

The Invitation

Matthew 22:1-14

Pastor Peter Hiett

March 6, 2005

[A clip from the television show, The Simpson's, is shown.]

Marge: "I can't believe you're giving up church, Homer."

Homer: "Hey, what's the big deal about going to some building every Sunday. I mean, isn't God everywhere?"

Bart: "Amen, brother."

Homer: "And don't you think that the Almighty has better things to think about than where one little guy spends one measly hour of his week."

Bart: "Tell it, Daddy."

Homer: "And what if we picked the wrong religion? Every week we're just making God madder and madder."

Bart: "Testify!"

Next scene: Homer has a dream that God comes and rips the roof off of his house.

Homer: "God?"

God: "Thou has forsaken my church."

Homer: "Well, kind of, but..."

God: "But what?"

Homer: "I'm not a bad guy. I work hard, and I love my kids. So why should I spend half my Sunday hearing about how I'm going to hell?"

God: "Hmmm, you've got a point there. You know, sometimes, even I'd rather be watching football. Does St. Louis still have a team?"

Homer: "No, they moved to Phoenix."

God: "Oh, yeah."

Homer: "You know what I really hate about church? Those boring sermons!"

God, sighing: "I couldn't agree more. That Reverend Lovejoy really displeases me. I think I'll give him a canker sore."

Homer: "Give him one for me."

God: "I will."

Homer: "So I figure I should just try to live right and worship you in my own way."

God: "Homer, it's a deal. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to appear in a tortilla in Mexico."

Next scene...

Lisa: "Dad, can I ask you a question?"

Homer: "Sure, honey."

Lisa: "Why are you dedicating your life to blaspheme?"

Homer: "Don't worry, sweetheart. If I'm wrong, I'll recant on my deathbed."

Next scene: Homer is seen walking in a monk's robe with animals gathered around him.

Homer: "Hello, my animal friends. Peace be with you."

Next scene: Homer is in the shower with animals gathered around him.

Homer: “Guys, please! Could you give me five minutes?”

So Homer starts his own religion, but it turns into hell. It’s destroyed when Homer’s house catches fire, and Ned Flanders, his evangelical Christian neighbor risks his life to save Homer. So by the end of the show, Homer is back in church.

[Another clip is shown. Homer is asleep and snoring in church. Homer has another dream about God.]

God: “Don’t feel bad, Homer. Nine out of ten religions fail in their first year.”

Jimi Hendrix is shown playing air hockey with Benjamin Franklin in heaven as God and Homer walk by.

Benjamin Franklin: “That’s game, Hendrix.”

Homer: “God, I gotta ask you something. What’s the meaning of life?”

God: “Homer, I can’t tell you that.”

Homer: “Come on...”

God: “You’ll find out when you die.”

Homer: “I can’t wait that long.”

God: “You can’t wait six months?”

Homer: “No. Tell me now.”

God: “Well, okay. The meaning of life is...”

The clip ends as Homer and God walk into the horizon.

There are some theological inaccuracies there, but it is a pretty good depiction of how most people view church, not all that inviting... especially for Homer types, tax collectors, and prostitutes.

In two of his books, Philip Yancey, from our church, tells about a prostitute unable to buy food for her two year old daughter. Sick and homeless, she came to Philip’s friend who worked in inner city Chicago. She explained how she had to sell her two year old to men for sex in order to support her drug habit. Philip’s friend had no idea what to say and then asked her if she ever considered going to a church for help. The woman looked back in pure naive shock and exclaimed, “Church... why would I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They’d just make me feel worse!”

Something about that is strange for the church is Christ’s body, and in Matthew we’ve found that it was the prostitutes and tax collectors that seemed to come to Jesus first and fastest. He was ridiculed for dining with them, a friend of tax collectors, prostitutes, and Homer Simpson types (like those twelve guys that followed him around).

Jesus sure didn’t skimp on the truth about sin, yet He was most quickly befriended by sinners. How could He be so honest about sin, yet so attractive to sinners? They are the very types that seem least attracted to church.

Our text for today is Matthew 22:1-14. Jesus has just told the religious elite “truly the tax collectors and prostitutes go into the kingdom of God ahead of you.” Then He told about the

householder who sent his servants and then sent his son to the vineyard. The tenants want the vineyard, and so they kill the son. Then Matthew 22:14:

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.' But they made light of it 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 is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the streets 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; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

Well, that's kind of a freaky story, especially that last part about the guy who gets thrown into outer darkness for violating the dress code. It's a scary story, yet it's a story about a king calling folks to a wedding banquet.

This is a picture of my wedding banquet.

Look at that woman in that dress. It's amazing grace that a woman like her would marry a nerd like me. It was the greatest day of my life, along with the days my kids were born. We had invited the whole church, all our friends and family.

For a reception, we rented a warehouse facility in downtown Denver. We served roast beef and beer and danced to accordion music. All were invited, the bad and the good.

That's my cousin Tim in the tie, and Steve next to him. They made a beer can pyramid at the banquet, and then had a truck pushing contest in the parking lot. They sat next to little old ladies from church.

Dave Jones, Andrew Trawick, and Jamie Stiehr were some of my groomsmen. They got into my car and taped our underwear all over the windows.

Everybody was there dancing and feasting and having fun. It was the greatest day of my life.

And it's Jesus' picture of the kingdom of God. The church is the presence of that kingdom in this world and an invitation to the great banquet.

You know, when I'd invited friends to my wedding banquet, I'd say, "Excuse me, I sure don't want to bother you or judge you, and I understand there are many things to do on May 28th, but [Peter sings] softly and tenderly I am calling, calling for you and for all. Come party, come party. You who are bummed out, come party."

No, I didn't say that! With freedom and joy, without fear and anxiety, I'd say, "Dude, you gotta come to my wedding party. It's gonna be awesome!"

And I didn't say, "You better come to my wedding banquet or my dad will send his army and kill you and burn your city. And if you don't dress right, we'll cast you into outer darkness."

Now, those things happened in Jesus' story, but they weren't the business of the servants issuing invitations.

You know, if I issued an invitation like that, I'm not sure any of my guests would enjoy my banquet. That is, they couldn't truly receive the banquet through threats.

The fear would make it feel like a prison. Fear might get their attention, but love would have to cast out the fear before they could taste the banquet.

Well, Jesus is talking about hell, but he's talking to people that won't listen, people who think they already own the banquet, and the truth is, they can't even conceive of the banquet.

They don't own the banquet, but they have been invited.

The Israelites had been invited for 2,000 years. Daily, they would offer sacrifices on Mount Zion in the temple in Jerusalem. The sacrifices atoned for violations of external regulations and rituals, but the sacrifices also provided for banquets in the temple.

The Jews were commanded to literally feast on their atonement. Yet, it was clear, the atonement was incomplete, and none of the feasting ultimately satisfied. Once I counted, including Sabbaths there were like 80 days of commanded feasting in the Old Testament, but only one day of commanded fasting. That was Yom Kippur, the day of atonement when the High

Priest entered the Holy of Holies to sacrifice for the sins of all the people. On that day, they stayed hungry.

Well, Yom Kippur, Passover, all the feasts, the lambs, they all pointed to the Messianic banquet. Isaiah prophesied,

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, [On that day, this is what they'll say... Have you ever heard something like this on a mountain somewhere?] "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Isaiah 25:6-9

As you know, Jesus came preaching, "the kingdom is at hand." His first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding banquet. Jesus was a party animal; He loved banquets.

In Luke 14, Jesus dines at the house of a Pharisee and tells this same story of the great banquet with a few variations. (It must have been a story He told several times.) Well, in Luke 14, He also tells us that when we throw banquets, we are to go to the highways and invite people that can't repay us. Church is to be like a picture of the great banquet.

That's why we throw the party at the side of the road.

That's why we threw a party for the Deadheads at Chief Hosa.

That's why our building campaign was called, "Where the world drives by." (And we preached on the great banquet our first Sunday here.)

That's why this room is called, "The Banquet Hall."

You may remember that the last meal Jesus had before His death was a banquet. He threw it on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. It was Passover, the feast of the Lamb that was slain to redeem Israel from death. And at that meal, Jesus broke the bread and poured the wine, calling it His body and blood, and saying, "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

It's fascinating that during passion week when Jesus retells the story of the great banquet, he adds two astounding details, as found here in Matthew.

First, that some of those invited to the great banquet murdered the messengers, and so would be destroyed along with their city.

And secondly, He talks about the strange man at the banquet who would be cast into outer darkness, naked.

Well, in the story, the servants go first to those that had been invited. They think they're found, but in reality they're lost. They're lost because they don't want the banquet.

They have no taste for the banquet.

They make light of it,

go off one to his farm (his vineyard), and

another to his business,
 his “emporium” in Greek, his empire,
 where he was emperor,
 lord and master of all,
 where he bought and controlled everything.

You know,
 true grace is the ultimate threat to your empire
 because it cannot be bought, and
 it is never earned.

To receive it,
 you must surrender control and
 sacrifice yourself.

If you think life is a competition, “survival of the fittest,” and you’re gonna win, then absolutely nothing is as offensive as grace because it’s admitting that you’ve lost. It means all your good deeds aren’t worth “skubula,” (that word).

“Nothing is more repugnant to capable, reasonable people than grace,” said Charles Wesley.

We’ve found that the produce of the Vineyard,
 the king’s banquet,
 the Lamb,
 the bread and the wine,

it’s all a banquet of grace that none can afford. It’s mercy. So these folks hate what’s for dinner. The king’s grace exposes their un-grace. So they judge themselves out and some kill the king’s messengers.

In 70 A.D., Roman troops came and destroyed the high priests and elders and burned Jerusalem. Jesus says, “The king sent his troops, destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Roman troops...

That’s scandalous, a stumbling stone.

The king then says to his servants, “Go to the highways,” (that would be outside the city, for it’s been destroyed) “go to the highways and invite everyone you see bad and good...”
 Bad and good.

See, it’s not the knowledge of good and evil that gets you into the banquet. And behold, the unworthy are now worthy, and those that thought they were worthy are unworthy.

The lost are found.

Those that thought they were found are now lost (apollumi in Greek), destroyed.

I’d like to pause here and discuss a little theology because folks have been rightfully concerned over some of the things I’ve said regarding the ultimate fate of those that reject the Gospel in this life.

There are at least three views held by Bible believing Christians.

1. Everlasting Torment (the majority view); The first view is that hell is everlasting torment. In The Great Divorce, C.S. Lewis describes hell as a place where you get whatever you want but hate all that you get for you can no longer want love. It's a place where your empire becomes your prison for you are a world unto yourself. Lewis argues that hell starts here in this world, like those in the first group that refused the banquet. So Jesus spoke about hell to people that were, in some ways, already in it and utterly deaf to the music of heaven. That's like the Biblical concept of Sheol or Hades (often translated hell), the realm of the walking dead. We've preached on that quite a bit.

The Bible also talks about entering "eternal punishment" and suffering "eternal fire." The problem is explaining how Hades, or the experience of punishment, could be eternal or everlasting, for in Revelation 20:14, death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, and "no longer will there be anything accursed," Revelation 22:3.

2. Annihilation (an increasingly popular view): The second view is annihilation, the view that people suffer and are then annihilated, destroyed by the "eternal fire," the "eternal punishment." The folks in Jesus' parable that renounced the invitation and killed the messengers reminds me of this view. Their empire, their city, their Hades is devoured by fire, and they are destroyed (apollumi).

So Hades is real, but the consuming fire is more real. It's eternal. Scripture says, "God is a consuming fire." I think He is the fire that surrounds New Jerusalem in Zechariah 2:5, that is the fire in the valley of Gehenna that consumes all evil.

We preached on that in Matthew 18. In Matthew 13, we preached on the wheat and the tares. The tares get consumed by fire. We said, "Maybe they are vessels of wrath without souls, like shadows and lies, predestined to destruction."

Well, the problem with this second view is that, in the Bible, destroyed things often come back, like the New Jerusalem, the new temple, even Sodom in Ezekiel 16:55. I mean, where God is concerned, you can't always count on stuff staying dead.

In our story, these guys are destroyed (apollumi), but that's also translated "lost." Jesus came to "seek and to save the lost," (apollumi), the destroyed.

In our story, the lost get found and the found get lost. That is, "the called," Israel, get lost. So the question is, "Can they yet be found or will they stay lost forever?"

In Roman's 11, Paul wrote, "And so all Israel will be saved. . . . They are beloved. . . . For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable."

And get this, Paul was a Pharisee and one of those murderers, right? So was he destroyed? He did write, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Well, the question is, "Can Jesus reach the lost in Hades?" Ephesians 4:8-10, Paul taught that Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth and ascended to fill all things and lead a host of captives free.

3. Eventual Redemption Through Christ (minority view): The third view is that eventually all are redeemed through Christ, a minority view that was held by some of the early church fathers and modern people like George MacDonald and Karl Barth. These folks believe that somehow, in the end, even after Hades is cast into Gehenna, Jesus will "make all things

new,” including the hearts of the lost, for Jesus is “the savior of all men, especially those that believe,” as Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:9. And, “as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive,” 1 Corinthians 15:22.

The problem is that Paul also wrote of those that will suffer “eternal destruction away from the Lord,” 2 Thessalonians 1:9.

In Luke 14, the king in Jesus’ story says, “None of these called ones will taste my banquet.”

Could that be said of one like Paul, who no longer lived but Christ lived in him, that the old Paul never tasted the kingdom, but the new Paul did? I don’t know.

Well, we preached on the prospect of the 3rd position in the recent sermon on the Vineyard. Those that take this position Biblically still believe in judgment, wrath, condemnation, the suffering in Hades, and fire of Gehenna.

And no matter what, we’re stuck with this one naked guy cast out of the banquet into the outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth.

I know that’s all confusing... so I included some more scriptures in your bulletin to confuse you more.

Howard Hendricks said, “A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew.” Maybe so, but maybe the mist is qadosh, holiness. Once it rested on Mount Sinai for forty days. The people of Israel hated the mist, so they made a golden calf, an idol.

Maybe we’ve made an idol to replace the holy mist, and we use the idol to scare people into the kingdom. But then they can’t taste the banquet. Or worse, we use the idol to secretly hate our enemies and feel better about ourselves (the found ones).

The truth is, I don’t know the ultimate state of the wicked, but that’s not my job. I’m to issue an invitation to the good and bad to come to the banquet of absolute mercy.

Our Lord is the revelation and manifestation of divine mercy. So the ones who least trust mercy are most in danger of hell. And anytime we trust an idol, we crucify our Lord. If hell is the last word, perhaps Jesus is not.

And the measure you give is the measure you get.
Give Jesus and get Jesus.

Jesus is the manifestation of divine mercy. So the less we trust in mercy, the less we trust in Jesus, and the harder it will be to invite people to His banquet for

- ~ we no longer have a taste for what’s being served.
- ~ we no longer hope that “all would reach repentance.”
- ~ we no longer put our trust in irrevocable mercy (mercy that will not stop and is not dependent upon us).
- ~ we’re no longer amazed at grace, so no longer delighted at what’s being served...

Roast lamb, broken bread, red, red wine.
Mercy, it’s what’s for dinner.

You know, when I’ve witnessed to people out of faith, hope, and love in God’s mercy, they seem to listen like they listened when I invited them to my wedding banquet long ago.

But when I witness out of duty, anxiety, and fear, fear for them, fear for me, and fear of God’s punishment, well, it doesn’t feel like faith. It doesn’t look like love. “Perfect love casts out

fear for fear has to do with punishment,” wrote John. It doesn’t feel like faith, look like love, and it doesn’t sound like Gospel, good news.

Good news is “ev-angelia” in Greek. Good angel, good message, good news, Gospel. It’s where we get the term, evangelical. But anymore it seems that few people (especially tax collectors, prostitutes, and Homer Simpson types), few people associate the word with those who bring good news. They think more in terms of prophets of doom, religious elite, legislators of good and bad, the morality police...

That makes some sense, I mean, it must have been tempting for the evangelists, the messengers in the parable to call the police, legislate morality. For as Jesus revealed, preaching good news often gets you killed, for nothing is as offensive and scandalous as grace.

Well, the last set of servant messengers are a picture of us. The king calls them and says, “Go to the highways. Invite them all, both bad and good.”

Did you get that? Bad and good.

It’s the difference between Christianity
and all other religions.

It’s not the good that are worthy.

It’s those that want a banquet of grace who are worthy.

“And so the wedding hall was filled with guests.” Tax collectors, prostitutes, Homer Simpson types... you and me.

How can the king afford this much mercy?

And what will all these shabby people wear?

And where is the bride?

And where is the groom, the son of the king?

(He showed up in the last parable just about this time.)

But now we come to the most shocking part of the story.

The wretches have been found
for no merit of their own.

But now the king’s *friend* is lost
for no merit of His own.

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; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

How many are called? I guess all, even the ones that murdered the servants. The many is all. How many are chosen? How few? It wouldn’t be the hall filled with guests. One is chosen, chosen by the king. The few is one.

Remember Matthew 7:14, “Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way. . . and few are those that find it.”

How narrow?

As narrow as the law.
 How difficult?
 As difficult as perfection.
 How few found it?
 One.
 He is the gate, and He is the way.

Remember Matthew 9:37, "The harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few."
 How few?
 One, and "apart from Him we can do nothing."

I believe the few is one and the one is Jesus. Ephesians 1:3, "God chose us *in* Him before the foundation of the world." The many chosen is one, all in one (like an ark passing through judgment, like a new creation in a seed).

"For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that *in* him we might become the righteousness of God," 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Jesus was predestined to hell
 (to bear our curse).

Jesus was predestined to heaven
 (that we might become the righteousness of God).

He clothed us with His righteousness.
 He's naked because He gave us His garments.

Galatians 3:27, we are to "put on Christ."

"For as in Adam all die, so *in* Christ shall all be made alive," 1 Corinthians 15:22.

In four days, Jesus will inaugurate the great wedding banquet at the Passover Feast in the upper room, saying, "This is my body and this is my blood."

He is the Lamb that was slain.
 He is the bread that's broken,
 the wine that's poured.
 He is mercy, and
 He is the friend of God.

But by the end of that day
 he'll be taken from the feast
 (outside the city)
 to the hill of the skull
 where they will *strip* him of his garments
 to divide them among themselves.

They will crucify him naked.

At the 9th hour,
 he will lift his head and cry,

“My God, my god, why have you forsaken me!”

He had descended into hell
where men weep and gnash their teeth.

We don't come to church to hear how we are going to hell.
We come to church to hear how He went to hell.

People say, “If mercy is unlimited, why not sin that grace may abound?”
Why?

Because grace is my savior's blood.
Because my Jesus bears your sin in hell.
And I love Him.
That's why.

“He has clothed me with the garment of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness.” Isaiah 61:10.

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:14

“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted [given] her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.” Revelation 19:7-8

You see, the wedding garment is white linen, and the white linen is a dress. The garment is a wedding dress. He is the bride groom, and we (the wretches from the street) are His bride.

That's some pretty amazing grace.

So why share your faith?

Why invite people to church?
Why preach the Gospel?

Well,

Why watch a sunset and turn to the person next to you and say, “Isn't that beautiful?
Why eat chocolate and then talk about it?
Why sing a song?
Why kiss your groom?
Why get pregnant and bear fruit?
Because He's good, and now we see it. We see Him.

Why love?

Because He first loved us.

Why?

Because we've tasted His banquet, even in this world where men weep and gnash their teeth.

And so on the mountain, on the night that He was betrayed, He took bread and He broke it saying, “This is my body, given to you.” (Did you know that we’re supposed to put it on?)

And in the same way, after supper He took the cup and He said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you in remembrance of me. I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Do you see how Jesus could tell the truth about sin, yet be so incredibly attractive to sinners? It was because He bore their hell. He spoke truth about sin, not to legislate against sinners, that had already been done. He spoke truth about sin so sinners could see He died for them and their sins. Seeing Him is the meaning of life, Homer, and that’s why we come to church, for a little taste of His banquet.

Revelation 19:6, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” So I’m inviting you. It doesn’t matter if you’re good or bad, just that you want the banquet.

In Jesus’ name, believe the Gospel. Forsake your empiria and come to the table of the Lord. In Jesus’ name.

When I sent out invitations to my wedding banquet, I used the phone, paper, and ink. But you see what Jesus used? His very own body and His very own blood. And He used all creation as a prop for offering it to you.

Paul wrote, “God subjected the creation to futility... [all that pain, all that suffering, all that death, all that disaster]. God subjected the creation to futility in hope.” Hope of what? You coming to His banquet. Amen.

And so that’s why we tell people about Jesus because He will stop at absolutely nothing for us. And His love is good. We love because He first loved us, and so I hope you tell people. I hope you tell your friends, your neighbors. And you don’t have to do it out of fear and anxiety and worry and “Oh, did I get the words just right?” but out of a new heart. That’s the way you tell them.

And if you want to use a dvd, we’ve got them. They’re in the back. Duncan made these up. This is really cool. If you want to give one to your friends or neighbors and invite them to our Easter service, it has stuff about our church, and then the invitation’s on the back to come join us for the service. It’s just something you can use.

Remember that prophecy in Isaiah about the great banquet, the marriage supper of the Lamb? He talks about that day saying, “On *that* day, they will say, ‘Lo, this is our God. We have waited for Him that He might save us. This is the Lord. We’ve waited for Him. Let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’” That’s what they’ll say on that day. So by way of benediction, let *that day* begin. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son.”

Matthew 22:1-2

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Isaiah 25:6-9

I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth." . . . "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, 'We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

Matthew 8:11-12, 11:16-19

And sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.' But they made light of it 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 [apollumi] those murderers and burned their city.

Matthew 22:3-7

For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost [apollumi]. "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish [apollumi].

Matthew 18:11-14 (NKJV)

For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost [apollumi].

Luke 19:10

Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find." And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

Matthew 22:8-10

We have all of us been told that grace is to be found in the universe. But in our human foolishness and shortsightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite. . . . But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude.

Isak Dinesen, Babette's Feast

But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.

Matthew 22:11

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
 My soul shall be joyful in my God;
 For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
 He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
 As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments,
 And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Isaiah 61:10 (NKJV)

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Galatians 3:27

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. . . . Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

Revelation 7:13-14, 19:6-9

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; there men will weep and gnash their teeth."

Matthew 22:12-13

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Ephesians 4:8-10

For many are called, but few are chosen.

Matthew 22:14

In this function this man is the object of the eternal divine decision and foreordination. Jesus Christ, then, is not merely one of the elect, but the elect of God. . . . His election is the original and all-inclusive election; the election which is absolutely unique, but which in this very uniqueness is universally meaningful and efficacious, because it is the election of Him who Himself elects. Of none other of the elect can it be said that his election carries in it and with it the election of the rest.

Karl Barth

In the election of Jesus Christ, which is the eternal will of God, God has intended the first—namely, election, blessedness, and life for man; but the second—rejection, damnation, and death for himself.

Karl Barth

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Ephesians 1:3-4

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you

they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Romans 11:29-33

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 20:14-21:5

God wants us to consider and enjoy love in everything. And this is the knowledge of which we are most ignorant; for some of us believe that God is all mighty and has power to do everything, and that he is all wisdom and knows how to do everything, but that he is all love and is willing to do everything -- there we stop. And it seems to me that this ignorance is what most hinders those who love God; for when we begin to hate sin, and to mend our ways under the laws of Holy Church, there still remains some fear which holds us back, out of concern for ourselves, and our previous sins, and some of us for our daily sins -- for we do not keep our promises or preserve the purity in which the Lord has established us, but often fall into such sinfulness that it is shameful to see it.

Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love

Some key scriptures regarding the ultimate fate of the wicked:

Everlasting Torment:

Matthew 12:30-32, Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 16:25-26, John 3:36, Revelation 14:9-11

Annihilation:

Matthew 10:28, Luke 14:24, I Thessalonians 5:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, Hebrews 10:26-27, Revelation 20:14-15

Eventual Redemption Through Christ:

John 12:32, Romans 5:12-21, Romans 11:28-36, 1 Timothy 4:9-11, Revelation 5:13, Revelation 21:4-5