

Friend, How Did You Come In Here?

Text: Mat 22:12

Suggested Hymns:

305, 377, 321, 327, 304

1) The Parable

2) The Interpretation

3) The Application

4) The Question On Judgment Day

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 22:12, ¹² *So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Bible tells us that the Lord at various times and for various reasons asked certain people personal, heart-searching questions.

The first such question was asked of Adam when he had sinned and tried to hide from the Lord. *The LORD God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?”*¹ Surely this question must have made Adam fully realise what he had done when he ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree.

A similar question was put to Cain after he had killed his brother Abel, for the Lord said to him, *“Where is Abel your brother?”*²

Similar questions are also found in the New Testament; for example, the words spoken to Judas by our Saviour when He said to him, *“Friend, why have you come?”*³ and *“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”*⁴

When Saul was journeying from Jerusalem to Damascus to bring Christians *“bound to Jerusalem”* and deliver them to the authorities, Jesus asked him, *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”*⁵

Our text, taken from the Gospel for the 20th Sunday after Trinity, is also a personal, direct, significant, heart-searching question directed to every one of us. Let us consider this question *“Friend, how did you come in here?”* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Parable

The text is taken from the well-known Parable of the Marriage Feast. The parable briefly is this. A certain king's son was to be married. The king prepared a great feast for his son's wedding. Certain people had previously received invitations; and when everything was ready for the feast, he sent out his servants to tell these invited guests to come to the marriage.

In verse 3 we are told that *they were not willing to come*. Then he sent other servants to tell these people who were invited, *“See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”*

But they ignored this second call also and went about their daily tasks. Yes, some of them even *seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them*. We can clearly understand that *“when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.*

Then the king told his servants to go into the highways and invite anyone they found. So they went out and did as the king had commanded, *And the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

Then the king went in to look over the guests, and he found one person who did not have on a wedding garment. It was self-evident that those who accepted the invitation to a king's wedding feast should be properly attired. The king himself provided the proper garments.

But there was one person there who was not clothed as he should have been. And to this man the king addresses the question, *‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’* And, we are told that *“he was speechless.”*

So the king had him bound and cast out. *“The king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’*

2. The Interpretation

Jesus Himself gives us the interpretation of this parable. He says that *“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, ³ and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding.*

Thus it is evident that the king is God. The wedding feast includes all the benefits and blessings which God bestows upon us in His Kingdom of Grace. The call to the marriage is the preaching of the Gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus. Those who are invited are all those who hear the Gospel message. And the wedding garment is what we confess in that beautiful hymn,⁶

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress,
Wherein before my God I'll stand
When I shall reach the heav'nly land.

But among those who hear the Gospel call there are such people who absolutely ignore the invitation and refuse to come, that is, to believe the Gospel message. Yes, some even openly antagonise it and persecute God's messengers of peace, while even among those who heed the call, externally enter the Kingdom of Grace, join the church here on earth, but are not sincere, and are hypocrites.

That such is the case we also learn from Christ's Parable of the Tares Among the Wheat,⁷ and from that of the Dragnet Containing Good and Bad Fish.⁸

If we consider these facts, it becomes quite evident that the question in our text is really a direct and personal one, addressed to each and every one of us, *"Friend, how did you come in here?"*

3. The Application

And now let us make a few practical applications of the question, *"Friend, how did you come in here?"*

First, let me apply it to your church attendance. "Friend, how earnestly did you come in here?" How did you come here this today? Did you come simply as a matter of habit or to please someone else who wanted you to come? Did you come because you thought it is time that you show yourself once again?

Or did you possibly come to observe others, to meet friends, or because it is a matter of good form to be a church member and attend services occasionally? Did you possibly come to hear what the preacher had to say, or even to criticise the sermon? Or did you come for some other external reason?

“Friend, how did you come in here?” God says in Ecclesiastes 5:1, ¹ ***Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.*** That means, Come in the right attitude and for the right purpose. Remember where you are going and where you are, namely, in the house of God. And come for the God-pleasing purpose of hearing what God has to say to you.

Let us come here and be here as David came to the Temple, saying in Psalm 26:6-8, ***I will go about Your altar, O LORD, ⁷ That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, And tell of all Your wondrous works. ⁸ LORD, I have loved the habitation of Your house, And the place where Your glory dwells.***

How about the Lord’s Supper? If you intend to partake of this Holy Sacrament, the question especially applies to you, ***“Friend, how did you come in here?”*** Why are you going to the Lord’s Table? Is it simply because, according to the calendar, it is time for you to do so again? Is this possibly also merely a habit, a matter of form, something that must be done so and so many times a year?

Friend, how earnestly ***did you come in here?*** Did you really come as a penitent sinner to confess all your sins and iniquities with which you have offended God and justly deserved His temporal and eternal punishment? And did you come to seek mercy and forgiveness because of the holy, innocent, bitter suffering and death of God’s beloved Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

Only then are you a worthy guest at the Lord’s Table. Hence the admonition in 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, ²⁸ ***But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.***

Friend, how did you come in here? This question may also be applied in a general way. How did you come to be a member of the Church? Why did you join the ranks of those who profess the Christian faith? This, too, is a most important question. Christ closes this parable and its interpretation with the remark, ***“For many are called, but few are chosen.”***

Not all who are called, not all who externally heed the call into God’s kingdom, are God’s chosen people. In the visible Church, as already stated, we

find good and bad, sincere Christians and hypocrites. Why are you in the Christian Church? Is it simply because you were brought up that way, because your parents were faithful church members?

Or did you possibly join in order to please someone? Is it because you think it gives one influence and prestige? Or is it possible that you have certain faults and shortcomings, sins that you want to cover up, or is it for business or other external reasons? If so, then Christ's entire question, *'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?'* applies to you.

Do you ask, What is the wedding garment? It is faith in Christ Jesus as one's personal Saviour. This will be followed by the fruit of faith, which are God-pleasing works.

Luther says, "The wedding garment must be the new light of the heart which the knowledge of the great grace of this Bridegroom and His wedding effects in the heart, that it entirely clings to Christ and, being infiltrated with such comfort and joy, with pleasure and love, thus lives and does as he knows that it is pleasing to Christ."⁹

"And from this it is easily understood what is meant here: that this one is without a wedding garment, namely, without the new attire with which to please God, which is faith in God, and hence also without real good works. He remains in the old tatters and rags of his own personal arrogance, unbelief, security, without repentance, and knowledge of his misery. He does not comfort himself from his heart with the grace of Jesus Christ, nor betters his life from it, and seeks no more from the Gospel than what the flesh lusts after.

They are those who let themselves be numbered among real Christians, hear the Gospel, and are in external fellowship with the Church, act before other people as though they, too, were adherents of the Gospel, and yet they are not sincere."¹⁰

What Luther said over 450 years ago is only too true also today. The fact is that not only many who were baptised and confirmed in the church have broken their solemn promise and deserted the ranks of the Christians, but there also those who still externally hear God's Word, attend services, and possibly even partake of the Lord's Supper, in short, they do act as Christians, but have in fact closed their hearts to God's Word.

Their worship is a mere matter of form. *Friend, how did you come in here?*

May God grant that you are sincere in your professed Christianity, that you are a truly penitent sinner, have received Christ as your personal Saviour, and serve Him with works that are pleasing in His sight, and that you have on the wedding garment in which you can stand before God.

4. The Question On Judgment Day

Finally this question, *Friend, how did you come in here?* will be asked of every one of us personally when we face the Son of Man whom God has appointed to judge the living and the dead.

Scripture says in 2 Corinthians 5:10, ¹⁰ *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

Nobody will be able to deceive the Eternal Judge, *who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.*¹¹

Whoever is seen there without a wedding garment, whoever has not washed his robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, will hear the terrible verdict which the king pronounced on the man in the parable who did not have a wedding garment!

*'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*¹² and *'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'*¹³

May God grant that on that great Day, when the question is asked of you, *Friend, how did you come in here?* you will be able to answer with the hymnist:

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress,

When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,
E'en then this shall be all my plea:
Jesus hath lived, hath died, for me. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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- ¹ Genesis 3:9
 - ² Genesis 4:9
 - ³ Matthew 26:50
 - ⁴ Luke 22:48
 - ⁵ Acts 9:4
 - ⁶ Hymn 327
 - ⁷ Matt. 13:24-30; 36-43
 - ⁸ Matt. 13:47-50
 - ⁹ Transl. from St. Louis ed., XI: 1761
 - ¹⁰ Transl. from St. Louis ed., XI: 1759
 - ¹¹ 1 Corinthians 4:5
 - ¹² Matthew 22:13
 - ¹³ Matthew 25:41