

Christ Lutheran Church



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“Be Ready, Willing, and Able”

Matthew 22:1-14

By

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Are you ready? The kingdom of God is near you know. And the time is now. Today is the day of salvation. This parable in Matthew 22 brings the end of the world to mind. Or at the very least it brings to mind heaven and hell. First of all the wedding feast is a reference to heaven. Secondly any mention of weeping and gnashing of teeth is a reminder of hell.

This parable is serious business, and so we should take note. As it is with any parable we need a basic interpretation of who the characters are. The king is God the Father and his Son is Jesus. The servants are Christians inviting people to heaven. And those who do not enter the wedding feast are going to hell.

So as we go through the parable you could either find yourself on the light side or the dark side. After all, in the end, God can cast you into outer darkness. But God’s desire is farthest from that. He is working really hard to get as many people into heaven as possible. God is constantly inviting us all to go to heaven. His invitation stands

for all who hear the parable. His invitation stands for all humanity until you die or until Christ returns to judge the living and the dead.

Now are you ready? That is the first part of the parable I would like to break down for you. On the one hand, maybe you have not heard that invitation to believe in Jesus and receive that free gift of eternal life. You may be distracted by the things in life. The things of this world often draw our attention away from the spiritual things that are far more important. Are you distracted by your farm, your business, your occupation? Is that keeping you so busy you don't have time to go to a party? If it is, heads up because your eternal life is at stake.

On the other hand, maybe through faith you already have eternal life. But are you ready to share that invitation for others? We talk a lot about sharing our faith with others, but do we ever offer them Jesus in the form of an invitation? And if we did, are we ready make the invitation properly? How would we invite them? Would we say "if you want to go to heaven, you must do this or that." Or would we say the invitation is free to all and that receiving God's Grace is the only thing that has to happen. Maybe the invitation should be as simple as "Will you be baptized? That seems more accurate instead of saying "have you really accepted Jesus in your heart?" The latter is a little vague and subjective. Have I REALLY accepted Jesus in my heart and am I REALLY going to heaven?

Baptism is one common thread that runs throughout the parable. That brings us to Part 2 of the parable. Are you willing? On the outside, the dark side, people persecute the Christian Church and literally abuse it. Are you somehow working against the church, its leaders, and its mission? Are you frustrating other Christians with negativity, stubbornness, and unnecessary criticism? More pointedly are you willingly resisting the Holy Spirit? God's invitation stands open for you also. Rejecting your Baptism, as we understand it is resisting the Holy Spirit and turning away from faith in Jesus.

And for those of us who are servants of God, are you willing to be persecuted for Jesus? As a pastor for thirteen years I have faced some people who have been difficult, frustrating, and literally want to tear down my ministry. Am I going to abandon ship because it's hard? Only by God's help, strength, and endurance, can I be a pastor, just as every Christian can remember their baptism and know that God not only freely gives salvation, he also freely gives the Holy Spirit. Yes, Christians, God freely provides the strength you need by

the Holy Spirit so that you are willing to even face death for the sake of extending the invitation to salvation.

Finally part 3 of the parable and my third question is are you able? And this question for the purposes of the parable means are you able to get into heaven? As the parable describes it, are you wearing the right clothes?

At first glance this parable takes a weird turn from God offering a free gift, and now suddenly looks like God is expecting way too much for us to enter heaven. I wonder if you are thinking like I did, why someone who is dressed in a rather ragged fashion, poor, and unable to afford nice clothes would be rejected for entrance into heaven? That isn't like God and you are absolutely right in thinking God would never reject someone based on actual clothing.

This inconsistency can only offer us one conclusion. This is not an ordinary wedding. This is the king's son after all. Not only is the wedding party dressed in fine clothing, but everyone invited must be dressed well. With all the subjects invited, even the good and bad it says, there is only one explanation. Everyone is freely offered the clothes before entrance. They are not picking out their clothes, the king is. He is literally giving them their clothes as they walk in. A robe, most likely, as that would be the only way to give them an instant change of clothes as they cover their own clothes.

And now it all comes together. In Baptism you were clothed with Christ. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Galatians 3:27

You were chosen. You did not choose me, but I chose you. You now have everything you need for entering heaven. It's already been picked out, you don't even have to wait till you get to the door to receive your clothing. Revelation 9:13-14 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" **14** I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Whether you were a supposed good person, or supposed bad person, Baptism covers all your sins. It's the only way. In a way, no one has the ability to get into heaven. But everyone is offered the ability of Christ as he is worthy and able to enter into heaven. The Son, that is Jesus Christ, makes the whole wedding itself possible.

Sadly many rely on their own abilities, and so few are chosen. Few look to their baptism, and few look to Jesus as they “stand before the pearly gates” as they say.

Revelation 3:5 The one who conquers will be **clothed** thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Are you ready, willing, and able? Baptism. Baptism. Baptism. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. You may now enter the wedding feast that is yet to come. Just out of curiosity, is there anyone here that would like to be baptized? See a Christian after the service. And if we are so blessed, see me or Pastor Winter. I’m positive God can make that happen.

Last year teaching 8th grade religion I just thought I would throw it out there to give them encouragement that they have all been baptized. Turned out one student hadn’t who wasn’t a member of our church. Apparently I assumed too much. She was already planning to be baptized at her church, but still, I could have missed an opportunity by not mentioning it.

It’s funny, I’ve gone to many nursing homes to do worship services and it is. I was conducting what I would call a non-denominational service and I just happened to be preaching on Baptism that day. I just couldn’t help myself, and asked just to make sure if everyone was baptized. It turned out someone wasn’t. The next time I baptized her in the nursing home at the ripe old age of 70. Somehow life hadn’t offered her the opportunity until I said it out loud.

The time is now. Today is the day of salvation. The kingdom of God is near. God has prepared his banquet, food drink and all. Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ Amen.