

“I Will Open My Mouth in Parables.”

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord Jesus, “All our knowledge, sense, and sight / Lie in deepest darkness shrouded / Till Thy Spirit breaks our night / With the beams of truth unclouded. / Thou alone to God canst win us; / Thou must work all good within us.

“Glorious Lord, Thyself impart, / Light of Light, from God proceeding; / Open Thou our ears and heart, / Help us by Thy Spirit’s pleading. / Hear the cry Thy people raises, / Hear and bless our prayers and praises.” Amen. (ELH #1, vv. 2-3)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the twenty-second chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. / “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.’ / “But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. / “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. / “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 hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.” (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who reveals the secrets of the kingdom of heaven to sinners such as you and me, dear fellow redeemed:

When the school year started, I talked with the students about nursery rhymes and how they often have hidden meanings. The story of Humpty Dumpty, for instance, may or may not actually be about an egg that fell off a wall and broke into numerous pieces. It could also be about a hefty cannon which fell down from its position on the wall and couldn’t be put back in its place by “the king’s men.” The true meaning of these nursery rhymes is often not obvious to

the reader, and if you will take my advice, it is really better not to know the meanings behind these delightful poems.

The parables of Jesus in the Bible are something like nursery rhymes. Jesus told these parables to illustrate important truths. Our common definition is that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. But to some of those who listened to Jesus' parables, the meanings were hidden. They did not understand what Jesus was teaching, and in many cases, they did not want to understand. They were looking for a different kind of Messiah. Jesus offended them. But the purpose of Jesus' coming was not hidden from them any more than it is from us. Jesus came to save sinners and only sinners. **The Purpose of Jesus' Coming Is No Secret.**

I

"Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and His might, and the wonders that He has done" (Psalm 78:1-4). These are the opening verses of Psalm 78, which provides our theme for this school year: "I Will Open My Mouth in Parables." The evangelist Matthew records a number of Jesus' parables, like the one in the Gospel lesson for today. After one such session in which Jesus spoke to the crowds, Matthew writes, *"All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, He said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world'" (Mt. 13:34-35).*

But why did Jesus speak in parables? Why would He want to hide the meaning of His teaching? Jesus' disciples asked Him the same thing. He explained, *"To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.... For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them" (Mt. 13:11,15).* In other words, Jesus spoke in parables because the people would not believe in Him. They saw His amazing miracles, they heard His comforting words, and yet they decided He wasn't worth their time. "This can't be the Messiah!" they thought.

The Messiah they were looking for was one who would break them free from the rule of the Romans. This passive Jesus could not be the man. Others like the Pharisees and scribes expected that the Messiah would welcome them into His inner circle. They were the righteous ones who carefully did the will of God, unlike the sinners all around them. But Jesus roundly criticized them, while at the same time eating with those same sinners they despised. Still others were looking for a Messiah who would create heaven on earth, generously feeding them like the LORD fed the Israelites in the wilderness, so that they could eat, drink, and be merry. Jesus was no Messiah like this. But He was exactly like the Messiah who was prophesied in the pages of Scripture.

God told Satan in the Garden of Eden that One was coming to defeat him: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15).* God promised to Abraham that *"in [him] all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).* Isaiah prophesied about the One *"despised and rejected by men," "wounded for our transgressions," "crushed for our iniquities,"* the One on whom *"the LORD*

has laid... the iniquity of us all" (53:3,5,6). The Messiah would come to break Satan's hold on sinners by paying for everybody's sin. This was no secret. So why didn't the people understand it? Why didn't they welcome Jesus with open arms? For the same reason that people don't welcome Jesus today.

II

They reject Jesus because He doesn't fit their idea of who God should be. They want a Jesus who tells them how much better they are than others, and how the world would be a much better place if only everyone were more like them. They want a Jesus who tells them they can do whatever they feel like doing, and He will just keep on loving them for who they are.

The real Jesus condemns these ideas. We see this in today's Gospel lesson, the parable about the wedding feast, servants, and guests. The first thing we need to determine is who Jesus initially spoke the parable to. The opening verse says, "*And again Jesus spoke to them in parables.*" Who is "them"? The previous chapter answers the question; Jesus was speaking to "*the chief priests and the Pharisees*" (Mt. 21:45). These were the so-called "holy people" of Israel. They followed an elaborate system of laws and regulations by which they believed they could earn God's favor. They were self-righteous, which means they were tough on others and easy on themselves. These are the ones described in the parable as the invitees who "*paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.*" What honor should they show the Son of the King? What could they want from Him? Jesus was here particularly describing the attitude of the people of Israel who rejected His Word in the Old Testament era and either ignored or killed the LORD's prophets.

So the invitation was extended to others, to any who could be found. This included even the Gentiles, who did not have the Scriptures and did not have the Law. These were like the countries and nations that surrounded the Israelites, which engaged in every manner of sin and vice. Even these were invited to the wedding feast, "*both bad and good.*" But one had the audacity to attend without a wedding garment. It isn't that he was too poor to wear appropriate attire; the proper garments would have been provided to him if he had admitted his need. But no; he wanted to attend the feast on his own terms.

In this parable, Jesus clearly addresses both those who think they are too good to need anything from God, and those who think they can approach God on their own terms and live their lives however they like. What does Jesus say happens to both? They are "*destroyed*" and cast "*into the outer darkness,*" where "*there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" I imagine that such a reaction from God is concerning to you just as it is for me, because we can think of many moments in our lives that we thought we were so much better than others and lived as though God never gave us a standard of right and wrong. But your memory of the bad things you have done and said and thought—your recognition of your sins—is actually a gift from God. Jesus said, "*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners*" (Mt. 9:13), and "*the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*" (Lk. 19:10).

III

Jesus came to save sinners and only sinners. That means He came to save you. Every disrespectful word, every hateful action, every adulterous thought, every lie, every single transgression of yours was taken from you and placed squarely on the shoulders of Jesus. He

paid the penalty for each sin just as if He were the law-breaker. His Father slammed Him with the punishment that sin deserves, and Jesus endured the *"weeping and gnashing of teeth,"* the eternal suffering of hell, while He hung on the cross in *"the outer darkness."* He did all that for you, so that you would be free of the devil's accusations, so that you would be forgiven of all your sins, so that you would have eternal life to look forward to instead of the unending death we all deserve.

This is the blessed truth that the parables of Jesus teach. They teach of salvation from sin and the promise of deliverance from the darkness of this world. The love that God has for us is not hidden from us; it is clearly revealed in what Jesus did to save us. Many are looking for something else, something that lets them be comfortable with sin and happy in their sinning. Jesus died for their sins too, but they do not receive His gift of forgiveness without faith, the faith which can only be worked by God the Holy Spirit through the powerful Word.

The Purpose of Jesus' Coming Is No Secret to you who have heard the message of salvation and believed it by the grace of God. This is no secret, but it is a great mystery how the Lord could love us so completely, and so graciously to invite us to His great wedding feast. *"But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear,"* said Jesus. *"For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Mt. 13:16-17).*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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