

Jesus and the Afterlife

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[0 : 0 0] St. John's Shaughnessy Church I'd like you to open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 22, and we're going to be looking at verses 1 to 14.

The Gospel of Matthew is found on page 22 in the New Testament section of your Pure Bibles. On this Remembrance Day, I think it is appropriate for us, as a Christian church, to honor and give thanks to God for the men and women who sacrificed their lives in battle for us.

If not for what God in His sovereign mercy accomplished through them, the world in which we live today would be a different one.

We give thanks to God for the peace that we have at the moment. We give thanks to God for the freedoms that we have as a result of the sacrifice of these men and women.

And I think we have every reason to rejoice and continue to remember them. We also have every reason to follow in the footsteps of these men and women, in trying as much as possible within our human power and by the grace of God, to make this world a better place for each and every one of us.

[2 : 1 2] And while it is important for you and I to pray for peace, and to do as much as within our power, under the grace of God, to seek and to foster peace in our world, we must not come under the illusion that we can, even in our very best efforts, engineer everlasting peace or everlasting justice in this world.

If you listen to the poor pails all over the country and all over the world today, people are going to be encouraged and made to believe that we, in our human efforts, can engineer everlasting peace if we just walk hard at it.

The truth of history is that human beings cannot, and they have proved themselves incapable of fostering everlasting peace in this world.

And scripture does certainly teach that we cannot in our human efforts. In the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of this world is a kingdom that continues to be marked by conflict, to be marked by injustice, by grief, by death, and by hate.

In the kingdom of this world, we speak the language of war and the language of peace at the same time. In the kingdom of this world, we speak the language of justice and the language of injustice, all at the same time.

[4 : 0 0] We must not therefore look for peace and everlasting justice in the kingdoms of this world. And the question is this, where then should we look for everlasting peace and hope?

The Bible certainly points our attention to the kingdom of God. It is only in the kingdom of God that you and I can have the peace and the mercy and the righteousness and the justice and the hope that only God himself can give to us.

And this is why Jesus in this parable compares the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God to a feast. By contrast to the kingdom of heaven is a feast.

And this idea of a feast is not just a literary device. There is truth to it. The kingdom of God is a feast on mercy.

It is a feast on forgiveness. It is a feast on fellowship and intimacy with God and with one another. The kingdom of God is a feast on eternal life, on righteousness, on holiness.

[5 : 19] It is a feast on the peace of God and the hope that will neither disappoint nor fade away. God's kingdom is the kingdom in which God himself will swallow up death forever and he will wipe away tears from all our faces.

God is the God who will comfort us in his kingdom. And this is why all through scripture, God invites you and I to this wonderful feast of God's kingdom.

In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophets. God spoke through the law. And in the New Testament, God spoke through Jesus Christ, through the apostles.

And today, God continues to speak through each and every one of us, inviting us through the preaching of the gospel to the feast of the kingdom of God.

As we read the passage, we notice in verse 4, This continues to be the message of God.

[6 : 46] He says, As we look into this parable, Jesus points our attention to three ways that people respond to God's kingdom.

The first invitation to the feast. The very first way that people respond is with rejection and contempt and violence. Look at verse 3.

God sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast. But they would not come. Again, he sent other servants saying, Tell those who are invited, Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen, my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready.

Come to the marriage feast. But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business. While the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

What a tragedy. What a tragedy. God is inviting men and women, inviting children to the feast. And some respond with indifference.

[8 : 44] And behind the indifference is hostility towards God. They said to God, Your feast is not as important as my farm.

The feast of eternal life is not as important as my business. The feast of righteousness is not as important as my pleasures and my career.

We do not want your feast. They made light of God's invitation. And they proceeded to kill even the messengers of God.

In a sense, there is some truth about this concerning the Pharisees that Jesus was speaking to. But it continues to be the reality in our present world.

That when people hear the invitation of the gospel to come to the feast of God, they are indifferent. And in some cases, they are absolutely hostile to the messengers that God has sent.

[9 : 46] I wanted to listen to how C.S. Lewis describes this kind of attitude. In his sermon on the weight of glory, he says, End of quote.

Do you want to keep making mud pies in your slum? Or do you want a holiday? Do you want the freedom, the salvation, or the sea of God's feast?

What do you want? And the answer to that question is absolutely crucial. It is because God's reaction to the rejection of his call is not avoidance.

God will not avoid the issue. God will not make a truth with us. God will not fly from the issue. God's reaction is judgment.

Let's look at verse 7. The king was angry and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

[11 : 23] The rejection of God's invitation leads to eventual punishment. And I know that we are not comfortable with the idea of judgment.

But God is the king of the universe and we are his subjects. God is a creator of the universe and we are his creatures. And our duty to God is to believe in him and obey him and submit to him.

And this is why the invitation of scripture to God is not just a mere invitation. It is an honor to you and to me as well as a command.

God's invitation is a command. I want us to turn briefly to Acts chapter 17. Let's read verses 30 to 31. Acts chapter 17.

It's on page 130 in the New Testament section of your Pure Bibles. Acts of the Apostles chapter 17.

[12 : 33] Verses 30 and 31. Page 130. And I want us to read this passage together. 30 and 31.

The times of ignorance God overlooked. But now he commands all men everywhere to repent. Because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness.

By a man whom he has appointed. And of this he has given us assurance to all men. By raising him from the dead. The days of ignorance God has overlooked.

But this day he commands all men and women to repent. Because the day is coming when he is going to judge all the world according to his righteousness through the man Jesus Christ whom he raised from the dead.

In other words, if we are not sure that God is going to judge the world. God has given us an assurance that he will indeed judge the world. And that assurance is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself.

[13 : 42] The resurrection of Christ is God's evidence that he will indeed judge the world. And when we reject the invitation of God. And when we reject the invitation of God which indeed is a command.

It is an act of disobedience. An act of rebellion against the king of the universe. And this is the way that God will eventually bring justice in this world.

God will punish sin. And he will do it at the end of the age. Secondly, people respond to God's invitation with acceptance and gratitude.

Look at verses 8 to 10. Then the king said to his servants, The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

Go therefore to the Torah fairs and invite them to the marriage feast, as many as you find. And those servants went into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good.

[14 : 48] So the wedding hall was filled with guests. God sent his servants to the thorough fairs, to the public squares, and said to them, Go and invite as many as you find, both good and bad.

And I think this is the good news of the gospel. That the gospel of the kingdom of God, the invitation to the feast of forgiveness, is not only given to those who are religiously and morally good.

God's invitation is both to the good and to the bad. And here is the question. Who are the good people? Well, the good people are the people who are good.

The good people are the people who we define as good. They are nice. They are kind. They are generous. They come to church regularly. But they have no living relationship with Jesus Christ.

You see, this is why they are still invited to the feast. If they already have the salvation of God, if they already have a living relationship with God in their goodness, then there will be no need to invite them to the feast.

[16 : 12] The matter of fact that these good people are invited to the feast is a clear indication that they have no living relationship with Jesus Christ. They have no salvation in their lives.

God invites the good people as well as the bad people. You and I, the good and the bad people, need to be washed of our sinfulness.

The good people need to be washed of their goodness, and the bad people need to be washed of their badness. The good people need to be clothed with the garment of righteousness, and the bad people need to be clothed with the garment of righteousness.

And so if you are here this morning and you are a good person, you are invited to the feast. God needs to wash you of your goodness. And if you are bad and you think God will not receive you, God's invitation to you is for you to come.

Because God will wash you of your badness and put on the cloth of righteousness upon you. Finally, some people will respond in a way that is unacceptable to God.

[17 : 35] Verses 11 to 13. But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?

And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, bind him hands and foot and cast him into outer darkness.

There men will weep and gnash their teeth. Some people will respond momentarily to the call. But the way they respond to the call is in a way that is unacceptable to God himself.

And I think the key is in verse 12. It says the man was speechless. And here is the question. Why was he speechless? He knew exactly what he was supposed to do.

See, looking at this passage, all of these people were invited from the public squares. And so this man could not have given the excuse in saying that I had no robe.

[18 : 43] I had no time to get my robe. Because nobody in this passage had the time. And he could not have said, I have no robes. Because he had no time even to go home to pick up the robes if he had it.

They were picked up from the public squares. And when they came into this wedding feast, it is likely that the king had the wedding garments for everybody. And this particular individual refused to accept the wedding garment that the king had provided.

And that's why he is speechless. And here is the point. It is true that the invitation to the feast is a broad invitation.

It is both to the good and to the bad. But it does not therefore follow that all who respond to the call will stay in the feast.

Because failure to prepare acceptably for the feast exposes the individual to divine punishment. This man represents the religious inside us.

[20 : 03] These are people who come to church. These are people who are spiritual. These are people who have some moral consciousness. They are stubborn.

And for some of you here who are not Anglicans, who are not baptized or confirmed, you may have answered the call at an evangelistic service.

But you never really gave your life completely in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. You are still following your own way.

I want to read you this particular text. The text is on the painting in the cathedral of Lubeck in Germany. And the title of this text on this painting is called, It's the Lament of Jesus Christ Against the Ungrateful World.

This is what Jesus says about this kind of a person. You call me show me. You call me the way and walk me not.

[21 : 39] You call me the way and walk me not. You call me life and leave me not You call me wise and follow me not You call me fair and love me not You call me rich and ask me not You call me eternal and seek me not If I condemn thee, blame me not It is a warning to church people You and I may have answered the call momentarily But we are still playing church We are playing fast and loose with God Thinking that our own ideas about spirituality Is more important than God's ideas We think that our robes of goodness And our robes of badness Are more important than God's robes Of righteousness and faith Through Jesus Here is a warning in verse 13

God says, bind him hand and foot And cast him into the outer darkness There men will weep and gnash their teeth Once again, if you are here this morning And you have momentarily answered the call But like the man in this story You still depend upon your personal righteousness Upon your goodness Or you still depend upon some idea of the grace of God Which allows you to be disobedient to God God is calling you this morning To surrender your self-righteousness To surrender your sinful disobedience And come to him In obedience and faith And I want to finish with a warning That Jesus gives in verse 14 Verse 14 he says For many are called

But few are chosen Everybody in this building tonight This morning Is hearing the call There is no way you can step out of this building Without having it clear to you That you have heard the call To receive God's forgiveness Jesus says That not all that are called Will be chosen And you can be chosen this morning If you will turn from your sins And believe in Jesus Christ This is the only hope You and I have in this world And in the world to come We can choose to participate In the feast of God Or we can choose to participate In the punishment of God And my prayer is May God help you and I To answer the call And be prepared acceptably For the feast

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