

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST NO. 975

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 12, 1871,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“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. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, 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.”
Matthew 22:2-4.*

IF God grant me strength I hope to go through this parable, but at the present we shall confine our thoughts to the opening scene of the royal festival. Before, however, we proceed further, it is most fitting that we give expression to our deep gratitude, that it has pleased the infinite mind to stoop to our narrow capacities and instruct us by parable. How tenderly condescending is God to devise similitudes, that His children may learn the mysteries of the kingdom! If it is sometimes marvelled at among men that great minds are ever ready to stoop, what a far greater marvel that God Himself should bow the heavens and come down to meet our ignorance and slowness of comprehension!

When the learned professor has been instructing his class in the hall in not easily understood matters of deep philosophy, and then goes home and takes his child upon his knee and tries to bring down great truth to the grasp of his child's mind, then you see the great love of the man's heart. And when the eternal God, before whom seraphim are but insects of an hour, condescends to instruct our childishness, and make us wise unto salvation, we may well say, “Herein is love.”

Just as we give our children pictures that we may win their attention and may by pleasing means fix truth upon their memories, so the Lord with loving inventiveness has become the author of many a charming metaphor, type, and allegory by which He may gain our interest, and through His Holy Spirit enlighten our minds. If He who thunders till the mountains tremble yet deigns to speak with us in a still small voice, let us gladly sit in Mary's place at His gracious feet, and willingly learn of Him.

O that God would give to each one a teachable spirit, for this is the greatest step towards understanding the mind of God. He who is willing to learn, in a childlike spirit, is already in a considerable measure taught of God. May we all so study this instructive parable as to be quickened by it to all that is well-pleasing in the sight of God, for after all true learning in godliness may be judged of by its results upon our lives. If we are holier, we are wiser, practical obedience to the will of the Lord Jesus is the surest evidence of an understanding heart.

In order to understand the parable before us we must first direct our attention to the design of the “certain king” here spoken of. He had *a grand object* in view. He desired to do honor to his son upon the occasion of his marriage. We shall then notice the very *generous method* by which he proposed to accomplish his purpose. He made a dinner and bade many. There were other modes of honoring his son, but the great king elected the mode which would best display his bounty. We shall then observe, with sad interest, *the serious hindrance* which arose to the carrying out of *his* generous design—those who were bidden would not come.

There was nothing to hinder the magnificence of the festival in the riches of the prince—he lavished out his stores for the feast. But here was a strange and difficult hindrance to remove, they would not come. Then our thoughts will linger admiringly over the *gracious rejoinder* which the king made to the opposers of his design. He sent other servants to repeat the invitation, “Come ye to the marriage.” If we

shall drink deep into the meaning of these three verses, we shall have more than enough for one meditation.

I. A certain king of wide dominions and great power designed to give a magnificent banquet, with a GRAND OBJECT in view.

The crown prince, his well-beloved heir, was about to take to himself a fair bride, and therefore the royal father desired to celebrate the event with extraordinary honors. From earth, look up to heaven. The great object of God the Father is to glorify His Son. It is His will “that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” (Joh 5:23).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is glorious already *in His divine person*. He is ineffably blessed, and infinitely beyond needing honor. All the angels of God worship Him, and His glory fills all heaven. He has appeared on the stage of action as *the Creator*, and as such His glory is perfect, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.”

He said, “Light be,” and it flamed forth. He bade the mountains lift their heads, and their summits pierced the clouds. He created the water-floods, He bade them seek their channels, and He appointed their bounds. Nothing is lacking to the glory of the Word of God, who was in the beginning with God, who spoke, and it was done, who commanded, and it stood forth.

He is highly exalted also as *the preserver*, for He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. He is that nail fastened in a sure place, upon which all things hang. The keys of heaven, and death, and hell, are fastened to His girdle, and the government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Wonderful. He has a name which is above every name, before which all things shall bow, in heaven, and earth, and under the earth. He is God over all. He is blessed forever. To Him who is, and was, and is to come, the universal song goes up.

But there is another relation in which the Son of God has graciously been pleased to stand towards us. He has undertaken to be *a Savior*, in order that He might be *a Bridegroom*. He had enough glory before, but in the greatness of His heart, He would magnify His compassion even above His power, and He therefore condescended to take into union with Himself the nature of man, in order that He might redeem the beloved objects of His choice from the penalty due to their sins and might enter into the nearest conceivable union with them. It is as Savior that the Father seeks to honor the Son, and the Gospel feast is not for the honor of His person merely, but for the honor of His person in this new, yet anciently purposed relationship. It is for the honor of Jesus as entering into spiritual union with His church that the Gospel is prepared as a royal entertainment.

Brethren, when I said that here was a grand occasion, it certainly is so in God’s esteem and it should be so in ours. We should delight to glorify the Son of God. To all loyal subjects in any realm, the marriage of one of the royal family is a matter of great interest, and it is usual and fitting to give expression to congratulations and sympathies by suitable rejoicings.

In the instance before us the occasion calls for special joy from all the subjects of the great King of kings. For the occasion in itself is a subject for great delight and thankfulness to us *personally*. The marriage is with whom? With angels? He took not up angels. It is a marriage with *our own nature*, “He took up the seed of Abraham.” Shall we not rejoice when heaven’s great Lord is incarnate as a man, and stoops to redeem humanity from the ruin of the fall? Angels rejoice, but they have no such share in the joy as we have.

It is the highest personal joy to manhood that Jesus Christ, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, was made in the likeness of men that He might be one flesh with His chosen. Arise you who slumber! If there was ever an occasion when you should bestir up your spirits and cry, “Wake up my glory, awake psaltery and harp,” it is now, when Jesus comes to be affianced to His church, to make Himself of one flesh with her, that He may redeem her, and afterwards exalt her to sit with Him upon His throne.

Here were abundant reasons why the invited guests should come with joyful steps and count themselves thrice happy to be bidden to such a banquet. There is overwhelming reason why mankind should rejoice in the glorious Gospel of Jesus and hasten to avail them of it.

Besides that, we must consider the *royal descent* of the Bridegroom. Remember that Jesus Christ our Savior is very God of very God. Are we asked to do Him honor? It is right, for to whom else should honor be given? Surely we should glorify our Creator and Preserver! Willful must be the disobedience which will not pay reverence to one so highly exalted, and so worthy of all homage. It is heaven to serve such a Lord. His glory reaches to the clouds. Let him be adored forever and ever. O come let us worship and bow down, let us cheerfully obey those commands of God which aim at the honor of His Son.

Remember also the *person* of Immanuel, and you will desire His glory. This glorious Son, whose fame is to be spread abroad, is most certainly God—of that we have spoken, but He is also most assuredly man, our brother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. Do we not delight to believe that He, tempted in all points as we are, has never yet submitted to be stained by sin? Never such a man as He, Head of the race, the second Adam, the everlasting Father—who among us would not do Him reverence? Will we not seek His honor, seeing that now He lifts our race to be next to the throne of God?

Remember, too, His *character*. Was there ever such a life as His? I will not so much speak of His divine character, though that furnishes abundant reason for worship and adoration, but think of Him even as a man. O beloved, what tenderness, what compassion, yet what holy boldness. What love for sinners, and yet what love for the truth! Men who have not loved Him have nevertheless admired Him, and hearts in which we least expected to see such recognition of His excellencies have nevertheless been deeply affected as they have studied His life. We must praise Him, for He is “chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.” It were treason to be silent when the hour has come to speak of Him who is peerless among men and matchless among angels. Clap your hands at the thought of the marriage of the King’s Son, for whom His bride has made herself ready.

Think, too, of His *achievements*. We take into reckoning whenever we do honor to a prince all that he may have done for the nation over which he rules. What, then, has Jesus done for us? Rather let me say what has He not done? Upon His shoulders were laid our sins. He carried them into the wilderness, and they are gone forever.

Against Him came forth our foes. He met them in shock of battle, and where are they now? They are cast into the depths of the sea. As for death itself, that last of foes, He has virtually overcome it, and ere long the weakest of us through Him shall say, “O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?” He is the hero of heaven. He returned to His Father’s throne amidst the acclamations of the universe. Do *we* not, for whom He fought, for whom He conquered, do *we* not desire to honor Him?

I feel I speak with bated breath upon a theme where all our powers of speech should be let loose. Bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him! Is it not the universal verdict of all who know Him? Ought it not to be the cry of all the sons of men? East and west, and north and south, ought they not to ring the joy bells, and hang out streamers on His marriage day, for joy of Him? Is the King’s Son to be married, is there a festival in His honor? O then let Him be great, let Him be glorious! Long live the King! Let the maidens go forth with their timbrels, and the sons of music make sweet melody—yea, let all creatures that have breath break forth with His praises. “Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.”

II. Secondly, here is a **GENEROUS METHOD** of accomplishing the design.

A king’s son is to be honored on the day of his marriage, in what way shall it be done? Barbarous nations have their great festivals, and alas, that men should have sunk so low. On such occasions rivers of human blood are made to flow. To this very day, on the borders of civilization, there is found a wretched tyrant whose infernal customs, for I dare not call them by a less severe term, command the murder of hundreds of his fellow creatures in cold blood, on certain high days and festivals. Thus would the monster honor his son by acting like a fiend.

No blood is poured forth to honor the Son of heaven's great King. I doubt not Jesus will have honor even in the destruction of men if they reject His mercy, but it is not so that God elects to glorify His Son. Jesus the Savior, on His wedding day with manhood, is glorified by mercy, not by wrath. If blood be mentioned on such a day, it is His own by which He is glorified. The slaughter of mankind would bring no joy to Him. He is meek and lowly, a lover of the sons of men.

It has been the custom of most kings to signalize a princely wedding by levying a fresh tax or demanding an increased subsidy from their subjects. In the case of the anticipated wedding of our beloved Queen's daughter, the dowry sought will be given with greater pleasure than upon any former occasion, and none of us would lift a whisper of complaint.

But the parable shows that the King of kings deals with us not after the manner of man. He asks no dowry for His Son. He makes the marriage memorable not by demands but by gifts. Nothing is sought from the people, but much is prepared for them. Gifts are lavishly bestowed, and all that is requested of the subjects is that they for a while merge the subject in the more honorable character of the guest, and willingly come to the palace, not to labor or serve at the table, but to feast and to rejoice.

Observe, then, the generous method by which God honors Christ is set forth here under the form of a banquet. I noted Matthew Henry's way of describing the objects of a feast, and with the alliteration of the Puritans, he says, "A feast is for love and for laughter, for fullness and for fellowship." It is even so with the Gospel. It is for *love*.

In the Gospel, sinner, you are invited to be reconciled to God, you are assured that God forgives your sins, ceases to be angry, and would have you reconciled to Him through His Son. Thus love is established between God and the soul. Then it is for *laughter*, for happiness, for joy. Those who come to God in Christ Jesus, and believe in Him, have their hearts filled with overflowing peace, which calm lake of peace often lifts up itself in waves of joy, which clap their hands in exultation.

It is not to sorrow, but to joy that the great King invites His subjects when He glorifies His Son Jesus. It is not that you may be distressed, but that you may be delighted that He bids you believe in the crucified Savior and live.

A feast, moreover, is for *fullness*. The hungry famished soul of man is satisfied with the blessings of grace. The Gospel fills the whole capacity of our manhood. There is not a faculty of our nature which is not made to feel its need supplied when the soul accepts the provisions of mercy. Our whole manhood is satisfied with good things and our youth is renewed like the eagles. "For I have satisfied the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul."

To crown all, the Gospel brings us into *fellowship* with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. In Christ Jesus we commune with the sacred Trinity. God becomes our Father and reveals His paternal heart. Jesus manifests Himself unto us as He does not unto the world, and the communion of the Holy Ghost abides with us. Our fellowship is like that of Jonathan with David, or Jesus with John. We feast on the bread of heaven, and drink wines on the lees well refined. We are brought into the heavenly banqueting house where the secret of the Lord is revealed to us, and our heart pours itself out before the Lord. Very near is our communion with God, most intimate love and condescension does He show to us.

What do you say to this? Is there not here a rich repast worthy of Him who prepares it? Here all your capacious powers can wish, O sinner, shall be given to you. All you want for time and for eternity God prepares in the person of His dear Son, and bids you receive it without money and without price.

I have already told you that all the expense lies with Him. It was a very sumptuous festival. There were oxen, and there were fatlings, but none of these were taken from the pastures, or stalls of the guests. The Gospel is an expensive business. The very heart of Christ was drained to find the price for this great festival, but it costs the sinner nothing, nothing of money, nothing of merit, nothing of preparation. You may come as you are to the Gospel feast, for the only wedding dress required is freely provided for you. Just as you are, you are bidden to believe in Jesus. You have nothing to do but to receive of His fullness, for to "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of

God, even to them that believe on his name.” You are not asked to contribute to the provision, but to be a feaster at the divine banquet of infinite compassion.

How *honorable*, too, is the Gospel to those who receive it. An invitation to a regal marriage was a high honor to those who were bidden. I do not suppose that many of us are likely to be invited to the Princess’s wedding, and if we were we would probably be greatly elated, for we should most of us feel it to be one of the great events of our lives. So was it with these people. A king’s son is not married every day, and it is not everybody that is bidden to the monarch’s entertainment. All their lives long they would say, “I was at his wedding, and saw all the splendor of the marriage festival.”

Probably some of them had never before enjoyed such a feast as the luxurious potentate had prepared for that day and had never before been in such good company. My brethren, nothing so honors a man as for him to accept the Gospel. While his faith honors Christ, Christ honors him. It is no mean thing to be a king’s son, but those who come to the marriage feast of God’s own Son shall become King’s sons themselves—themselves participators in the glory of the great heir of all things.

While I am speaking of this generous method, my heart glows with sacred ardor, and my wonder rises that men do not come to the banquet of love which honors all its guests. When the banquet is so costly to the host, so free to the guests, and so honorable to all concerned, how is it that there should be found any so unwise as to refuse the favor?

Surely here is an illustration of the folly of the unrenewed heart, and a proof of the deep depravity which sin has caused. If men turn their backs on Moses with his stone tablets, I do not marvel, but to despise the loaded tables of grace, heaped up with oxen and fatlings—this is strange. To resist the justice of God is a crime, but to repel the generosity of heaven, what is this? We must invent a term of infamy with which to brand this base ingratitude. To resist God in majesty of terror is insanity, but to spurn Him in the majesty of His mercy is something more than madness. Sin reaches its climax when it resolves to starve sooner than owe anything to divine goodness.

I feel I must anticipate the period for delivering my message, and as I have described to you the way in which God honors His Son, I must at once proclaim the invitation, and cry to you, “Come to the wedding feast. Come ye and glorify Jesus by accepting the provisions of grace. Your works will not honor Him, if you set them up as righteousness in competition with His righteousness. Not even your repentance can glorify Him, if you think to make it a rival to His precious blood. Come, guilty sinner, as you are, and take the mercy Jesus freely presents to you, and accept the pardon which His blood secures to those who believe in Him.”

I think when the messenger went out from the king, and first of all marked signs of neglect among those who were bidden, and saw that they would not come, he must have been mute with astonishment. He had seen the oxen, and seen the fatlings, and all the goodly preparations, he knew the king, he knew his son, he knew what joy it was to be at such a feast. And when the bidden ones began to turn their backs on him, and go their way to their farms, the messenger repeated his message over and over again with eagerness, wondering all the while at the treason which dared insult so good a king.

I think I see him, at first indignant for his master’s sake, and afterwards melted to pity as he saw what would surely come of such an extravagance of ingratitude, such a superfluity of insolence. He mourned that his fellow-citizens, whom he loved, should be such fools as to reject so good an offer, and spurn so blessed a proclamation.

I, too, am tossed to and fro in soul, with mingled but vehement feelings. O, my God, You have provided the Gospel, let none in this house reject it, and so slight Your Son, and dishonor You, but may all rejoice in Your generous way of glorifying Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom of His church, and may they come, and willingly enjoy the festival of Your love.

III. We now advance to our third point, and regretfully remember THE SERIOUS HINDRANCE which for a while interfered with the joyful event.

The king had thought in his mind, “I will make a great feast, I will invite a large number. They shall enjoy all my kingdom can afford, and I shall thus show how much I love my son, and moreover all the

guests will have sweet memories in connection with his marriage.” When his messengers went out to intimate to those who had received previously an express invitation that the time was come, it is written, “They would not come.” Not they *could* not, but they “*would* not come.” Some for one reason, some for another, but without exception they would not come.

Here was a very serious hindrance to the grand business. Cannot the king drag his guests to the table? Yes, but then it would not accomplish his purpose. He wants not slaves to grace his throne. Persons compelled to sit at a marriage feast would not adorn it. What credit could it be to a king to force his subjects to feast at his table? No, for once, as I have said before, the subject must be merged in the guest. It was essential to the dignity of the festival that the guests should come with cheerfulness to the festival, but they would not come.

Why? Why would they not come? The answer shall be such as to answer another question—Why do not you come and believe in Jesus! With many of them it was an indifference to the whole affair. They did not see what concern they had in the king or his son. Royal marriages were high things and concerned high people. They were plain-speaking men, farmers who went hedging and ditching, or tradesmen who made out bills and sold by the yard or pound. What cared they for the court, the palace, the king, the prince, his bride, or his dinner? They did not say quite that, but such was their feeling. It might be a fine thing, but it was altogether out of their line.

How many run in the same groove at this hour? We have heard it said, “What has a working man to do with religion?” and we have heard others of another grade in life affirm that persons who are in business cannot afford time for religion but had better mind the main chance. The Lord have mercy upon your folly! Here is one great obstacle to the Gospel, the indifference of the human mind concerning this grandest of all conceptions—God’s glorifying His dear Son by having mercy upon sinners.

At the bottom, the real reason for the refusal of those in the parable was that they were disloyal, they would not come to the supper because they saw an opportunity for the loyal to be glad, and not being loyal, they did not wish to hear the songs and acclamations of others who were. By staying away they insulted the king and declared that they cared not whether he was a king or not, whether his son was a prince or not. They determined to disavow their allegiance by refusing the invitation. They said in effect, “Anyhow, if he is a king and his son a prince, we will do him no honor. We will not be numbered with those who surround his board and show forth his splendor. No doubt a feast is worth having, and such a feast as there will be provided t’were well for us to participate in, but for once we will deny our appetites that we may indulge our pride. We proclaim a revolt. We declare we will not go.”

Ah, you who believe not in Jesus, at the bottom of it your unbelief is enmity to your Maker, sedition against the great Ruler of the universe, who deserves your homage. “The ox knows his owner and the ass his master’s crib,” but you know not, neither do you consider. You are rebels against the Majesty of heaven.

Moreover, the refusal was a slight to the prince as well as to his father, and in some cases the Gospel is refused mainly with this intent, because the unbeliever rejects the deity of Christ, or despises His atonement. O sirs, beware of this, I know of no rock more fatal than to dishonor Christ by denying His Sonship and His deity. Split not upon it, I beseech you, “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little.” Indifference covered the refusal in the text, “They made light of it,” but if you take off the film you will see that at the bottom there was treason against the majesty of the king, and distaste to the dignity of his son.

No doubt some of them despised the feast itself. They must have known that with such a king it could not be a starveling meal, but they pretended to despise the feast. How many there are who despise the Gospel which they do not understand, I say, which they do not understand, for almost invariably if you hear a man depreciate the Gospel, you will find that he has scarcely even read the New Testament and is an utter stranger to the doctrines of grace. Listen to a man who is talkative in condemnation of the Gospel, and you may rest assured that he is loud because he is empty. If he understood the subject better,

he would find, if he were indeed a man of candor, that he would be led at least to be silent in admiration if he did not become loyal in acceptance.

Beloved friends, the feast is such as you greatly need, let me tell you what it is. It is pardon for the past, renewal of nature for the present, and glory for the future. Here is God to be our helper, His Son to be our shepherd, the Spirit to be our instructor. Here is the love of the Father to be our delight, the blood of the Son to be our cleansing, the energy of the Holy Spirit to be life from the dead to us. You cannot want anything that you ought to want, but what is provided in the Gospel, and Jesus Christ will be glorified if you accept it by faith.

But here is the hindrance, men do not accept it, "They would not come." Some of us thought that if we put the Gospel in a clear light, and if we are earnest in stating it, our hearers will be converted, and God forbid we should ever try to do otherwise than make it plain and be earnest, but for all that, the best ministry that ever was, or ever could be, will be unsuccessful in a measure. Yea, and altogether so unless the effectual work of the Spirit is present. Still will the cry go up, "Who has believed our report?" Still will those who serve their Master best have reason to mourn that they sow on stony ground and cast their bread on thankless waters. Even the prince of preachers had to say, "You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, but you will not come to me that you might have life." Alas, alas, that His mercy should be rejected and heaven spurned.

IV. So now we must close with the most practical matter of consideration, THE GRACIOUS REJOINER of the king to the impertinence which interfered with his plans.

What did he say? You will observe that they had been bidden, and then called. After the Oriental custom, the call intimated that the festival was now approaching, so that they were not taken unawares, but knew what they did. The second invitation they rejected in cold blood, deliberately, and with intent. What did the monarch do? Set their city in a blaze, and at once root out the rebels?

No, but in the first place, he winked at their former insolent refusal. He said in himself, "Perhaps they mistook my servants, perhaps they did not understand that the hour was come. Perhaps the message that was delivered to them was too brief, and they missed its meaning. Or if by chance they have fallen into some temporary enmity against me, on reconsideration, they will wish that they had not been so rude and ungenerous to me. What have I done that they should refuse my dinner? What has my son done that they should not be willing to honor him by feasting at my table? Men love feasting, my son deserves their honor—why should they not come? I will pass over the past and begin again."

My hearers, there are many of you who have rejected Christ after many invitations, and this morning my Lord forgets your former unkindnesses, and sends me again with the same message, again to bid you "come to the wedding." It is no small patience which overlooks the past and perseveres in kindness, honestly desiring your good.

The king sent another invitation, "All things are ready, come ye to the marriage," but you will please to observe that he changed the messenger. "Again he sent forth other servants." Yes, and I will say it, for my soul feels it, if a change of messengers will win you, much as I love the task of speaking in my Master's name, I would gladly die now, where I am, that some other preacher might occupy this platform, if thereby you might be saved.

I know my speech to some of you must be monotonous. I seek out images fresh and many, and try to vary my voice and manner, but for all that, one man must grow stale to you when heard so often. Perhaps my modes are not the sort to touch your peculiarities of temperament—well, good Master, set Your servant aside, and consider him not. Send other messengers if perchance they may succeed. But to some of you I am another messenger, not a better, but another, since my brethren have failed with you. Oh, then, when my voice cries, "Come unto Jesus, trust in His atonement, believe in Him, look to Him and live." Let the new voice be successful, where former heralds have been disregarded.

You notice, too, that the message was a little changed. At first it was very short. Surely if men's hearts were right, short sermons would be enough. A very brief invitation might suffice if the heart were right, but since hearts are wrong, God bids His servants enlarge, expand, and expound. "Come, for all

things are ready. I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings are killed, all things are ready, come to the marriage.”

One of the best ways of bringing sinners to Christ is to explain the Gospel to them. If we dwell upon its preparations, if we speak of its richness and freeness, some may be attracted whom the short message which merely tells the plan of salvation might not attract. To some it is enough to say, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved,” for they are asking, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

But others need to be attracted to the wedding feast by the description of the sumptuousness of the repast. We must try to preach the Gospel more fully to you, but we shall never tell you of all the richness of the grace of God. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His thoughts above your thoughts, and His ways above your ways. Forsake your sins and your thoughts and turn to the Lord, for He will abundantly pardon you. He will receive you to His heart of love and give you the kiss of His affection at this hour, if, like prodigal children, you come back and seek your Father’s face.

The Gospel is a river of love, it is a sea of love, it is a heaven of love, it is a universe of love, it is all love. Words there are none, fully to set forth the amazing love of God to sinners, no sin too big or too black, no crime too crimson or too cursed for pardon. If you do but look to His dear crucified Son, all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven you. There is forgiveness. Jesus gives repentance and remission. And then the happiness which will be brought to you here and hereafter are equally beyond description. You shall have heaven on earth, and heaven in heaven. God shall be your God, Christ shall be your friend, and eternal bliss shall be your portion.

In this last message the guests were pressed very delicately, but still in a way which if they had possessed any generosity of heart at all, would have touched them. You see how the messenger puts it. He does not say, “Come, or else you will miss the feast. Come, or else the king will be angry. Come, come, or else you will be the losers.” No, but he puts it, as I read it, in a very remarkable way. I venture to say—if I am wrong, the Master forgive me for so saying—the king makes himself the object of sympathy, as though he were an embarrassed host.

See here, “My dinner is ready, but there is no one to eat it. My oxen and fatlings are all killed, but there are no guests. Come, come,” he seems to say, “for I am a host without guests.” So sometimes in the Gospel you will see God speaks as if He would represent Himself as getting an advantage by our being saved. Now we know that herein He condescends in love to speak after the manner of men. What can He gain by us? If we perish, is He the loser?

But He makes Himself often in the Gospel to be like a father who yearns over His child, longing for him to come home. He makes Himself, the infinite God, turn beggar to His own creatures, and beseeches them to be reconciled. Wondrous stoop. For, like a salesman who sells his wares, He cries, “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters; and he that has no money, let him come.”

Do you observe how Christ, as He wept over Jerusalem, seems to weep for Himself as well as for them. “How often would I have gathered your children together.” And God, in the prophets, puts it as His own sorrow, “How can I set you as Admah, how can I make you as Zeboim?” as if it were not the child’s loss alone, but the Father’s loss also, if the sinner died.

Do you not feel, as it were, a sympathy with God when you see His Gospel rejected? Shall the cross be lifted high, and none look to it? Shall Jesus die, and men not be saved by His death? O blessed Lord, we feel, if nothing else should draw us, we must come when we see, as it were, You represented as a host under our embarrassment for lack of guests. Great God, we come, we come right gladly. We come to participate of the bounties which You have provided, and to glorify Jesus Christ by receiving as needy sinners that which Your mercy has provided.

Brethren, since Christ finds many loath to honor Him, my exhortation is to you who love Him, honor Him the more since the world will not. You who have been constrained to come, remember to sing as you sit at His table, and rejoice and bless His name. Next go home and intercede for those who will not come, that the Lord will enlighten their understandings, and change their wills, that they may be yet constrained to believe in Jesus.

And as for those of you who feel half inclined this morning by the soft touches of His grace to come and feast, let me bid you come. It is a glorious Gospel—the feast is good. He is a glorious King—the Host is good. He is a blessed Savior, He who is married, He is good. It is all good, and you shall be made good too, if your souls accept the invitation of the Gospel which is given to you this day. “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved: he that believes not shall be damned.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” The Lord send His Spirit to make the call effectual, for His dear Son’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—MATTHEW 21.

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