

Sermon: Jesus righteous garments

Reading: Matthew 22: 1-14

Introduction

Excuses, excuses, we have all made them. Sometimes our excuses are genuine and valid but there are times when excuses are made which are less than genuine and we hear them with a hint of scepticism, a bit like 'the dog has eaten my homework!'

Context

In our passage today we are nearing the journey's end for Jesus. By the end of this week Jesus is arrested, falsely accused and led out to Golgotha and crucified. Jesus entered Jerusalem to cries of jubilation but the week went downhill so to speak after that. Jesus enters the temple and causes outrage when He overturns the tables of the money changers. The chief priests and elders of the people confront Jesus demanding to know under whose authority does He do these things? As this is Jesus' final week we need to pay great attention to His final teachings. Today Jesus teaches a parable concerning the kingdom of God and poor excuses people use to turn down the invitation by using an illustration of a wedding banquet.

Wedding banquet

Jesus begins, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they all refused to come' (**Matt 22:1-3**). I imagine this was a really humorous illustration to use, after all when the king throws a banquet, everyone knows it's going to be an extravagant affair and a wonderful celebration, no expense spared. There would be no other celebration in the land to compare it to. It's ludicrous to think anyone would ever turn down the invitation to the king's son's wedding feast, especially with the excuses offered. But excuses were made as the invited guests all turned down the king's invitation. Jesus sets the scene of the banquet saying, 'The oxen and fattened calf have been butchered, and everything is ready' (**Matt 22:4**). All was ready. I imagine everyone listening would have been laughing loudly when Jesus begins to offer the excuses made by each one of those invited. For one has business to attend to, another has a field he has just bought and must go and inspect it. Who in their right mind would pass up an invitation to be an honoured guest of the king and feast at a sumptuous banquet to go and look at a field or attend see a cow they have just bought! The excuses would have sounded hilarious to those listening. The reasons for not attending were flimsy at best. None of the reasons given was genuine.

The situation becomes worse, not only were flimsy excuses offered but Jesus goes on to say when the invitation arrived, 'they paid no attention' (**Matt 22:5**). This is even more serious than offering silly excuses, they blatantly ignored the king's invitation, turning their backs on the king and dismissing him as irrelevant.

Just when you think it couldn't get any worse, the situation turns sinister. The king sends out his servants to inform the guests to come, but the servants of the king were abused, mistreated and even killed when they came with the gracious invitations. It's a horrendous situation. Once the king discovered how his servants have been treated, he rightly becomes enraged. It's a very vivid and graphic parable. It begins with the description of a mouth-watering banquet and with hilarious excuses offered by those invited for not wanting to come, then then the situation turns ugly leading to death, judgment and destruction.

The king is not put off, he intends to continue with the celebration for his son. He wants his house to be filled with great rejoicing, so he gives orders for the servants to go out into the city streets, towns and villages and seek as many people as possible to come and dine at the king's expense, to join with him in celebrating the marriage of his son. The servants obediently go out and gather all the people they could find and filled the hall with guests. Next the parable scene moves into the banqueting hall itself and the king notices one of the party standing out from all of the others. We will return back to this particular person a little later.

Ambassador of Christ

One of the greatest joys I have in ministry is helping people to understand the Scriptures and sharing the hope of salvation we have been offered through Jesus Christ. This is also can be one of the saddest parts of ministry, to hear of so many people offering excuses which are flimsy at best and dismissing the king's gracious invitation of salvation unto eternal life. Here are a few of the most common I have heard.....

I was made to go to church 3 times each Sunday as a child, I'm just not interested

I am not ready to give my life to Jesus there are so many other things I want to do

I just want to get the baby done (Christened) we've already booked the caterers

I will seek Jesus on my death bed

I am just too busy, I take the kids to football, cricket and rugby on Sundays

Parachutes and Context

Hearing the excuses offered, many just don't realise who they are turning down and who they are rejecting. So many casually dismissed God out of hand as if God is irrelevant and superfluous to life. Evangelism sometimes feels like I am offering free parachute lessons to those who will never get in a plane, very few people are interested! However change the context and see what happens! Imagine sitting in a plane 2000 feet in the air and the engines on the plane cut out. We may have a little bit of confidence in the pilot's skill to glide the plane down safely until we hear the announcement from the pilot who says, 'I am offering free parachute lessons and a free parachute to any who would like to attend'.

Parachutes are uncomfortable to wear especially while sitting in a plane. We are much happier to keep them under the seat (just in case) tucked up and out of the way. No one wants to think about parachutes when we are heading on our holidays. Most people simply want to sit back and enjoy the inflight entertainment. However when the engines cut out and the plane begins to nose dive, the parachute suddenly doesn't seem superfluous and we probably wouldn't notice it feeling a cumbersome or uncomfortable when I wear it, in fact it would probably fill us with a lot of confidence and maybe even give us peace of mind. Evangelism is introducing another passenger to the parachute and its importance.

Jesus Saves

There is one uncompromisingly clear distinction in which Christianity differs to all other religions when it comes to salvation! Do you know what this is? Christianity is a religion which focusses exclusively not on saving souls of nice people but of sinners! The church is the only organisation which is set up for the benefit of its non members. Now that is shocking. For Jesus Christ came to save sinners, not nice people. Jesus says. "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance (**Luke 5:32**). Scripture clearly tells us that none are good. I'm convinced when chatting to people most of them think.....

They are never going to stand before God to give an account

God loves them because they are nice people and so will accept them as they are

Or that there is no God at all and so no judgement.

When people are convinced and believe these falsehoods, they have made a bed for themselves which is too comfortable, warm and cosy to venture out of. The Gospel does not deceive us in any way, but lets us know plainly who we are before Almighty God and that offends our sensibilities, the cross offends our self righteousness and Jesus offends everyone who reject Him as Lord. Consider these passages if you need to be convinced.....

Rom 6:5 Christ died for the ungodly.

Rom 5:10 While we were God's enemies

Rom 5:8 While we were still sinners Christ died for us

Luke 5: 32 I have to come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance

What makes Christianity unique is salvation is found in no other name but Jesus

John 14:6 I am the Way and the Truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me

Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

1 Tim 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.

1 John 1:1-2 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes,,,,,,,

Rom 10:9 If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved

This is the celebration of the Son which leads us back to the wedding banquet.,Consider the riches of the banquet Jesus offers with His gracious invitation saying, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty' (**John 6:35**). This is an amazing offer indeed. For in Christ the banquet invitation is not only completely satisfying but eternally so, for we will never go hungry or thirsty with Christ. For the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ it is.....

Food for the hungry

Drink for the thirsting

Peace for the restless

Wholeness for the broken hearted

Joy for the bereaved

Contentment for the discontented. For Christ is all sufficient and all we need.

The Son is ready to pardon and to cleanse, offering salvation to all who humble themselves in repentance turning to Christ. There they will find a true friend and amazing Saviour, who will pardon their eternal souls offering salvation and life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed' (**John 3:16-20**). For the gospel message is clear,

The Father is ready to love and receive

The Son ready and to cleanse

The Holy Spirit to sanctify and renew

The angels are ready to celebrate and rejoice when sinners repent

Grace is ready to be bestowed on the believer

Nothing is missing from the salvation process, in fact there is only one thing left which remains and that is our repentance (RSVP). Jeremiah writes these words of God, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart’ (**Jer 29:13**). Jesus also says, ‘Seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened to you” For the door before us is ready, ajar and will open wide for any who come with a humble and contrite heart in repentance and faith. This is inclusive, for no one who humbly seeks will ever be turned away no matter what history or life they have led. So let us be clear on these matters, for the king of heaven invites us, He has prepared everything, and all things are now ready. Hebrews tells us, ‘Today is the day of salvation, harden not your hearts’ (Heb). The churches mission is to make sure everyone receives the invitation, everyone are invited, but sadly far too often the invitation goes unheeded, with feeble excuses.

The parable shifts focus to the banquet and the presence of the king. The king comes to see the guests and noticed a man who was not wearing the wedding clothes! He asked, “How did you get in here without the wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless” (**Matt 22:11-12**). What is happening here? In truth sin affects what we do, say, and think, it taints everything about us. Therefore, no matter how good we try to be, we will never meet God’s standard of perfection. The Bible says, all of our righteous deeds are like a “polluted garment” (**Isaiah 64:6**). Here we find the clue to the clothes the guests are wearing. As the guests have come in off the streets, they have removed their filthy garments and been given new clothes to wear, all except one person who this king spots straight away. As we come to Christ in repentance, we are sanctified and given clean garments to wear. The theological term for this is called imputation.

Through our faith in Christ, the righteousness of God is given to us. Christ righteousness covers us as a garment, clean, spotless and beautiful. This is called “imputed” righteousness. To impute something is to ascribe or attribute something to someone. When we place our faith in Christ, God ascribes the perfect righteousness of Christ to our account so that we become perfect in His sight. “For our sake He made Him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (**2 Corinthians 5:21**). Christ paid our sin debt to God, He had no sin in Himself, but took our sin which has been imputed to Him, incredibly He suffers on the cross in my place, He is suffering the just penalty that our sin deserves. That is why Paul can say, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (**Galatians 2:20**). This is an amazing concept to grasp as we now have the Spirit of Jesus indwelling within us and our sinful nature is being replaced with His righteousness. There is no other way we can enter the kingdom of God, certainly not in our old clothes and without invitation. The man who was found not dressed in the wedding garments attempted to enter the kingdom by his own merits. As we read from the parable, it didn't end well for this person nor for those who rejected the kings invitation and offered flimsy excuses.

Summary

I offer my summary with the words of Paul who succinctly says it much better than I ever could, ‘...that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (**2 Cor 5:19-21**). **Amen**