

The Third Pennsylvania Sermon

~Other Speakers S-Z: Count Zinzendorf:

Held in the Reformed Church in Germantown,
on February 4th, (new style calendar), 1742.

Exerpt from the new book, Zinzendorf's Pennsylvania Sermons, tr. by Julie Weber; ed. by Craig Atwood.

Faithful and dearly beloved Savior, may your grace and truth be with us! Let us speak with each other as children in your presence. Let us not deal with futile matters, but with matters which touch our hearts and which will benefit us throughout eternity. Faithful heart, be with us as you are accustomed to being with souls, because you purchased them with your blood. May what we discuss with each other be your word and your own will.

Amen!

Text: Matthew 22:11-14

"Then the king went in to see the guests, and there he saw a person who did not have on wedding clothes. He said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' He, however, said nothing. Then the king said to his servants, 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the darkest darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Because many are called, but few are chosen.'"

We want to talk about this important text together, about the judgment of reprobation or rejection.

First, of what this consists.

Second, to whom it befalls.

Third, how it can be avoided.

The judgment of rejection is when a person who desires to be saved, who seeks to be saved, cannot be saved. As it says among other things, "Many will strive to get in and will not be able to do so." Now this is a divine truth, just as another is that there is a secret judgment of rejection, when called people cannot be saved, when people who are called and who come are turned away. Therefore it is surely worth our trouble to be certain of our salvation and our calling. As it is written, "make his call and election firm" (I Peter 1:10). This is surely a very important matter that must be discussed in a Gemeinde of the Lord and in an assembly of souls.

To be rejected naturally means not only not to be received but also to be sent away when a person is already there. There is a clear word in the Revelation to John, chapter 22, verse 15, "the dogs and magicians and fornicators, the persistently bad sinners, stand outside." The gates of the city stand open, but even so "nothing common or unclean will enter through them" (Revelation 21:27). So it is.

The judgment of rejection is not when people are refused entry because of their godlessness, because of their unbelief, because of their unfaithfulness. Those stand outside. That is the usual way in which one is saved or not. "Whoever believes will be saved. Whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Matthew 16:16).

But the judgment of rejection (I want to say it once again) is when a person diligently tries to become saved and goes so far that in his own mind, according to the logic of his reason and theology, he necessarily must be saved. And he dies thinking that it cannot be otherwise, because everything that he considers part of being saved applies to him. His reputation is indisputable and this can surely be confirmed in comparison with others. He is called, and yet when he enters into eternity, before God's throne, not only is he not saved, not only is he condemned, he is condemned with scorn and disgrace.

"You will see many coming from the east and west and sitting at the table in the heavenly kingdom with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but you will be thrown out" (Luke 13:28). Who will be thrown out? Perhaps children of evil? No, children of the Kingdom (Matthew 8:12). This, however, is clearer in the next section. There we see "whom this befalls."

"The king went in to see the guests and saw a person there who was not wearing wedding clothes," and so on. You see quite plainly from this, dear friends, that it is rare to see such people in God's kingdom.

These are not people who walk the broad road, who go down the big street which leads to damnation. These are not people whom one might lose among the masses and have to look for, who live godless lives, who will obviously be lost. Rather, these are people whom God's servants hardly have the heart to call unconverted, who have an appearance that not only deceives them but also all the others with whom they deal. These are

people who have so much to say about the matter, who know how to make so many objections, that they even close the mouths of the Lord's servants. They force themselves, so to speak, upon the community of God's children, and not all kinds of God's children are able to fend them off.

"How did you get in?" asks the king, "without wearing a wedding garment?" However he remained silent. From his silence we can see clearly that he knew what was going on. He understood what the king meant by the question, and he knew that there was nothing to reply. Oh, I very sincerely ask you to consider carefully the subject of reprobation! The man understood what was going on, I say. He had no good reply.

In what then did his disgrace and his confusion consist? Precisely in the subject which was being discussed and which then silenced him.

It would seem that he could have given the king an important answer. He could have silenced the king. The king asks, "How did you get in here?" He could have answered, "I was called."

"Why don't you have on a beautiful garment?" "Where should the people who were fetched from the roads and fields get them? They were fetched just as they were, beggars, blind people, and lame people. Where should they have gotten them? Just as they all came in their rags, so did I."

That would have been an answer to which there was no rebuttal, if the talk had been about beautiful clothing at all. Thus there must have been something else behind the wedding clothing. It does not have to say "beautiful clothing." It does not have to say, "How did you get in here without beautiful clothing on?" but rather, "You do not have the clothing on that others are wearing." Because the beggars were wearing wedding clothing given to them. He was the only exception; he did not have this.

Why didn't he have it? Because without a doubt he had the most beautiful clothing of those who had arrived at the same time he did.

It was easy to persuade the beggars, the blind, and the lame that they needed different wedding clothing. As they were about to enter the wedding hall, they thanked God that they had been given a garment of honor to wear, for which they were not allowed to pay. But when the proud man, the well-dressed man who came pretty much as he had been on the street, was supposed to put on a garment, he says, "My garment looks better. I do not need one. No prince can be ashamed of a garment like mine." The servants thought this was surely so and let him in. The king came to see the guests and found a single one sitting among them who did not have on the robe which the king had had distributed.

So that my friends do not think that this is just an invention of mine, I will explain it clearly. In the country in which the Savior spoke, it was customary for everyone who came to a wedding, or who was a guest of a respected man, to receive festive clothing when he entered the house. This was made so that it was put on over the other clothing. In Turkey this is called a "Pelz" or also a "Caftan" and even today this is customary in the whole Orient. If the ambassador of a great potentate, of the Roman emperor himself, wants to have an audience, he must put on such a robe of honor. Even if his own clothing abounds with gold and silver and is set with precious stones, the gentleman must appear with the robe of honor over this.

Now you can understand the mystery of why the well-dressed man did not accept the wedding garment. Now you can see why the king addresses him thus and why he does not have an answer for the king. His heart tells him that he has nothing honorable to say. He sees what the robe means. His head begins to swim with the realization that he is wrong, but it is too late.

"Bind his hands and feet," says the king, "and throw him out into the darkest darkness." That is the judgment of rejection.

"He brings down the powerful from their seats and raises the lowly" (Luke 1: 52). All haughty people, all conceited people, all self-righteous people, all sanctimonious people, all people who have justification other than that based in the blood of Jesus and his merits, who try to amass holiness from all books, experiences and exercises and who spend their lives doing this and are worshipped by half the world, these are the people who need no wedding garment. When they are offered the wedding garment, when you tell them about Christ's blood and righteousness and that this is the jewelry and garment of honor with which one must stand before God, as long as they are in the world they think these are children's matters, these are details. They could have experienced this in another way. They knew better; they were either well beyond this or they had deeper insights into this.

And they come out of the world before God's throne with this same proud, blind mind, without becoming sober. They are let in, resulting in their prostitution. They are asked why they come and yet do not have the very customary wedding garment on. They know nothing to answer. They have often heard, "You will be sent away before all sinful saints, not with the Savior's compassion like the other creatures, but with disdain." Because this is part of being rejected.

That is the reason. That is what it means when the Savior says, "Many are called, but few are chosen." The called ones always have a reason. One person is called and does not come, but excuses himself. The other comes, but does not come rightly. Rather he comes with a proud spirit, with pretensions about himself. He would rather bring things along with him than be given things.

If we ever have to be prostituted, how fortunate we would be, how good it would be, if this happened here in the world! Esau was a great despiser. He thought it would be a small thing to sell his birthright. When he later wanted to have it back again, he found no way to do this even though he tried with tears. "Beware" says the apostle, "that no one among you is the kind of man who disregards common grace, the beggar's grace" (Hebrews 12:15-16, alt.).

This is not unusual. Naaman almost did just the same. He thought a prophet should have a lot of special ceremonies, or lead deep discussions. "The prophet said, 'Wash yourself in the Jordan.' 'Oh,' he thought, 'if there is nothing else, I could have done this better in my country.'â€™ His servants, however, said, 'Dear Father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, you would not have taken it lightly. How much more so when he says, â€Wash yourself, you will become clean.â€™ And he washed himself and became clean" (II Kings 5:13-14).

Thus it is always as the Savior says, "The strong do not need a doctor, but the sick" (Matthew 9:12).
Whoever needs nothing receives nothing.
Whoever is not poor will not become rich.
Whoever bears no sorrow will not be comforted.
Whoever is not sick will not become healthy.
Whoever is not lost will not be sought by the Lamb, much less found.
Whoever is not naked, whoever does not feel his nakedness and desire clothing, receives none.

This is a sad but true matter. And therein lies the whole mystery of the truth of rejection. This means that all proud spirits who do not want to bow down, who do not want to get down in the dust, who are not poor in spirit, who do not want to be ill, who do not want to go on the same road which every other poor sinner and beggar takes when he goes to heaven, will perhaps be let in, but for no other purpose than being all the more publicly thrown out.

Thus their security comes during their life. Thus it happens that their pretensions about themselves increase from year to year. It is just the same hardness of heart which Pharaoh experienced. Because he who so loves broken hearts demonstrates his power on such proud spirits and demonstrates it rightly on them. He can wait them out. He can bear them with patience, with immeasurable patience. But they go to the well too often.

" â€Just for this I have let you recover over and over, awakened you out of unconsciousness, reestablished you time after time, so that through you I might make quite public my power to help and to ruin,â€™ says the Lord of Pharaoh" (Exodus 9:16).

And when they break, then it happens cum emphasi, with emphasis, with power, with a clatter. They are cast out as an example for others.

"And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:27).

Thirdly, how can this be avoided? Who will gladly come for nothing? Who will gladly deceive himself about his eternal salvation? Who will gladly leave the broad road and take the narrow road to the wedding house with the others, and afterwards still be sent away? Surely no one wants this.

Now there is two-fold advice against this. The first advice is for people like those who have just been described. The other is for people who have the fortune of being poor, blind and so on.

The first advice is, briefly, that which the Savior himself gives in Luke 14, when he gave a warning to people who were fighting over positions at a public meal. This serves all the more for our purpose since he gave it to them on an occasion which has some relationship to the parable of the wedding.

"If you are invited to a wedding," he says, "do not sit at the head of the table, because someone more honorable than you may have been invited. Then the one who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this place to him,' and you must then sit with disgrace at the foot of the table. Rather when you are invited, go and sit at the foot of the table. Then when the one who invited you comes he will say, 'Friend, move to a better place.' Then you will have the honor before those with whom you sit at the table. Because whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:8-11).

It is no different in the world. Whoever has exalted himself and yet has so much love for his soul that he does not want to continue this drama into eternity, whoever does not want to be openly shamed in eternity, must allow himself to be brought down from his heights in the world. He must allow people to say, "The poor sinners are more honest than you are; let them move up to the head of the table. You sit down at the foot."

Whoever loves his soul must be satisfied with the disgrace that for twenty, thirty years he dreamed a false Christianity for himself, made a religion that had no basis. He would have been saved if he had remained with the simple foundations he learned from the catechism from his youth on. He will be lost because he fooled himself, studied all the theosophists, and in the process lost his way and his faith.

If a man can admit, and does not allow himself to regret saying, "The beetles have eaten the past years; I want to turn to the Lamb. I will change and become a child. He may replace my years out of grace and do what he pleases with me," this is what it means then to sit at the foot of the table.

In this way a person can be helped. And this is a blessing a person must manage in the world, because if he waits until eternity then he will be sent away with disgrace and insult. And if a person knew what to say in the world, had plenty of responses, always had to have the last word, then he has to remain silent in eternity.

The second thing people who recognize themselves as poor and wretched, who know that there is nothing good about themselves, should note is this. They must be lost if they are not helped. They will be called from the streets and fields and come and say, "What should we do? We are not dressed for the wedding. It must not be meant for us. What will the Lord Jesus do with such a bad person, with such a greedy, arrogant, envious, irksome person as I am? What will he do with such a dumb person who hardly knows what he wants, who hardly has a concept of what goes along with salvation? Surely he does not mean me."

"Yes," say the servants. "We have instructions. We are supposed to bring people in from the streets and fields, as we find them, bad and good, without distinction. We are not supposed to treat the good ones better and the bad ones worse."

"May I also come then?" "Yes, indeed."

If a person comes, then someone says to him, "You were afraid and worried about how you should appear at the wedding because you have no wedding garment. This is taken care of. I will give you a garment, a white garment, which you can put on."

"That would be well enough. But I cannot pay."

"You will receive it as a gift. This is the garment which all receive, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the white silk of the saints, the innocence of the Lamb, sprinkled with his blood." That is the adornment and the garment of honor in which one can stand before God.

And then a person only needs to be childlike and simple, just allow this to be given to him and take it, and in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to put on the clothing he is given as a person puts on his robe early without great effort. He should think, "I am indeed not allowed to do anything. I am only allowed to receive gifts. I want to do this too. He can give me as much grace and give to me as richly as he wants to. He can adorn me as he pleases. I know well that I have no right to this, but I will accept it." To be joyful about the clothing and to accept it with deep gratitude, this is to have a taste for the matter, to desire it, to have a will for it. This is enough.

But now actually to say, "What then does the garment mean?" It means precisely what a proper garment means in the world.

People are generally accustomed to dressing properly. Then, if they appear before people for whom they have respect, they dress even more respectably. They do not do this out of arrogance, not because of their own person, but out of respect for those persons who come to them or to whom they go. If someone is dressed in his everyday manner and someone for whom he has respect comes to him, it is not arrogance if he then puts on a coat or vest if he was in his shirt. It is, rather, an act of respect.

Thus it is proper for a person to come to heaven overdressed. Respect for the living God, the impression which is already in his mind, brings this along with it. The apostle says this about it, "Thus indeed, where we are dressed and not just found naked. We have a building, we have a palace, but we must go there dressed" (II Corinthians 5:2-3). That is all that we are lacking.

Now if we look at ourselves in our misery, in our bad circumstances, we say, "Dear God, I cannot dress and adorn myself. I cannot make myself beautiful. Where do I get a garment? I cannot appear before the majestic God." It is written, "What you do not have, he has in abundance." The death of the Lamb, the blood that was shed on the cross, adorned all of us at once. And whoever has received a living impression of this in his heart, whoever has sincerely sighed and pleaded, "Oh, clothe me in your righteousness!" puts on the Savior's merit and "the blessing of his cross, like a shirt, like a robe." That is a biblical way of speaking.

Just as we put on Satan's evil nature, his evil being, through the fall, we put on the Lord Jesus, his blessing, his merit, everything holy and glorious about him. This is extended to a person; it is given. The Father in heaven looks at a person as someone who is blessed in his Son, who is pardoned, who is covered with his Son, who no longer appears in his natural nakedness, but rather stands with Jesus under one cloak, under one garment, under one glorious adornment of honor.

I do not hesitate to include the making honest of dishonest children under the cloak, because what happens to them truly happens to us. It is, in the end, what the prophet says, "He put the clothing of salvation on me and dressed me in the cloak of righteousness, like a groom is adorned with priestly finery and like a bride adorns herself with jewels" (Isaiah 61:10).

It is given purely as a gift, purely someone else's, nothing of our own. All of our virtues, all of our goodness, all of our gentleness, humility, childlikeness, beneficence, and whatever names the virtues have, this is all clothing which is completely good. However, it is not the clothing in which we can stand before God. "Above all this, the Lord Jesus Christ," above all this, his righteousness, his blood and death. It is thus the closest thing, the lowest and highest, shirt and caftan, the necessary and the honorable.

All external exercises, all good things are also to be used if we have the Savior, but above all things we must have him. If our nakedness is covered with him, then all virtues, all the happiness that is given to us, all levels of sanctification are put on us like jewelry. But over all of this comes the garment of honor, so that a person can stand on the day of the Lord, not in virtues, not in beautiful things, but rather in the only royal garment on which the little Lamb has sprinkled his blood, in which he has wrapped his believers.

This is their priestly cloak, their sign that they belong to the Savior, their uniform. With this a person can show God that he has a part in him.

"Friend! How did you get in here?" "You dressed me in righteousness."

Because salvation depends on this: the Savior must acknowledge us. If the Savior does this, then we are helped. However, if the Savior does not announce someone and acknowledge him before his Father, but says, "I do not know you or where you come from," then even if a person has driven out devils, "brought half the world to God and under the feet of religion," he can still be sent away.

God looks at the heart. He makes himself known to the lowliest child who has grace. If the Savior does not find an honest heart and a soul wrapped in righteousness in the most important witness, the most respected saint, the greatest prophet who had many blessings in the world, then he does not declare himself to him. Thus everything depends on the Savior and on his declaration.

Being rejected thus amounts to a person being called, coming, and still sent away. But this happens only to those who stand high, who have no need of righteousness, who are holy enough that, in their imagination, they lack nothing.

Those, however, who come to Jesus as poor sinners, who bring no righteousness, no words, no holiness, nothing but nakedness and poverty, they can receive the garment of honor. Such people are not turned away.

They are not thrown out into the darkness but can walk in the light of life.

May the Savior bring about such a mind in us so that we faithfully guard against all such pretensions of our own and allow ourselves to be saved from them. They have brought ruin to so many people in so many hundreds of years; they have completely destroyed people and blinded them throughout their lives. They set the Bishop of Laodicia in such a troubled state that the Lord said to him, "You say, 'I am rich and have enough to eat and need nothing,'^{â€™} and do not know that you are a wretched, poor person" (Revelation 3:17).

Let us not look for these people among the Turks and Tartars or among the heathen, but in the places where we see and hear the most good. The angel of the Gemeine at Laodicia describes such a person, and he has many like him.

Although there are not a lot in an assembly, there are still many in general, and it will not be easy to find a place where there are none. Surely the most necessary thing is for us to allow ourselves to be called and to come.

Perhaps a very few among us will be worried that they will be sent away in this way with disgrace and insult. Because of spiritual arrogance, they will not begin their conversion. However, it is like this with anyone who is this foolish and does not consider the matter great enough, not important enough, anyone who excuses himself with his nourishment or with his sins or with his household (as we hear in this same chapter from which our text comes, that one person excuses himself this way and another one another way). They do not get around to it at all. "I swear," it is written, "that none of the men who are invited will taste my Holy Supper" (Luke 14:24).

Thus two dangerous issues arise with the wedding invitation. On the one hand there is not coming, being lazy, indolent, being negligent, if the voice of God's Son allows itself to be heard. That is called remaining outside.

On the other hand there is depending on yourself, on your own authority, on your beautiful clothing, on your own sanctity. This brings reprobation.

The kind of people, however, who allow themselves to be called and then come with trembling and shaking and think, "What should I do there? This grace is too great for me!" These are the ones who accept it. They allow it to be given to them because Jesus came to bless us. They put on the clothing of righteousness, the merit of Jesus. These are the ones who rejoice over the great salvation. In that clothing they await the appearance of his joy. They will taste the wedding. They will not only celebrate the Lord's Supper with Jesus, and he with them, but they will also eat his flesh and drink his blood until they have something new again with Jesus in his Father's kingdom.

My dear Savior, you great and living Lord, you King of Saints who were saved by grace, through faith, and this not from themselves. It was your gift! We ask you in a childlike way and sincerely to accept all of us and to call many in this service to yourself, and to give them the clothing of your righteousness. We ask you to let them be numbered among your guests. Let them enjoy a foretaste here of what they will have there completely.

Have mercy also on the others who consider themselves wise, clothed, rich, completely satisfied, and who do not know their wretchedness. On their behalf we also call upon you in a childlike way to present yourself before their eyes so authoritatively, so bloodily, so divinely, that they learn to lower themselves in the world and are not finally sent away from there with disgrace and insult.

Give us, your poor children, the grace to know you and to remain clothed in your righteousness, and to wash our own clothes in your blood and not to put on our finery until your day. Do this for your own sake. Amen!