

ISAIAH 25:6-9 AND MATTHEW 22:1-14

A MAN NAMED DAVID RANDOLPH SHARED A STORY ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE AS A TOURIST IN MILAN - ITALY, SEVERAL YEARS AGO.

WHILE HE WAS THERE A CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN, ALONG WITH THE TRADITIONAL MARCHING OF SOME CLOWNS, AND ANIMALS DOWN THE MAIN STREET.

IT WAS SUMMERTIME AND MANY DOORS WERE LEFT OPEN, INCLUDING THE DOUBLE DOORS OF A CHURCH.

DURING THE PARADE ONE ELEPHANT VEERED OFF AND ENTERED THE CHURCH BEFORE SHE COULD BE CORRALLED BACK INTO LINE.

RANDOLPH WHO WAS NEAR THE DOORS WATCHED AS THE ELEPHANT WALKED DOWN THE AISLE AND TRUMPETED SOME, AND THEN, ON HER OWN, TURNED AROUND AND LEFT.

LATER HE REFLECTED ON INCIDENT, AND WONDERED IF HE HAD EVER ACTED LIKE THAT ELEPHANT.

HE WONDERED IF HE WAS GUILTY SOMETIMES OF WALKING INTO CHURCH, MAKING SOME NOISE, AND THEN LEAVING TO REJOIN THE PARADE OF LIFE OUTSIDE THE BUILDING.

THIS INDEED CAN BE A DANGER FOR ALL CHRISTIANS, EVEN THOSE OF STRONG FAITH. SOMETIMES WE MAY BE GUILTY OF JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS, FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS.

SURELY GOD UNDERSTANDS THAT LIFE CAN DISTRACT US, EVEN WHEN WE ARE TRYING TO BE FAITHFUL.

THE WARNING IN THE PARABLE JESUS TOLD WAS NOT PRIMARILY DIRECTED TOWARDS THOSE WHO ARE OCCASIONALLY OR TEMPORARILY DISTRACTED.

HIS FOCUS INSTEAD, WAS ON THOSE WHO CONSISTENTLY MERELY WENT THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF WORSHIP OR SERVICE, FOOLING OTHERS, AND POSSIBLY THEMSELVES ALSO.

TODAY'S PARABLE IS ANOTHER IN A SERIES OF STORIES JESUS TOLD TO CHALLENGE THE JEWISH LEADERS WHO WERE TRYING TO ENTRAP HIM.

THEY WERE HOPING EITHER TO GET HIM TO SAY SOMETHING THAT TURNED THE CROWD AGAINST HIM, OR GAVE THEM GROUNDS TO PROSECUTE HIM.

THE SAVIOR'S MOTIVATION, HOWEVER WAS MORE TO TURN THEM BACK TO GOD, THAN TO WIN A VICTORY OVER THEM.

MUCH LIKE WATCHING THE ELEPHANT IN THE CHURCH INSPIRED DAVID RANDOLPH TO REFLECT ON HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, JESUS' WORDS COULD HAVE MOTIVATED HIS OPPONENTS TO DO SOME SELF REFLECTION.

SADLY, MOST OF THEM, IT SEEMS, WERE NOT WILLING TO LISTEN, ADMIT THEIR SIN, OR CHANGE THEIR WAYS.

THE LAMENT JESUS MADE, FOUND IN MATTHEW 23:37 GIVES US INSIGHT INTO CHRIST'S PURPOSE IN TELLING THE STORIES.

“JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM, THE CITY THAT KILLS THE PROPHETS AND STONES THOSE WHO ARE SENT TO IT!

HOW OFTEN I HAVE DESIRED TO GATHER YOUR CHILDREN TOGETHER, AS A HEN GATHERS HER CHICKS UNDER HER WINGS, BUT YOU WERE NOT WILLING!”

THIS BRINGS US TO THE GOSPEL PASSAGE, WHICH IS BETTER UNDERSTOOD IF WE GRASP THE DIFFERENCE IN THE CONCEPT OF TIME BETWEEN NOW, AND THE ANCIENT WORLD.

BEFORE WATCHES, CELL PHONES, AND OTHER DEVICES TO HELP US PRECISELY MEASURE MINUTES AND HOURS, THE TIME OF DAY WAS VIEWED DIFFERENTLY.

PEOPLE WOULD CHECK THE LOCATION OF THE SUN OR LOOK TO THE STARS TO FIGURE OUT ABOUT WHAT TIME IT WAS.

THIS MEANS THE EXACT TIME A FEAST OR OTHER EVENT WOULD BEGIN WAS GENERALLY NOT ANNOUNCED WHEN INVITATIONS WERE SENT OUT.

THE STORY TELLS ABOUT THE MARRIAGE OF A KING'S SON. HE WOULD HAVE INVITED PEOPLE WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE EVENT.

THE DAY THINGS WERE TO BEGIN WOULD HAVE BEEN GIVEN, BUT NOT THE EXACT TIME THE FESTIVITY WAS TO START.

THUS, IN THE PARABLE, ONCE EVERYTHING IS READY THE GUESTS ARE GIVEN NOTICE, AND THEN ARE EXPECTED TO ARRIVE A SHORT TIME LATER.

THIS MEANS THOSE IN THE PARABLE WHO REFUSED TO ATTEND, HAD PREVIOUSLY SAID THEY WOULD BE THERE.

BUT THEN, WHEN THE SERVANTS ANNOUNCED THAT IT WAS TIME TO HEAD TO THE FEAST, THEY REFUSED TO GO.

THE PARABLE JESUS TOLD, WAS MOST LIKELY DRAWN FROM ISAIAH 25, AS WELL AS AN OLD RABBINICAL STORY.

THAT STORY WAS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO MISSED OUT ON A FEAST BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT DRESSED AND READY TO GO, WHEN THE CALL CAME.

AND LIKE WITH THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS WE HEARD LAST WEEK, THIS GOSPEL PARABLE IS AN ALLEGORY.

THE KING IS GOD, THE SON IS JESUS, AND THE ORIGINAL GUESTS WERE THE JEWISH PEOPLE, OR POSSIBLY THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

THE SERVANTS WERE GOD'S PROPHETS, AND THE NEW GUESTS WERE THOSE OF MANY DIFFERENT NATIONALITIES.

THE CITY, IS JERUSALEM, AND THE MARRIAGE FEAST IS UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE PROMISED FEAST OF THE MESSIAH AND HIS PEOPLE, IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

THE PARABLE DESCRIBES TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF PEOPLE WHO END UP MISSING OUT ON THE FEAST.

THE FIRST ARE THOSE WHO ARE INDIFFERENT TO GOD. THEY REFUSE TO ATTEND BECAUSE THEY HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO, AND REALLY ARE NOT THAT INTERESTING IN GOING.

THE SECOND GROUP ARE THOSE WHO ARE OPENLY HOSTILE TO GOD. THEY ACTIVELY, RATHER THAN PASSIVELY, RESIST GOD'S CALL.

INSTEAD OF SIMPLY WALING AWAY LIKE THE OTHERS DID, THEY REACT VIOLENTLY TO THE CALL OF THE KING TO COME NOW, TO THE FEAST.

TODAY WE CAN GLEAN FROM THE STORY A REMINDER THAT OUR PRIORITIES DICTATE OUR CHOICES, AND MAY CAUSE US TO REACT IMPULSIVELY IN WAYS THAT CAN BE HARMFUL TO OURSELVES OR OTHERS.

WE HAVE A PRIME EXAMPLE IN THE WORLD TODAY WITH SOME PEOPLE TAKING PRECAUTIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC, BUT OTHERS NOT TAKING IT SERIOUSLY.

THERE ARE EVEN SOME PEOPLE HOSTILE TO ANY REQUESTS OR REQUIREMENTS TO WEAR MASKS OR STAY SOCIALLY DISTANT.

THE PARABLE WARNS THOSE WHO ARE UNREPENTANTLY INDIFFERENT OR HOSTILE TOWARDS GOD WILL END UP BEING REJECTED BY THE LORD.

THE MESSAGE FURTHER DECLARES THAT GOD WILL EXTEND THE INVITATION TO ANY WHO ARE WILLING TO COME, INCLUDING THOSE PREVIOUSLY EXCLUDED.

CHRISTIANS UNDERSTAND THIS PART OF THE STORY AS HAVING BEEN FULFILLED WHEN MANY JEWS REJECTED JESUS, AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH AND THE SON OF GOD.

REMEMBER, ON PENTECOST, PETER'S CALL TO FAITH IN CHRIST WAS DELIVERED TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE, BUT MOST DID NOT HEED THE CALL.

THE HOLY SPIRIT THEN LED, PETER, PAUL, AND OTHERS TO ALSO PREACH ABOUT JESUS TO, THE SAMARITANS, AND TO GENTILES, THAT IS PEOPLE OF OTHER NATIONS, PAGANS.

SOME OF THEM ACCEPTED THE INVITATION OTHERS REJECTED IT.

THUS THE GUESTS ARE DRAWN FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE, AND EVERY RACE AND TRIBE AND NATION.

SO HERE WE HAVE A SEEMINGLY SIMPLE STORY, WHICH JESUS USED TO TELL HIS PEOPLE THAT GOD WILL SOON BE OPENING THE GATES TO HIS KINGDOM TO ALL PEOPLE.

IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE THE STORY ENDS WITH CELEBRATION, BUT MATTHEW'S VERSION DOES NOT.

HE RECORDS AN ADDITION TO JESUS' STORY ABOUT A GUEST WHO COMES TO THE FEAST, BUT WHOM THE HOST OBSERVES IS NOT PROPERLY DRESSED.

THE MAN IS EJECTED FROM THE FEAST AND PUNISHED BECAUSE OF IT.

THE EXPLANATION PEOPLE HAVE COME UP WITH AS TO WHY HE WAS NOT DRESSED SUITABLY FOR THE KING, IS THAT HE EITHER WAS NOT INVITED, OR DID NOT HONOR THE KING.

AND YET, IT IS ODD HE WAS REJECTED, BECAUSE IF THE MAN HAD BEEN PULLED OFF THE STREET HE MIGHT NOT HAVE HAD TIME TO CHANGE.

HOWEVER, RECORDS SHOW THAT IN THE ANCIENT WORLD KINGS OFTEN PROVIDED SPECIAL ROBES TO GUESTS. SO PERHAPS THE MAN REFUSED TO PUT ON THE ROBE.

HOWEVER, NO MATTER WHY THE MAN DID NOT HAVE THE RIGHT CLOTHES, THIS UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS CAN CONFUSE, DISTURB, AND EVEN FRIGHTEN PEOPLE.

WHAT, WE MAY WONDER, WAS THE POINT JESUS WAS TRYING TO MAKE WITH THIS STRANGE ADDENDUM TO THE ORIGINAL STORY?

REMEMBERING IT IS AN ALLEGORY IS HELPFUL BECAUSE THIS TELLS US THE CLOTHES REPRESENT A SPIRITUAL TRUTH.

SO LETS THINK ABOUT HOW SCRIPTURE DESCRIBES SALVATION IN TERMS OF CLOTHING.

ISAIAH 61:10 SAYS THIS: "I WILL GREATLY REJOICE IN THE LORD; MY WHOLE BEING SHALL EXULT IN GOD; FOR HE HAS CLOTHED ME IN THE GARMENT OF SALVATION, AND HAS COVERED ME WITH THE ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS...."

THE APOSTLE PAUL USED CLOTHES OFTEN AS A METAPHOR OF THE BLESSINGS GIVEN TO US THROUGH CHRIST.

GALATIANS 3:27 SAYS-"FOR AS MANY AS YOU WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST HAVE CLOTHED YOURSELVES WITH CHRIST."

LIKEWISE COLOSSIANS 3:12 SAYS: "AS GOD'S CHOSEN ONES, HOLY AND BELOVED, CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH COMPASSION, KINDNESS, HUMILITY, MEEKNESS, AND PATIENCE."

AND IN VERSE 14, PAUL ADDS THE DIRECTION TO CLOTHE OURSELVES WITH LOVE.

THESE ARE JUST SOME EXAMPLES, BUT THEY ARE ENOUGH TO POINT US IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION IN MAKING THE CLOSING PART OF THE PARABLE MORE RELEVANT TO US.

ALL THESE VERSES SPEAK ABOUT BEING TRANSFORMED BY GOD'S SPIRIT WHEN WE COME TO HIM IN SINCERE FAITH.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN WE WILL NOT STRUGGLE WITH DOUBTS, OR EVEN PERHAPS A PERIOD OF REBELLION, BUT IT DOES MEAN WE ARE BEING CHANGED BECAUSE OF JESUS.

SOMEONE SUMMARIZED THE REPETITIVE CLOTHING METAPHOR THIS WAY: "THE WORLD DRESSES FOR SUCCESS, CHRISTIANS DRESS FOR SALVATION."

OF COURSE IMPLICIT IN THIS CHRISTIAN ATTIRE IS THE FACT WHAT EVERYONE "PUTS ON" IS GIVEN TO US BY GOD.

ST. AUGUSTINE COMMENTED ON THIS FACT, SAYING ABOUT THE PARABLE:

“WE CAN ONLY COME TO THE FEAST CLOTHED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH IS NOT OF OUR OWN MAKING. IT IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST OUR SAVIOR WHICH IS OUR WEDDING GARMENT.”

THE IDEA JESUS WAS SPEAKING ABOUT SPIRITUAL GARMENTS IN THE PARABLE IS HELPFUL.

IT POINTS US TO THOSE WHO PUT ON A GOOD SHOW FOR OTHERS, BUT ARE INSINCERE IN THEIR CLAIMS TO FOLLOW JESUS.

THEY MAY BE ABLE TO FOOL SOME PEOPLE, AND PERHAPS EVEN FOOL THE WHOLE WORLD, BUT THEY CAN NEVER FOOL GOD.

THIS IS THE WARNING JESUS GAVE TO THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, TO EXAMINE THEIR OWN COMMITMENT TO GOD, AND SEE IF WORSHIPPING THE LORD IS THEIR PRIORITY OR IF WORLDLY HONOR OR POWER IS THEIR FOCUS.

THE KING’S STRONG REACTION TO THIS MAN, FOLLOWED BY SEVERE PUNISHMENT IS A WARNING ABOUT GOD’S FINAL JUDGEMENT.

THUS, WHILE THE PARABLE REMAINS DISTURBING, THERE IS STILL HOPE TO BE FOUND WITHIN THE STORY.

NOTICE, THE MAN WAS GIVEN A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN HIMSELF TO THE KING, BEFORE HE WAS CAST OUT.

HE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO APOLOGIZE, EVEN BEG FOR THE KING’S MERCY, AND REQUEST A GARMENT, YET HE REMAINED SILENT.

IT WAS HIS UNREPENTANT SILENCE THAT CONDEMNED HIM EVEN MORE THAN HIS IMPROPER CLOTHING.

A VERSE IN THE HYMN “GOD OF COMPASSION”, DESCRIBES THE LORD’S WILLINGNESS TO GIVE US THE GARMENTS WE NEED.

“WANDERING AND LOST, THOU HAST SOUGHT US AND FOUND US. STILLED OUR RUDE HEARTS WITH THY WORD OF CONSOLING.

WRAP NOW THY PEACE, LIKE A MANTEL, AROUND US, GUARDING OUR THOUGHTS, AND OUR PASSIONS CONTROLLING.”

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR HIS WILLINGNESS TO CLOTHE US IN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WE NEED TO BE PLEASING MEMBERS OF GOD’S FAMILY, AND SUBJECTS IN GOD’S KINGDOM. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY- MATTHEW 22:1-14

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