I dare say each one of you has the invitation lying about in your homes. It's right in God's holy Word and it is written in letters of love!

I don't know if you fully realize how astounding such an invitation is. To be invited to a formal dinner by a president, a prime minister, a king would be quite something. We might be tempted to doubt the reality and authenticity of such an invitation if we received it. But now to be invited by God Himself, the Almighty of heaven and earth, and not only invited to *witness* the wedding and the feast, but to actually *be* the bride of Christ.

Before we finish considering the wonder of the feast, there are a couple of other very important things we ought to realize.

First, consider the *cost* of this wedding feast. Today, especially in some localities, some pay exorbitantly large amounts of money for a wedding and the wedding reception. We can only imagine what kings spent for their feasts. But the King of heaven and earth, God, who prepared all things for those who have nothing, paid for the entire wedding Himself. He gave up the most precious thing He had—His very own Son.

If the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, had not come down, if He had not left the glory He had with His Father in heaven, there could be no feast. All sinners would be forever lost, forever estranged from the God who made them.

But then consider the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ—the King's Son. In some countries, the bridegroom must pay a large dowry for his bride. But this Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, paid for His bride with His life. Every drop of His precious blood had to be spilled in death in order that His sin-stained bride could appear in the white-robed righteousness of God Himself. May the wonder, the tremendously amazing wonder of this all abide with us, astound and humble us, and influence our lives toward godliness.

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**II. The invitation to the feast**

Let us now consider more carefully the *precious invitation* of which Jesus speaks. In the third verse we read, “And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.”

God sent His servants. Who were they? They were and are His prophets, apostles, gospel ministers, missionaries, and believers of all sorts. What are they to say? “Come to the wedding”—a very simple message. Repent and believe the gospel, turn from your own ideas, your own ways, and embrace by faith the good news that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners.

Though we’ll consider the response to the invitation more particularly later, we see in verse 3 that those invited would not come. The king invites them. They say “no.” Just on the face of it that seems incredible. Don’t they realize what an enormous privilege this was? What an honor to feast with the king himself? But the king doesn’t become angry with them. “Ah,” he must have thought, “I see there must have been a misunderstanding. Perhaps those who were invited thought they themselves would have to bring something to the feast. Perhaps they feel themselves too poor to come, or that they don’t have anything worthy of bringing.”

Why do we speculate this way? In verse 4 we read that he sent forth other servants, modifying their message somewhat to 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.”

There would be no misunderstanding now. All things are ready. You need not bring anything along—I have provided it all. The food is prepared ahead of time—all is in readiness. You need only come.

Beloved congregation and friends, this is the simplicity of the gospel. God knows we have nothing with which to earn our salvation, nothing to contribute to it since we already owe Him perfection. Yet this is the good news,

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that He has done for us that which we could never have done for ourselves. He prepared all things, eternally decreed that Jesus would come, the Son willing to lay down His life as a ransom for sinners. Throughout the history of the world, the King sends forth the glad tidings; both in picture form through the sacrifices and other symbols and then in reality when Jesus Himself came to obey, suffer, die, and rise again. We do not need to add anything to His perfect work, nor bring anything to Him.

It is true that as saved sinners we will willingly give Him our whole life. It will be our desire to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves, all out of loving gratitude to Him. But this will be a sacrifice of thanks and praise, not of payment.

Why did this invitation come to us, to me? Think in your mind of the many, many people—neighbors, co-workers—so many of whom show not the least interest or concern about the things of God and of eternity. Think of the many nations of the world, so many people never having read a Bible, never having heard this precious, invaluable invitation. Think of so many others who are being deceived by a false, superficial gospel. Just sign a card, say a pre-printed prayer, and you're saved, as if salvation was nothing more than following a recipe. Why did the invitation come to us? We can only conclude it was God's goodness, mercy, and sovereign good pleasure. Yet let us beware lest we think receiving the invitation is the same as coming to the feast.

Those who were invited, even for the *second* time, did not come. The king made a second, more detailed and compelling appeal, yet this was also rejected.

### III. The rejection of the feast

The Bible says, "But they made light of it." What does that mean, children—to make light of the invitation? They didn't take it seriously. They shrugged it off. "So

**Matthew 22:2, 3, 10**

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what?” “Who cares?” “Why should I go to some wedding feast?” Some thought they had more important things to do. One got busy with his farm work. Another absorbed himself in his goods—his merchandise. Perhaps he was a shopkeeper, salesman, or maybe even one who doted on the goods he purchased for himself. Whatever the case, each thought little of the invitation.

Adding injury to insult, we read that some who perhaps were not so busy took the king’s servants and treated them spitefully and slew them. Children, can you imagine such a thing? What did these messengers ever do to deserve such treatment? They were bringing *joyful* news of great mercy and kindness. They were being obedient to their king. They probably anticipated a gladsome reception from those invited. But it was not so. They were shamefully treated and then killed. What is Jesus saying here, dear friends?

Look over the vast history of mankind. Man falls away from God, turns his back on Him in Eden. God responds with severe chastening, but also the first gospel promise (Gen. 3:15). As we continue to search through Scripture, we find God continuing to send messengers with the good news of salvation. How were most of them regarded? With disdain, mockery, or ignored. Think how God’s prophets, speaking on God’s behalf to the wayward, were so often treated just like the servants in the parable. The very invitation to repentance and faith which should have been gladsome tidings was almost always rejected. The messengers were despised, even killed by the very ones to whom the glad tidings came.

Is this not madness, dear friend? Is not man truly evil by nature? Who but those not in their right mind would reject their rescue?

The king in the parable sent no more servants. He sent his armies to destroy those miserably sinful men. This, of course, points to what shall become of those who obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ and perish under the

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just wrath of God. Yet similar to the parable of the vineyard, God, who superabounds in mercy and goodness, sent His own Son Jesus into this wicked world to proclaim the gospel invitation and command. Jesus, just like His servants before Him, was mistreated and finally killed. “He came unto his own, but his own received him not” (John 1:11). “He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him” (Isa. 53:3).

Is it any different today, friend? How many still make light of the gospel offer? Who needs the gospel? I have my house, my car, health, wealth. What do I need God for? Who is God anyway?

How many others, claiming to be Christians, comply only with the most obvious demands of the law (“I don’t kill, commit adultery,” etc.). Such do not realize the depth of the law nor the corruptness of their heart—that to even look upon a woman lustfully is adultery in the heart, that unrighteous anger against another, even in our heart, is murder, etc. (Matt. 5:21-22, 28).

God the King sent His only-begotten, well-beloved Son with the good news. He still sends His messengers to a lost world with the message of hope. But the reactions are still largely the same today as ever—rejection.

What will become of them who do reject the invitation? What about those who do come?

Verses 7-10 speak of the reaction the king had to this rejection. In verse 7 the king in his wrath destroyed those who rejected him, and in verse 8 he called those “not worthy” who had been invited but rejected the invitation. You might ask, “If they were unworthy, why did the king invite them in the first place?” The king is saying they make themselves unworthy by their very rejection.

You see, the gospel doesn’t come to worthy people. It comes to sinners, offering through Christ to make them worthy of God’s blessings and salvation, even inasmuch

**Matthew 22:2, 3, 10**

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as they are united to the Savior by faith. By means of our unbelief, we remain in our unworthiness. By rejecting the worthiness of Christ Jesus, we are therefore judged worthy of everlasting destruction by God the King.

Verse 7 is but a picture of God's final judgment of all unbelievers. Verse 9, however, is central to this parable. Why? Verse 9 teaches us that God remains good and gracious and merciful despite the sin and rejections of man. Though some reject the gospel message, God sends it to others. His house, heaven, shall be filled with worthy guests, saved sinners. Though for the most part the Jews in Jesus' day rejected the Savior, the wonderful work of salvation which He accomplished didn't end with that rejection. On the day of Pentecost and ever since, the gospel has been spreading out across the earth to sinners of every nation and kindred and tongue and people.

**IV. The celebration of the feast**

In verse 10 we read, "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." See here that the quality of the ones invited was not an issue. It was the quality of the *invitation* that makes all the difference. In other words, it should be no comfort to you that you are better, at least in your own eyes, than other sinners around you. Your comfort should be in the certainty and trustworthiness of God's invitations, promises, and Scriptures. The comfort is in the fact that God is good and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Him (Ps. 86:5).

The wedding was furnished with guests. The sin of man will not prevent heaven from being filled with people. The bad as well as the relatively good are both called by the gospel. In the ending verses of this parable, treated in a separate sermon, we find that God, as it were, makes sinners altogether good by clothing them in

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the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ His Son—the wedding garment. Where are you in this story, friend? How many times have you been sent this precious invitation? What has your response been? Are you too busy, too young, and too careless? Do you make light of God's Word, His invitations, His commands, His service? Would you rather attend to your farm, shop, pleasures, entertainments, etc.? Do you despise God's servants, even if only in your heart? Do you wish sometimes that you could be left alone—no more warnings from others in your life about repentance and seeking God? Be very careful, dear friend. You may get your wish after all.

Perhaps you are among the second group. Maybe you were one of the bad ones, found, perhaps, by Him on some highway of sin, living without God and without hope. It could be the gospel arrested you on the highway of indifference, foolishness, coveting material gain, lust, substance abuse, pride, selfishness, or carnality.

Or maybe you were one of the "good" ones who, though perhaps very civil and decent, were also on the broad road that leads to destruction. Perhaps you were brought up in the church, never lived a worldly life. Maybe you never rebelled against your parents, always did your duty (or so you thought) toward God and others. Maybe you thought that based on your decency and obedience God would just let you in heaven on good behavior—that you really didn't need the gospel or perhaps thought you somehow earned entrance to celestial bliss.

The servants of the King are calling each of you—"All things are ready." All must come to this feast or be destroyed. You either honor the King or you insult Him. Ignoring His invitation is counted by Him the same as rejecting it. He destroyed all His enemies who did not obey, who despised Him, His invitations, and His servants.

Blessed be God if you may turn in faith to Him now, at last, tasting for yourself the goodness and mercy of the Lord, joining countless others who love and serve

**Matthew 22:2, 3, 10**

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Him now and who will hereafter feast throughout eternity in His presence.

If you, dear friend, have long since obeyed the invitation by faith, thank God afresh this day for that. Do what you can to make His service, His invitations, our God as wonderful and worthy as you can in the eyes of others. Live like one going to a tremendous feast. Honor the King! Amen.

## The Wedding Garment

*Rev. D. Lipsy*

Psalter 89: all  
Acts 8:5-25  
Psalter 172: all  
Psalter145:1-4  
Psalter 103: all

In the first part of the parable about the wedding feast of the king we learned how he, at his own expense, prepared all things for those invited.

We also saw how, even after the first invitation was made light of, the king sent out a second, even richer one—"All things are ready." In other words, the guests need bring nothing but themselves; the king has provided all.

We have considered together how this parable represents the good news of salvation, sent out by means of God's servants throughout the ages. Sadly, the parable also points to the reality that the good news has been rejected by so many to whom it came, first among the Jews and now the Gentiles.

Yet despite these rejections, the just king remained gracious and merciful, sending forth still more servants, bringing in to the feast both the bad and good so that the wedding feast would be furnished with guests

In this message we want to consider the final part of this parable of Jesus. In this closing section we find the king coming to see his many guests and spotting among them one that did not have on the wedding garment that had been given to each guest that entered the feast.

Our text is Matthew 22:11-14, but for the sake of

**Matthew 22:11-14**

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time I will only now repeat verse 14, the conclusion, “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

**The Wedding Garment**

1. The king’s inspection
2. The man without a wedding garment
3. Jesus’ concluding summary

The feast would be held, the king’s son would be married. There will be a celebration complete with guests. The servants had gone out the third time. They went into the highways and bid to the feast whomever they found there, whatsoever they be.

In obedience the servants went out. Verse 10 tells us they gathered all as many as they found, bad and good alike, so that the wedding was furnished with guests.

Would *you* plan your wedding reception this way, friends? Hire people to go out into the streets of the nearest city, pick out whomever they came across and invite them to the reception, so that when you came to the reception, the room would be filled with all kinds of people, probably most of whom you never saw nor met in your entire life?

You might think, going to such a reception, what insanity! What a lavish waste of money! But then again, can you imagine wedding invitations stirring up so much passion in those who *receive* them that they actually mistreat or even kill those who delivered them?

This is the gospel, friends. It runs contrary to everything we are used to doing and thinking. God *does* bid all kinds to the wedding of His beloved Son. He not only invites us to attend a *meal* with Him, but in fact to spend all eternity with Him! Believers shall spend that eternity with Him, not only as His redeemed people, but also as a people betrothed unto Him by righteousness and grace.

**I. The king's inspection**

So there they all were, gathered for the wedding feast. See who comes in, children? There, it is the king himself! In verse eleven we are told the king came in to see the guests. This was certainly expected, that the king should appear at his beloved son's wedding feast.

But see the surprise! The king is not at all displeased with the diverse group his servants had brought in. There perhaps was a beggar, there a leper, there a thief. But one could hardly tell what they had been before. What? Could not tell? How so? They all looked nicely dressed. Even the poor? Yes, the poor looked just as nice as the rich. How?

In those days, and especially at a rich man's feast, the host would give to all his guests special clothing to wear. It would be very costly, fit very nicely, and look wonderful. In this way, no one would be shamed by not having as nice clothing as the next man. All would wear what was given.

How thoughtful, how generous of the king this was. He didn't want any poor person embarrassed nor any rich person proud. Each could mingle with the other and all in costly, lovely clothing.

There he goes, the king, mingling among them all. He is evidently pleased with the turnout. The disappointment and wrath that lined his face earlier as he dealt with those who had so shamed his servants was gone. It was replaced by a warm smile of contentment that so many were in attendance, all looking just as nice as the other.

What is Jesus' point in all this, congregation? Remember in the sermon about the wedding feast we learned that it wasn't a person's *worthiness* that determined if he would be invited to the feast or not? It was the king's love and kindness that enabled guests to come. Remember, too, how we saw that only their unbelief and scorn could hinder their attendance? In

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other words, it wasn't the *king* that made them unworthy; it was their own sinful rejection of his invitation that prompted him to call the uncooperative ones unworthy. He called them this only *after* their punishment was given.

But see in the wedding garment further proof of the freeness of the gospel. When they arrived, the rabble from the highways, bad and good, would have their shame covered. They were all given a clean, wondrous garment that set them, in a sense, as equals among the others. No one had to be ashamed before the King, wearing the garment he himself had provided.

So it is still, beloved. God bids us come. He knows what we have been and what we still are. He knows the ugliness of our sins even more than we ever could. He knows our *hearts* and their sinful depths, better than we do. But He also provides, not only the invitation, but also the remedy for our guilt and shame and ugliness. He covers us with a garment He Himself has made. He places upon us, through the merits of the Lord Jesus, a righteousness just as wonderful as His own—*perfect!* Isaiah wrote about this beautiful garment of righteousness in 61:10:

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, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

God Himself gives these garments through faith in Christ Jesus, and joyful will we be when we are covered by them! How so? Because they beautify sinners so that their sin is seen no more.

Do you realize what this means, beloved? When the King of kings comes into the heavenly feast, when He looks at you, at me, *with* the garment of Jesus' right-

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eousness wrapped about us, covering all sin and guilt, then we shall be able to stand before Him without shame. In fact, He will rejoice over our beauty. Imagine! Zephaniah 3:17 says, “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” This kind of love, this joy, these thoughts are staggering, aren’t they?

But just as it seemed things would go joyfully on, the king pauses. There, over in the corner, sits a man who stands out from the rest. The king makes his way there. There must be some mistake. “And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” Let us consider this question and the man’s lack of an answer in our second thought.

### II. The man without a wedding garment

What a blessed King, what a dear Being God, is congregation! Jesus, who in this parable is unveiling layer after layer of His Father’s beauty, kindness, and generosity, includes also *this* word, “Friend.” The King said, “Friend.” It is as if He was saying, “I had no quarrel with you, sir. Did not My invitation come to all? I did not inquire whether you were rich or poor, did not ask your family circumstances, never sought to know if you were an upright man or a criminal. And when you arrived, surely you saw how each of the guests was offered the costly, beautiful garment I had prepared for him. Did you not see them joyfully putting them on, covering their rags or their poverty or shame or sins or past or lusts, putting all that away forever beneath this my joyful gift? Friend, how camest *thou* in hither not having a wedding garment?”

We ought not conclude that somehow the ungodly will be able to sneak into heaven and remain awhile till they’re discovered. Revelation 21:27 makes it plain, “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth,

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neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." No, that's not the point of this part of the parable—that someone who didn't belong somehow entered heaven. The key is the garment, the *wedding* garment.

The king did not mind who the man was. He did not inquire his ancestry or origin or lifestyle or past. He was not interested in his age, ethnicity, or anything like that. The whole difference, the whole point, was the wedding garment. The question is really, "Why don't you have on the wedding garment? Why would you not accept one? Why not wear my precious gift? What is it about your own clothing that you prefer it so to mine?"

Spiritually speaking, the question is far more piercing. How is it you do not so value the offered righteousness My Son purchased for sinners at such an enormous price—His own blood—that you are content with your own moth-eaten righteousness? How *dare* you appear before Me without it? Are you somehow *better* than all these others who *leaped* at the opportunity to wear it? To sit here like this is an insult. It is insulting to Me who provided all free of charge to you, an insult to My Son whose death *paid* for all. Friend, how?

I want you to answer this question, friends. Are *you* clothed in Christ's righteousness? Are you *sure* you won't appear before God in your own? How did you come to have that precious garment of Christ's? Are you sure you're not, at least in part, depending on something other than the Lord Jesus for your righteousness? Have *you* wholeheartedly embraced the King's invitation? Are you holding back a part of your heart, your life, from Him? Have you truly been made willing to serve Him unconditionally? If not, how are you going to stand before Him without the wedding garment? How are you going to look the Father in the face, seeing how He did not spare His beloved Son but delivered Him up to the death of the cross, and you, *you* cannot be bothered to come and

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to embrace this so great salvation? Too busy with the farm, merchandise, your work, play, friends, studies?

How are you, without Christ's righteousness, going to appear before *Christ*? What will you say to Him who died so that sinners like you could live? What will you say to Him when you see the wounds and His glory and majesty? What will you do? What will you say?

Jesus tells what you will say—*nothing*! "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless." What could the man say? He saw the other guests, their garments. He knew these came from the King. What will we say, rejecting the proffered righteousness of Christ? Speechless. Not a single answer to a thousand questions. That will be the most awful silence you ever experienced. To have absolutely nothing to say, all your sins stuffing your mouth shut. Your conscience will explode with overloading guilt in that moment. All swaggering talk, all excuses—all will be gone *then*!

Once the king in the parable saw there was no misunderstanding, once he saw that the man had no excuse for his appearing this way, the king at once dealt with the man as a criminal. Justly incensed against him for his pride, his arrogance, verse 13 reads, "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."

The man had wandered the highways of sin. God could have justly, sovereignly let him continue wandering till death. But the servants came and called. The man responded. He was happy to get what he could *from* the King, but he was not about to give up anything *for* the King and certainly not his self-righteousness and pride. He came to the feast but ended up bound over to outer darkness.

How many of us appear fair for heaven? God didn't have to allow His Word to come to you. He didn't have

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to order matters so that you would be brought up in a Christian home or otherwise direct you to His church. But He did. He met you somewhere on the highway of sin. He sent His servants to call you, “Come to the feast. Come to wedding of the King’s Son.” He prepared all that you lacked—His righteousness for your unrighteousness, His garments to cover your spiritual nakedness, His love to cover your sin.

To be *among* the godly, however, is not to *be* godly. No wedding garment, no righteousness of Christ—you shall be cast out. This man had once been free; now he was bound. He was once sitting with the guests. Now he was gnashing his teeth and wailing aloud. To go from the church to the very gates of hell – how awful!

As horrible as the ending to this parable is, how much more will the reality be? The reality of appearing before Christ *unprepared*, the reality of appearing before God as an *enemy*, the reality of realizing for the first time in our life that those who we thought were fools were truly wise and that all our self-inflated thoughts of ourself were all a lot of nothing in God’s sight.

This parable doesn’t have a happy ending. Jesus doesn’t tell us about those that had the wedding garment on, the guests who did, without shame, enjoy the king’s fellowship. No, His focus was on this one man and those who did not heed the first two invitations earlier. So that must be our focus, too, beloved. We don’t want to miss the force of what Jesus is saying, trying to soften the blow of this parable by diverting our attention to that which Jesus wasn’t emphasizing.

But before considering Jesus’ concluding summary, let us first sing from Psalter 145:1-4.

**III. Jesus’ concluding summary**

Jesus’ summary was ever so brief yet so very powerful. “For many are called, but few are chosen.” This summary may, at first, appear surprising to us. Wasn’t there

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a roomful of guests at the wedding? Wasn't there only *one* man who was cast out? Why then does Jesus say *many* are called, *few* chosen? It would seem many were chosen, but few lost.

But we're forgetting something. The earlier servants—who came to the feast then? The second set of servants—who responded to *their* appeal? Just look around in your mind, dear friend. It's not our place (nor are we able) to judge the eternal destination of others. But one doesn't need much insight to see that the vast majority of those around us, regardless of what they might *profess*, do not appear to be very zealous after holiness and godliness.

What about ourselves? Are we living testimonies of God's grace? Can the robe of Christ's righteousness be clearly seen on *us*? Can it be seen by the way we live, the things we talk about, the tendencies of our heart?

Notice, too, that Jesus *didn't* say, "Many are called but few obey or come." No, He says, "Few are *chosen*." He points us to the sovereignty of God in salvation. Maybe this spoils the whole parable for some hearing it. You can go along with invitations, responding or not, disdaining or thankfully receiving the wedding garment—but "few are chosen"? Doesn't the mention of God's sovereignty dash the rest of the parable? Doesn't it render the rest of it meaningless? After all, if God chose some few, no wonder many did not come. What could they do about it?

That's the way man's mind goes. If God is sovereign, I'm guiltless. If God chooses, I'm off the hook, so to speak. If He's that sovereign, then nobody really has a chance. If you're picked, your in. If you're not, there's nothing you can do to change it. That was the thinking Paul battled against in Romans 9:19: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" In other words, can *I* change God's

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sovereign choice? And our answer is, “No, you absolutely cannot change God’s election.”

But we are not ashamed to state exactly what Jesus says here at the end of this parable. If you respond to the invitation to the wedding feast, the gospel, if you receive a wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness, it is entirely God’s doing—one hundred percent His doing. And therefore it is entirely, completely to His glory that you do. And *what*, may I ask, is wrong with *that*?

God creates man with an entirely free will in the Garden of Eden. Man takes his free will and turns his back upon God, thinking that he himself will be as God instead. God justly takes away this free will and allows man to receive the temporal, spiritual, and eternal death that was threatened. What’s there to argue against here?

What then, considering the ruin man has made of himself, if God, who is rich in mercy, should still extend to perishing man the precious gospel of Jesus Christ so that whosoever believeth in His only begotten Son will undoubtedly be saved? What’s to argue against such astounding, undeserved mercy?

What if man, utterly incapable because of his Fall and sin to do good, is then rescued by God’s sovereign grace from such a pit, born again by His mercy and power, and brought to a saving knowledge of and relationship with Himself? If God, entirely on His own, effects salvation *for* helpless mankind, what argument should we make against such a magnanimous way of salvation?

What if, in His infinite justice, God allows some, even many, to walk on in the sin they so love and cherish? What if God allows obstinate, God-despising sinners to go on in their rebellion against Him, their Creator? If, after a lifetime of abusing His mercies, spurning His invitations, wasting His blessings, He should justly judge them? What’s to argue against such justice, such righteous judgments?

I say, thank God many are called. What a mercy to

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hear the good news! I say thank God any at all are chosen, for each one is more than deserve to be since, in the final analysis, *none* are deserving! I say, thank God we don't know if we are one of the *not* chosen. If we, too, believe in Jesus Christ, if we, too, embrace this blessed gospel offer by faith, if we, too, eagerly wrap this proffered righteousness about us by faith, then we, too, will personally enjoy this blessed salvation. Who can argue against this? Is it not rather a cause for rejoicing?

Yes, friends. Thank God we serve a sovereign and a holy God. I'm very, very thankful salvation wasn't left up to *me* or to *you*. Knowing just a little about my own heart, there would be no hope at all! What a comfort it is to know that all for whom Christ died *will* most assuredly be saved. None shall perish. What a comfort if *I* may be privileged by His grace to be one of them.

No, friends, the end of the parable fits perfectly with the rest of it. There's no disconnection here, no derauling of the gospel message. God will have us know to whom belongs all the honor and glory. It's not me and it's not you. It belongs entirely to God. It belongs to Jesus Christ the Son of God. It belongs to the blessed enlightening and indwelling Spirit of God.

We can fight against this truth, but doing so will avail us nothing. It will land us in outer darkness at last where is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Instead let us fall before the God whose love is so very, very great that He gave His only begotten Son so that sinners like us could live.

If you think all this unfair, I dare say you don't know yourself well enough. You have altogether too high thoughts of your own goodness. But if you rejoice at this word *chosen* then I think you begin to understand how that we cannot be saved in any other way. We would *never, ever* have been saved if we had to do our part. And contrary to widespread opinion, this very gospel truth is that which makes men *holy*, not remiss or careless. Men

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who ascribe all grace, glory, salvation, and holiness to God are those who abide at God's feet. Those who are careless or remiss are those who are satisfied with sin, with self, with their own goodness, with rubbish. Such think little of wedding garments. They would rather wear something of their own making! And so you shall—and that forever!

Yes, friend, this is a solemn parable. It was meant to be. But let us not lose sight of the tremendous love, mercy, and grace of God that runs all through it, not to mention His longsuffering!

Let us bless the Lord who thus cares for us, poor sinners. Give Him all glory, ye people. He alone is worthy of it! "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever." Amen.

