

Invited to the Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet
(Lk 14.15—24)

22 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.” ¹

Ready or not, here comes Jesus with an invitation. The kingdom of God is at hand. You are invited to enter. Your name is on the invitation list. The new order of existence, where God rules the human heart by love, confronted us in Jesus. Membership to the kingdom of heaven is open to all. The invitation is for everyone, no one is excluded from the guest list. The invitation is as deep as the grace of God and as wide as the peace of God.² These are the opening words of a sermon by Herman Winberry entitled “You are Invited.”

You may remember from previous sermons that the Jewish religious leaders had demanded that Jesus explain by what authority he had done His ministry. As the custodians of the spiritual life of the nation, they had the right to ask this

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Mt 22:1-14

² Bergland, John K., editor, *Abingdon Preacher’s Annual 1993*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992, 318-323

question of Jesus. However they had witnessed Jesus' three years of ministry, and they still would not face the facts that He was sent from God.

Last week's scripture was a follow-up to Jesus' teaching about their lack of faith and lack of follow-through when it came to doing God's will. God had given His people everything they needed to give Him the fruits for His glory, but they had rejected God's servants and now they were rejecting His Son, who would, with his death and resurrection become the foundation stone of the church. Of course, the Jewish leaders knew the messianic importance of the Scripture Jesus quoted. They were the builders who rejected the stone (Acts 4:11), who would be ultimately judged and crushed to bits.

In our scripture today, Jesus tells a third parable. Again we meet the Father and the Son; and the Son is alive and has a bride. Jesus again referred to God's work in offering the kingdom. The king had made plans for a wedding banquet for his son. His servants had told those invited that it was time for the banquet, but the invitation was ignored and the guests refused to come. Further effort was put forth to extend the invitation but the same result followed.

This is difficult for us to understand, however this was completely in accordance with normal Jewish customs. When the invitations to a great feast, like a wedding feast, were sent out, the time was not stated; and when everything was ready the servants were sent out with a final summons to tell the guests to come. So, then, the king in this parable had long ago sent out his invitations; but it was not until everything was prepared that the final summons was issued.

Since the offer was rejected to the point of mistreating and killing the servants, the king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. But the wedding banquet was prepared. Since those who were first invited had rejected the invitation, opportunity to attend was extended to a broader group, to the good and the bad.

In this instance Jesus took a story that were already familiar to his hearers and used it to make his point. The Rabbis told of a king who invited his guests to a feast, without telling them the exact date and time; but he did tell them that they must wash, and anoint, and clothe themselves that they might be ready when the summons came. The wise prepared themselves at once, and took their places waiting at the palace door, for they believed that in a palace a feast could be prepared so quickly that there would be no long warning. The foolish believed that it would take a long time to make the necessary preparations and that they would have plenty of time. So they went, the mason to his lime, the potter to his clay, the smith to his furnace, the fuller to his bleaching-ground, and went on with their work. Then, suddenly, the summons to the feast came without any warning. The wise were ready to sit down, and the king rejoiced over them, and they ate and drank. But those who had not arrayed themselves in their wedding garments had to stand outside, sad and hungry, and look on at the joy that they had lost. That rabbinic parable tells of the duty of preparedness for the summons of God, and the garments stand for the preparation that must be made.

This part of the parable has much to say to us. It reminds us that the invitation of God is to a feast as joyous as a wedding feast. His invitation is to joy. To think of Christianity as a gloomy giving up of everything which brings laughter and sunshine and happy fellowship is to mistake its whole nature. It is to joy that the Christian is invited; and it is joy one misses, if we refuse the invitation.

The parable reminds us that the things which make us deaf to the invitation of Christ are not necessarily bad in themselves. One man went to his estate; the other to his business. They did not go off on a wild immoral adventure. They went off on the task of efficiently administering their business life. It is very easy for us to be so busy with the things of time that we forgets the things of eternity, to be so preoccupied with the things which are seen that we forget the things which are

unseen, to hear so insistently the claims of the world that we cannot hear the soft invitation of the voice of Christ. The tragedy of life is that it is so often the second bests which shut out the bests, that it is things which are good in themselves which shut out the things that are supreme. We can be so busy making a living that we fail to make a life; we can be so busy with the administration and the organization of life that we forget life itself.

The parable reminds us that the appeal of Christ is not so much to consider how we will be punished as it is to see what we will miss, if we do not take His way of things. Those who would not come were punished, but their real tragedy was that they lost the joy of the wedding feast. If we refuse the invitation of Christ, some day our greatest pain will lie, not in the things we suffer, but in the realization of the precious things we have missed.

The parable reminds us that in the last analysis, God's invitation is the invitation of grace. Those who were gathered in from the highways and the byways (you know Jean, Linda, Alice, Diane, Lila, Sandy, Lucille, Wendy, Murietta, Doris, Ruth, Betty, Inetta, Doyle, Bill, Aaron, Bob, Dick, Steve, Jack, Leroy, Verne...you get the idea) had no claim on the king at all; they could never by any stretch of imagination have expected an invitation to the wedding feast, and definitely they could never have deserved it. It came to them from nothing other than the wide-armed, open-hearted, generous hospitality of the king. It was grace that offered the invitation and grace which gathered them in.

But Jesus put a warning in the parable. The king noticed a guest who appeared at a royal wedding feast without a wedding garment. Though the invitation was extended to both good and bad, individual preparation was still necessary. He had failed to use what the king provided because he was not wearing the proper wedding clothes. Apparently the king gave them all wedding clothes as they arrived, because they came off the streets [v. 10].

Jesus' audience was also familiar with a similar rabbinic parable that told how a king entrusted to his servants royal robes. Those who were wise took the robes, and carefully stored them away, and kept them in all their pristine loveliness. Those who were foolish wore the robes to their work, and soiled and stained them. The day came when the king demanded the robes back. The wise handed them back fresh and clean; so the king laid up the robes in his treasury and told them to go in peace. The foolish handed them back stained and soiled. The king commanded that the robes should be given to the fuller to cleanse, and that the foolish servants should be cast into prison. This parable teaches that a man must hand back his soul to God in all its original purity; but that the man who has nothing but a stained soul to render back stands condemned.

A person must respond not only outwardly, but also they must be rightly related to God the King by appropriating all the King provides. While the kingdom had now been expanded to include individuals from all races and backgrounds as many are invited, an individual response is required.³

Salvation is personal and individual. We must accept what God gives to us—the righteousness of Christ—and not try to make it on our own.

The nation's leaders were guilty of spiritual blindness, hypocrisy, and deliberate disobedience to the Word. Instead of accepting this indictment from Jesus, and repenting, they decided to attack Him and argue with Him. The ultimate result was judgment. We should be careful not to follow their example of disobedience.⁴

This parable has nothing to do with the clothes in which we come to church; it has everything to do with the spirit in which we come to God's house. It is profoundly true that church-going must never be a fashion show. But there are

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:70

⁴Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 21:23

garments of the mind and of the heart and of the soul—the garment of expectation, the garment of humble penitence, the garment of faith, the garment of reverence—and these are the garments without which we ought not to approach God. Too often we come to God's house with no preparation at all; if every man and woman in our congregations came to church prepared to worship, after a little prayer, a little thought, and a little self-examination, then worship would be worship indeed—the worship in which and through which things happen in our souls and in the life of the Church and in the affairs of the world.⁵

Jesus invites us to come to the feast and enter the joy of the kingdom of God. He holds the door open and beckons us in. What will you do with his invitation?

⁵ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume 2*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible, Rev. Ed), S. 265