

Matthew 22:1-14

In every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. So says Newton's laws of physics. But what may be for physics is not always for us. Are our reactions always "equal"? If you've ever seen anyone yell at a minimum wage fast food worker, then you would know that sometimes our reactions aren't an equal reaction, but an overreaction.

But we all overreact don't we? Does God? It certainly seems like it in this parable. The people decline his wedding invitation and kill his servants so he kills them, OK, and then burns their cities!? Later on a guy isn't up to the dress code so they bind him and throw him into the outer darkness!? Talk about an overreaction, the King in this parable, God, maybe needs to settle down a little bit.

And that is what much of the world thinks about God and his Church. "You guys have an old book and it says things about sexuality that is just really outdated, settle down a bit." "Your God, who apparently doesn't know we aren't perfect, still threatens to toss us into suffering if we screw up once or twice."

And we know we are supposed to disagree with the statement that God is too harsh. But when you read this stuff, well, do you ever think he is sometimes? In the

parable today the Master is tossing someone into darkness because of the dress code. Jesus says that anyone who even looks at a woman, who is not his wife, with lust is committing adultery. “Surely a little day dream isn’t going to hurt anyone, right?” Don’t steal, “but a little loophole that everyone uses isn’t really stealing, right?” Don’t bear false witness, “but I can tell one person, and add one adjective to describe the person I’m spreading rumors about right?” Forgive your brother, “but if everyone knew what he did to me they wouldn’t forgive him either!” There is a lot of harsh stuff in there. And in many ways we, Christians, act like God is over-reacting and just needs to settle down a little bit.

And when we think that, and we do, when we justify our sins, “well it doesn’t apply to this, and if I do it this way, and I can still do it...” We start lowering the bar, to make ourselves look better. And when we do that, how are we any different than everyone else? We are doing nothing more than saying God has over-reacted and needs to settle down. We are saying we know what is right and wrong not God, and not surprisingly, our right and wrong is a little less strict. Probably because we are a little less good.

Put the bar up, God is not overreacting. There is Good and there is evil, and God commands good and, like any good judge, will bring justice to evil. Stop lowering

the bar, trying to justify why we can hold to a specific sin or grudge. It's all a charade! Because when we lower the bar we still can't jump over it. By our own worldly standards, we still don't measure up. We still do wrong, we still are evil. So put the bar up and own it, and confess it. "I can't do the good, I am a screw up, and I have underreacted to the evil in the world and in myself." That is our confession. And it is true. If the thoughts in our heads were made public, we all would be looking for a hole to crawl into. I confess it. And it's why I wear a white robe like the unbroken line of preachers have for over four thousand years. Because throughout history God has used black as sin people like me, to give his passionate and seemingly over-reactionary word to people like you. Because he cares about you. And longs for you to have the wedding garment of salvation.

And because he cares about you, he reacts. God reacts to the evil in the world, and it is a good thing. And so today the King, God, has a party and he desperately wants all to come, so he invites. 1 Tim 2: God desires all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. John 3:16 God so loved the World he gave his only Son. Ezekiel 33: I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He invites, because he honestly wants all to come. But they declined his gracious feast, salvation. They reject him. Even after, you may notice in the parable, he invites them a second time. Such is his patience and desire for them to come to him. Yet They prefer

their ways to his, they prefer their evil to his good. Even as Pharaoh hardened his heart, even as the Pharisees, who Jesus was telling this parable to, thought they were the best ever and jumping over all the bars and rejecting the Savior who stood in front of them because they didn't think they needed him and so they will kill him, just like they did to the servants in the parable.

But notice the first response to the invitation is apathy. The second response is murder. One leads to another. To ignore the message of the King is the first step to being hostile to the message of the King. Both are an insult to the King's Son, who the banquet is for. And clearly the King cares if his Son is insulted. So we in the pews, we may not have murdered anyone (though Jesus in the sermon on the mount sets that bar pretty high), but are we immune to apathy? "Eh, the Church thing is something I do on Sundays if the weathers not too good, or too bad." Be on your guard, hear the call of the King, believe in his Son, to not insult the Son is to believe in him – to accept the invitation.

Because we see the response to those who insult the Son and are hostile to him and his servants, "The King was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed *those murderers* and burned their city." And we might think: "So is this how God reacts

to us who fall short?” No, this is how God reacts to those who are hostile to his mercy and insult the invitation and therefore insult the Son.

We know this because as we continue the parable the King sends out an invitation again, this time to the main roads to as many as you find to both the good *and the bad*. Guess which one you are? Especially when that bar is back in the spot God places it. We are the bad, we have fallen short. So God must hate us? No! God still invites us! Because he loves us too, and all people. And the bad, with all their sin, all their evil, all their inability to jump over the bar, with all their black sin, are covered with the wedding garment, the robe which, again, symbolism here, is why we have worn them for over 4 thousand years. Symbolizing the robe of righteousness, washed in the blood of Christ given to all, who are at the master's banquet. Which is why he originally invited even those who would murder his servants. He invited them too! To come in repentance, come to my kingdom of grace and receive a robe that washes you clean! But they preferred their murder, they rejected the King's mercy, so they got the King's justice instead.

Which is why Jesus tells of the overreaction with the guy who wasn't going along with the dress code. If you don't have the robe of Jesus, you don't have the sin covered, you have your evil with you and God doesn't want evil in his party, in his

kingdom, only good, and can you blame him? Do you want the evil? The thoughts of shame, pride, pure hatred, death, sickness, the broken hearts and homes of adultery, awkwardness, and murder? No! So he casts out the evil if it is not covered in Jesus so that it may never harm his people or assault his holy presence ever again.

One additional comment here on what I think is a very real question. How can God be just in sending people to hell for eternity, for “finite” sins? I put the “finite” in quotes because I think that is debatable, but I still see the point of the question – isn’t that an overreaction from a supposedly merciful God? I bring that up not only because of the sermon theme but also because I think there is a clue in the text here. The outer darkness is here described as a place of weeping, sadness, we get that, but also “gnashing of teeth.” What is that an expression of? We might think, pain, but I will point out a word study done by Dr. Gibbs at our seminary who found that the emotion combined with this phrase in the Bible is not pain, but anger. So, for example, in Acts 7 when saint Stephen preaches to the Sanhedrin they gnash their teeth (same Greek verb) and stone him. Which I think gives an insight to the attitude of the people in hell towards the King. They don’t like him, they still desire, as with the demons who hell was made for, to overthrow him. And for any prisoner even now who is in jail for a crime they did, should they, in jail,

continue in their rebellion, and criminal ways, the sentence gets lengthened. This, of course, is only one side of a very large question, but I hope you begin to see, as we already know, that our God will not give anyone an unfair deal. He is a good judge and will not let evil go unpunished and offers an invitation to a party for a Son who is celebrated because he does the Father's will and dies as a sacrifice for the world! That's not evil, that's mercy.

So: your evil, your sin, murderer or not, cannot come to God's Holy presence. But he wants you there. So how might we separate the two, how might he wash you clean? You know this, Christians. You know this. Not by your excuses, or self-justifications – that man cast out was speechless – because he knew he had no excuse. So will all our excuses in God's courts sound so hollow, we might as well not even say them – we dare not say them!

So how can we be washed clean? You know this. The Justice and mercy of God meet at the Cross. Christ died for you, you have been claimed by him in baptism and received the robe of righteousness that covers all your sin. His death was for you, his new life is for you. So don't be afraid. And give up the charade of trying to weasel out of sin, own it, confess it, it's covered by the robe. Rejoice in his

invitation, that is much more than just attendance here, but make no mistake the Word of the Son, the fruits of his cross, are here – even as he is. So come!

When you recognize the forgiveness you have in Christ I hope you recognize that God's reaction to sin and evil *isn't* an overreaction, but the perfect reaction. He punishes evil, but he does it for all at the wedding, by killing his own Son.

Overreaction? Maybe, we certainly aren't worth it, but it is precisely what was needed to save us all. Thank God he reacts to evil. So let's hear his word, it is good and true, and share it so more might know of evil and receive their free invitation, with their free robes, to cover it. So we all might celebrate at the resurrection victory party of the Son together, forever. Amen.