

A Sunday school teacher decided to have her young class memorize one of the most quoted passages in the Bible; Psalm 23. She gave the youngsters a month to learn the verse. Little Rick was excited about the task -- but, he just couldn't remember the Psalm. After much practice, he could barely get past the first line. On the day that the kids were scheduled to recite Psalm 23 in front of the congregation, Ricky was so nervous. When it was his turn, he stepped up to the microphone and said proudly, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know."

In a sense our Gospel lesson from Matthew 22:1-14 tells us all we need to know. It is a wisdom teaching from Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Matthew, the teaching of Jesus is presented as surpassing that of the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon. Accordingly, Matthew records more of the teachings and wisdom stories than any of the other Gospel writers. In the Gospel for today, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast.

The story goes as follows: A certain king had a son who was about to get married. Invitations were sent out via the king's own servants, very personal invitations to the invited guests to ask them to come for this momentous occasion. But they were not willing to come. Then each invitee was told just how special the occasion was; the king was going to kill his choicest cattle to prepare a spectacular meal. Yet, the intended guests "made light" of the invitation. One by one, they gave various reasons why they couldn't come. They even mistreated the very servants of the king who had brought the good news, killing some of the king's messengers. When the king heard what had happened to his gracious offer, he sent out an army to destroy those who were originally invited.

The king did not give up on securing guests for his son's wedding, but having decided that the original invitees were not worthy to attend, he sent out his servants into the highways and byways to find other guests, both good and bad. Finally the wedding hall was filled with the mix of guests, and the monarch entered to start the great feast.

But when the monarch entered, he found one man in the crowd who was not wearing his wedding garment. What needs to be understood here is that in an ancient Hebrew wedding, the host provided a special wedding garment to each guest to cover the soil from the streets. Apparently, the man didn't want to wear the wedding garment for some reason, we don't know why. But in refusing the gracious offer and requirement of a wedding garment, this man was directly insulting the king. When asked how and why he did what he did, the man was speechless; in other words, there was no excuse for what he had done. For this, he was thrown out. The parable ends with the words, "Many are called but few are chosen" (v. 14).

The last verse teaches us the consequences of missing all that you need to know when it comes to God. The story is about salvation, salvation history. The first guests are the chosen people of God. They reject and eventually kill the messenger(s). Other guests are brought, the Gentiles. All types, any type of person can come to the wedding feast. The key to admission, all you need to know, is the wedding garment. It is what covers all the dirt and sin accumulated in the world. The wedding garment is Jesus Christ. He is the clothing that atones for our sin. Christ is our covering when we believe in Him. He is the means of entrance. It's not anything in us or what we do that can offset all our sin. Only His sacrifice can wash away our impurities. And the good

news is that this salvation is offered like a garment given at a wedding feast. We can't buy or secure it ourselves. It can only be offered by the giver of the feast, but it must be accepted by faith and put on in order to attend the feast.

And how do we put on the wedding garment? By giving ourselves over to loving God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, and our neighbors as ourselves. By giving of our time, talent, and treasure in the furtherance of God's kingdom, and in the assistance of those around us. By responding to Christ's sacrifice with true sacrifices of our own – not gifts that are easy, inconsequential contributions, but true examples of the extreme love we have for our God. As we put on God's gracious gift to us, we must show in our response the enormity of the change we are making in ourselves.

Martin Luther, the great German reformer, used the image of a prince who marries a harlot to make this point. Luther observed that the prince who marries a harlot doesn't marry her because she's pure. He doesn't even ask her to reform her life before he marries her and takes her in. He unites with her in marriage because he loves her, and she loves him. And as she enters his life and love, her life is changed. This is the story of Biblical justification.

Elsewhere he writes:

*I do not come because my soul is free from sin and pure and whole and worthy of Thy grace;*

*I do not speak to Thee because I've ever justly kept Thy laws and dare to meet Thy face.*

*I know that sin and guilt combine to reign o'er every thought of mine and turn from good to ill;*

*I know that when I try to be upright and just and true to Thee, I am a sinner still.*

*I know that often when I strive to keep a spark of love alive for Thee, the powers within leap up in un-submissive might and oft benumb my sense of right and pull me back to sin.*

*I know that though in doing good I spend my life, I never could atone for all I've done; But though my sins are black as night, I dare to come before Thy sight because I trust Thy Son.*

*In Him alone my trust I place, come boldly to Thy throne of grace, and there commune with Thee.*

*Salvation sure, O Lord, is mine, and, all unworthy I am Thine, for Jesus died for me.*

This is the Gospel, the Good News, all we need to know in the final analysis. Indeed, "The Lord is my Savior, that's all I need to know."

*Amen.*