

Parable of the Wedding Feast
Matthew 22:1-14
ABC 7/12/20

Around the world weddings are a time of joy & celebration. It's an honor to be invited to such an important event. The weddings of royals always draw attention. Most of us remember Prince Charles & Lady Diana's wedding back in 1981. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered in London to catch a glimpse of them & an estimated 750 million more around the world watched on TV.¹ Prince Harry & Meghan Markle's wedding cost more than \$45 million.² Needless to say, weddings of royalty are a big deal & have been since the beginning. To be invited to the wedding of a king's son is an honor. Today we find ourselves viewing a royal wedding in Mt 22. But let's remember the context before we get to it. After Jesus cleansed the temple, He was confronted by the religious leaders who questioned His authority to do so. In response, Jesus asked them about the baptism of John, whether it was from heaven or from men. In asking this, Jesus wasn't evading their question, He was driving them into a corner. If they answered, **from heaven**, He'd say, **why did you not believe him?** If they answered, **from men**, they'd face the hostility of the crowd. So they punted & said, **We do not know** (21:23-27). Jesus didn't drop it. Instead, by means of the parable of the 2 sons, He exposed their self-righteousness & lack of repentance. The 1st son refused his father's order to work in the vineyard, but he later repented & went. The 2nd son said he'd go but didn't (28-30). The 2 sons represent sinners who repent & self-righteous people who think they need no repentance. Jesus was direct as He applied the parable to these rulers. He deliberately chose 2 classes of people who were the scum of society, tax-collectors & prostitutes, & said, **Truly I say to you that the tax collectors & prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you** (31). He then told them the parable of the wicked tenants (33-46), concluding with Jesus telling them, **the kingdom of God will be taken away from you & given to a people, producing the fruit of it** (43). This week, we have the 3rd parable in this trilogy which is introduced with the simple statement, **Jesus**

¹ Tanya Mohn, www.forbes.com/sites/tanyamohn/2016/04/15/the-10-most-extravagant-weddings-how-billionaires-celebrities-and-royals-get-married-kate-middleton-donald-trump/#7fa96afd6b20

² Tanza Loudonback, www.businessinsider.com/cost-of-royal-wedding-prince-harry-megan-markle-vs-prince-william-kate-2018-5

spoke to them again in parables, saying... No other introduction is necessary because the context is still the same. These parables have been summarized like this:

The 3 parables in this series are similar to 3 concentric circles in their scope. The scope of the parable of the 2 sons encompassed Israel's leaders (21:28-32). The parable of the wicked tenant farmers exposed the leaders' lack of responsibility & their guilt to the people listening in as well as to the leaders themselves (21:33-46). This last parable is the broadest of the 3. It condemned the contempt with which Israel as a whole had treated God's grace to her.³

We'll examine this parable by dividing it into 4 scenes. This wedding feast involves a king & his son, some ornery invitees, cold-blooded murder, the destruction of cities, & a ragtag group of last minute guests, one of which is kicked out.

Scene #1: The 1st & 2nd Invitation & Refusal 2-3

Jewish weddings were different than ours today in that it often included more than a ceremony; it also involved a huge banquet as well (4). The **wedding feast** was inseparable from the wedding itself, which often involved a week-long series of meals & festivities. For a royal wedding, the celebration could last for several weeks. Guests were invited to stay at the house of the groom's parents for the entire time & the father would make as elaborate provisions as he could afford. This royal wedding Jesus tells about represents the greatest festivity imaginable, given by the greatest monarch imaginable, for the most-honored guests imaginable. 1st, an invitation went out to those the king wanted at his son's wedding so they could plan to be ready for the festivities at a future date. The fact they'd **been invited** indicates they were asked earlier & knew they were expected to attend. When the day approached, the king sent his servants out to tell the guests to come. This invitation shouldn't have been viewed as a burdensome duty, but a joyful privilege of fellowship with the king. It seems inconceivable **they were unwilling to come**. As with the parable of the wicked tenants, it's the shockingly extreme & unthinkable nature of the events mentioned that are central to the story's point. Jesus' hearers would've begun to think, *Who would do such a thing? That's preposterous!* Attending the royal wedding would be an even greater experience than receiving the invitation & would've provided the finest food & fellowship in the land. Not only that, but an invitation from one's king not only brought honor but obligation. It was a serious

³ Thomas Constable, www.studydrive.org/commentaries/dcc/matthew-22.html

offense to spurn the king's favor. It seems strange that those invited refused an invitation to a royal wedding. The unwillingness to accept the invitation was active rebellion. Jesus is using this parable to accuse the Jewish people who've been rejecting Him as having a rebellious heart toward their King & His Son, the Messiah. God's invitation into His kingdom is a privilege & an honor & those who refuse show their rebelliousness toward Him.

Scene #2: The 3rd Invitation & Refusal 4

The king is patient in continuing to issue repeated invitations. People knew the wedding day was coming but when the day came & the servants were sent out to bring in the guests, those invited were unwilling to come. This 3rd invitation gives details about the greatness & the readiness of the feast in order to further entice the guests to come. Even if they don't care about the king's son, they might want to enjoy the feast & festivities that's been prepared for them. But this wasn't the case. **5-6**

As before, those invited disregarded the call from the king, except their refusal this time was even more absurd & brutal. Many were coldly indifferent, acting as if the wedding were of no consequence. They responded by carrying on business as usual. They **went their way**, doing the things they'd normally do, looking after their own interests. They were so selfishly preoccupied with concerns for profit that the invitation & the repeated calls of the king to attend his son's wedding were ignored. They willingly & purposely forfeited the honor of the wedding for the sake of their everyday, mundane, self-serving endeavors. They weren't concerned about the king's honor but only about what they thought were their own best interests. Their selfish concerns left them apathetic about the king's invitation. Yet such apathy was mild in comparison to what others did. They were offended at the king's persistence & in an act of unbelievably brutal arrogance, they **seized the king's slaves & mistreated them & killed them**. Contempt for the king's servants demonstrated contempt for the king himself & in mistreating & killing his slaves they committed rebellion. This stresses a point made in the preceding parable where the Jews had mistreated & killed the servants who'd been sent: **21:35-36**

But despite the warning given, the Jewish leaders still plotted to kill Jesus! Immediately before our parable we read: **21:45-46**

Almighty God had invited His chosen people to receive His Son, their Messiah, & to enter into the full blessings of His kingdom. But His invitation was met with indifference, then with scorn, & finally with violence. & yet, He patiently continued to issue the invitation, *Come! Everything is made ready! Come to the wedding!* What a horrible thing it is to harden one's heart against the greatest invitation ever given! But what a patient God it is that gives the invitation again & again & again. Many today don't see this parable as applicable to them. They think they'd never reject such an invitation & would never try to kill God's messengers with His gracious invitation. But their rejection is still rebellion, even if it's nothing more than an apathy toward the things of God. May He prevent any of us from such an apathetic, rebellious, unbelieving heart! Especially since such a heart deserves the wrath of God. The point of the multiple invites was to illustrate God's gracious patience & forbearance with the rejecters, His willingness to call Israel again & again. **7**

This depicts the punishment of the rebellious subjects who rejected the king's call. God's patience has limits. **The king** would've been perfectly justified in punishing the offenders when they ignored His call. After His repeated invitations & their repeated wicked responses, He finally became **enraged**. As Prov 20:2 says, **The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to anger forfeits his own life.** That's true here. The king sent his armies & they destroyed those who'd killed his servants & set the city on fire! This all must have happened with shocking swiftness because the wedding feast would still go on as scheduled. To scorn the gracious offer to attend the wedding feast of the king's son was to rebel against the king himself. Therefore, to scorn the offer to receive God's Son as King is to scorn God Himself. As Jesus said, **He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him** (Jn 5:23b). & there comes a time when the Father's patience is exhausted toward those who reject His Son. The day came within 40 years of Jesus speaking these words, that the Roman armies came & destroyed Jerusalem. **Not one stone** of the temple, as Jesus had warned, would **be left upon another** (Mt 24:2). This wasn't an arbitrary act by God. It's an act of His justice because they'd rebelled against Him. He's reminding us of the

judgment that awaits all those trifle with God. God isn't a cosmic Santa Claus. He's the God of love & justice, of mercy & judgment, & of grace & righteousness. & He won't tolerate wickedness & rebellion forever. & so Jesus is giving us a picture of the judgment to come. Let this be a lesson about the Father to us today as well. He's patient toward those who're hardened against Him. He'll allow time for repentance & belief & will graciously offer repeated invitations. He isn't willing that any perish, but that all come to repentance (2 Pt 3:9). But even so, there does come a time when the offers cease & the outpouring of His wrath begins. The judgment of the king is seen not only by this act of destruction but in his offering the invitation to others, which leads to us to the next scene of the parable.

Scene #3: The 4th Invitation & Acceptance 8

Their unworthiness wasn't because they lacked the required righteousness. Neither the original invitation nor the following calls were based on merit but only on the king's gracious favor. No one was invited because they were considered worthy & their rejection of the invitation revealed how unworthy they actually were. They rebelled because they were sinful people & thus the invitation offered to them was an invitation of grace all along. The people God here declared **not worthy** were His chosen people, Israel, who wouldn't come to Him freely & without merit through His Son. & because they rejected the Son, God rejected them for a season. Because they rejected their own Messiah, they were temporarily cast off as a nation & as God's unique chosen people. **9-10**

Since those who should've been expected to accept the invitation refused it, those who otherwise wouldn't have been invited were asked instead. The plan was for the servants to go everywhere & find everyone they could & **invite** them to come. That's precisely what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission: **Go therefore & make disciples of all the nations** (Mt 28:19). Jesus tells us that they gathered all they could find, **both evil & good**. There were no qualifications. Whoever they may be, wherever they were, if they were found, they were invited. & when it was over, the banquet hall was filled with happy guests, people who perhaps were beggars, sinners, or even foreigners, people who never would've expected they'd be so blessed as to sit at the wedding feast of the son of a king. Yet there they were! What makes one worthy? To Matthew, worthiness comes

through acceptance of the invitation. Faith is the key to becoming worthy. Who makes you worthy? The One who graciously invited you. Worthiness isn't the result of merit. It's the result of faith in the only One who has merit. I think when Jesus refers to **both evil & good** He has in mind those who were good or bad in the sight of men; those who were considered righteous & those who would've been considered unrighteous by the Jews. Those considered **evil** by the Jews would, of course, include Gentiles, who we know are also invited to the great wedding banquet of the Son, a fact for which I'm extremely grateful! The original guests hadn't been invited because of their moral or spiritual superiority & neither were the newly-invited guests. This reflects an emphasis found earlier when Jesus had warned the Jewish leaders, saying, **21:31-32**.

What a good reminder to us that the kingdom of God is for everyone. & we're told to share the invitation to the kingdom with everyone, whether they're society's accepted ones or those thought of as the rejects of society. All are invited & all that accept the invitation may come. All who accept God's invitation to His Son's celebration, that is, who follow the Son as their saving Lord, will be **dinner guests** in His divine & eternally glorious **wedding hall**. The unrestricted offer of the gospel & the provision of the Father's glory at that marriage feast are rooted in His desire to honor the Son. The fact is, the sacrifice of Christ is for all, no matter the race, nationality, sex, or social standing. God desires all to come to Christ. But there will be some who appear to accept the invitation even though they don't really accept the King's terms of inclusion. This is seen in the last scene of the parable

Scene #4: The Guest Without a Proper Garment 11-13

The man obviously had been included in the invitation because the king made no restrictions as to who was invited. He wasn't a party crasher who came without an invitation, but he'd come improperly **dressed** & stood out in contrast to the other **dinner guests**. At 1st reading, we wonder how any of those who accepted the invitation could've been expected to come properly attired. They'd been rounded up from every part of the land & many had been taken off the streets. Even if they had time to dress properly, they had no clothes fit for the wedding of the king's son. But the fact that all of **the dinner guests** except that one man were **dressed in wedding clothes** indicates

the king had made provision for such **clothes**. It would've been a moral mockery, especially for such an obviously kind & gracious king, to invite even the most wicked people in the land to come to the feast & then exclude one poor fellow because he didn't have the proper clothes to wear. The man who appeared without them was deliberately flouting the king's offer of appropriate clothing.⁴ Perhaps he thought his own were good enough. This man was fully accountable for being improperly dressed, but the gracious king nevertheless gave him an opportunity to justify himself, asking, **Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?** Had the man had a good reason, he'd certainly have mentioned it. But **he was speechless**, unable to offer the king even the feeblest excuse. It's obvious he could've come in **wedding clothes** had he been willing. Until this point he was presumptuous, thinking he could come on his own terms, in any clothes he wanted. He was proud & self-willed, & worst of all, insulting to the king. Arrogantly defying royal protocol, he was determined to be himself. Since Cain's 1st attempt to please God by offering his self-appointed sacrifice, men have been trying to come to God on their own terms & it never works. The lesson Jesus wanted to teach was that individual faith in Jesus was necessary for entrance. What's needed to be properly clothed is a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes & Pharisees (Mt 5:20) & this is the righteousness of Christ. Jesus may have had a couple of OT passages in mind here. For example, in the days of Josiah, the prophet Zephaniah made use of the banquet metaphor when he warned of God's coming judgment on Jerusalem:

Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near, For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests. Then it will come about on the day of the LORD'S sacrifice That I will punish the princes, the king's sons & all who clothe themselves with foreign garments. I will punish on that day all who leap on the temple threshold, Who fill the house of their lord with violence & deceit. "On that day," declares the LORD, "There will be the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, A wail from the Second Quarter, & a loud crash from the hills" (Zeph 1:7-10).

Here the wearing of the wrong apparel clearly suggests rebelliousness toward God & His standards of righteousness. In addition, the idea of God providing the proper garments for His people may be found in a Messianic passage from Isaiah:

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, & as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Is 61:10).

⁴ Blomberg, C. L. (2012). [Interpreting the Parables](#) (Second Edition, p. 310).

Contrary to the man-made, legalistic traditions of the Pharisees, God not only requires inner righteousness of men but He also offers it as a gift. The righteousness with which we're clothed as followers of Jesus is the very righteousness of God which comes through Christ alone & results in our being conformed to His image & living increasingly changed & righteous lives before Him by the power of His Spirit. This is seen in the revelation John received while on the island of Patmos. In it we're told that when Jesus returns His followers will themselves be guests at a great wedding banquet, which is referred to as the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-9). Those of us who know Christ should always be thankful that we're not only invited to the kingdom banquet by the King to celebrate the wedding of His Son, but that we're also found worthy, not because of any righteousness of our own, but only through the righteousness of Christ. As Paul explained, God made Christ **who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him** (2 Cor 5:21). That's the wedding garment that God demands & His Son provides. Again, it's fascinating that the man in the parable was **speechless**. It would have been a great opportunity for him to say, *Please tell me how I can get a wedding garment so I can enjoy your gracious offer to attend the feast of your son!* But he didn't. He said nothing. He presumed to enjoy the benefits of the feast while refusing to be adorned with the garment the king provided. As a result, the king ordered he not be merely shown to the door but be bound **hand & foot** & thrown into **outer darkness**; where, as Jesus says, **there will be weeping & gnashing of teeth**. The wedding feast is an open invitation, but there's a dress code. Everyone is welcome at the table but the table changes us. Or to keep with the imagery of the parable, it changes our clothes. If it doesn't, then we aren't truly guests. We're wedding crashers, & our lot lies outside of the laughter & light. This is a warning that we can't think we'll enter into the blessings of Jesus' kingdom reign apart from being adorned, by faith, with Christ's own righteousness. When the Bible speaks of that great future day of the wedding feast of Christ, it says, **Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb** (Rev 19:9). But it also says that the **bride ... was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright & clean** (7-8). We're made ready by turning from sin & trusting in the righteousness of Christ alone to make us acceptable in God's sight. We're to **put on the Lord Jesus**

Christ, as Paul says, & **make no provision for the flesh** (Rom 13:14). The only garment the Father will accept on any of His guests at His Son's wedding feast is that of His Son's own righteousness. Anything less will result in being thrown into outer darkness. How important it is for us to be sure we're clothed by faith in the righteousness of Christ alone! However, those who profess to know Christ & to have accepted the invitation, but who are trusting in their own righteousness should beware of the great judgment that awaits them. When Jesus refers to this man being improperly clothed as being cast **into outer darkness** where **there will be weeping & gnashing of teeth**, He's referring to the final judgment. This is His typical language to describe the judgment of hell as one of intense anguish & pain. It describes the fate of all who reject His invitation or who may profess to accept it while rejecting the garment of His righteousness. This is also why He goes on to warn **14.**

Many & few most likely mean *all & not all*.⁵ It's important for us to understand this how our Lord characterized God's invitation of the gospel. It isn't an invitation to a funeral, even though some people act as though becoming a Christian is equivalent to being soaked in formaldehyde. It's an invitation to joy. It isn't an invitation to a formal state dinner but to a joyful occasion. It's an invitation to life. This is what we so desperately need to understand: The gospel invitation is sent to everyone, because it isn't the Father's will that a single person be excluded from His kingdom & perish in hell (2 Pt 3:9). But not everyone wants God & many who claim to want Him don't want Him on His terms. Those who're saved enter God's kingdom because of their willing acceptance of His sovereign, gracious provision through His Son, Jesus Christ. Those who are lost are excluded from the kingdom because of their willful rejection of that same sovereign grace. D.A. Carson summarizes the meaning of this well:

*Many are invited; but some refuse to come, & others who do come refuse to submit to the norms of the kingdom & are therefore rejected. Those who remain are called "chosen," a word implicitly denying that the reversals in the parable in any way catch God unawares or remove sovereign grace from His control.*⁶

⁵ Ben F. Meyer, *NTS* 36, pp 89–97

⁶ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol 8, p 457

Those who are chosen will accept the offer of salvation on God's terms. They'll renounce their own self-interest & their own righteousness & will gladly agree with Paul when he declares,

whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ... & may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith (Phil 3:7-9).

I ask you, have you accepted the invitation to be a citizen in God's kingdom? Have you seen that you've been given a great honor in that you've been extended an invitation to joyful fellowship with Him? If so, you'll also have accepted His terms & rejected your own self-interest & self-righteousness. You'll have accepted the righteousness of Christ as a free gift. If so, join me in praise & thanksgiving. If not, I pray you'll recognize that the invitation has been once again offered to you today & it's not yet too late to accept it. Trust in Christ as the one who died for you, rose from the dead, & is seated at the right hand of God to reign over all things. Taken as a whole, the parable speaks of judgment both on those of the religious elite who refuse the invitation offered by God through His servants & on those who, when invited, accept but don't respond with appropriate seriousness. The gospel invites many to come who are unwilling to do so. The invitation to come is given to all. You may wonder, *How do I know for sure that I'm among the chosen?* The answer is simple: It's all a matter of how you've responded to the invitation. Have you responded to the call by placing your faith in God's Son? Have you heard the message of His sacrifice for you on the cross & have you placed your trust in His sacrifice as payment for your sins? Do you, by faith, count on His righteousness alone to make you favorable in God's sight? & are you turning from sin & following Him in loving obedience? If so, you're among those who He not only called, but also has chosen. You've a place awaiting you at the table of the joyous wedding feast of God's Son! Don't presume on the patience of God. A time will come when it will be too late. Don't be caught unprepared when the feast begins. Jesus is telling a shocking tale here & He's doing it to jolt you into the reality of what it is when we reject the gospel offer. God has spread this feast for us in the gospel. It's cost Him His Son. He's invited all to come. When we reject that offer, either by indifference or direct opposition, it isn't simply rude, it's an offense to God almighty, & that's

precisely what Jesus is driving home in this parable. The gates of the kingdom are open wide. Salvation isn't based on ethnicity, education, income, popularity, ministry, personality, ability, or looks. For this reason, we should be careful not to assume that the people most fit for the kingdom are those who look most like us. Although the gates of the kingdom are open wide, the kingdom still has gates & we must enter through them. The kingdom imposes conditions on us. We have a particular kind of clothing to wear to the feast. In the words of Paul,

as those who have been chosen of God, holy & beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness & patience; bearing with one another, & forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; & be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching & admonishing one another with psalms & hymns & spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father (Col 3:12-17).

A bitter & unforgiving heart is as much out of line for the Christian as a wedding crasher! & the kingdom of God is a feast & we should act like it. God means to be enjoyed. He's the God of joy & peace & feasts &, dare I say, 2nd helpings. In His presence there is fullness of joy (Ps 16:11). Do you believe that? Then come. There's a seat with your name on it. There's no reason for people to reject a gracious invitation from the King to come to the wedding feast & enjoy all His goodness. The only reason they reject the invitation is they don't believe the King or they don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God. But since this is a call from the King, from God Himself, we aren't free to take it or leave it, even if we think we can be non-committal. To reject the invitation of God is foolishness; it's to choose death when God's made provision for eternal life. Each of us have been offered a golden ticket based on the grace of God. Everything you think you've earned or has made you worthy to come to the dinner has been judged invalid. The only thing you have to do to experience the feast you're invited to is to believe that you're welcome only because God says you are. God's invitation is the invitation of grace. Those who were gathered in from the highways & the byways had no claim on the king at all. They could never have expected an invitation to the wedding feast. Still less could they ever have deserved it. It was God's grace which offered the invitation & grace which gathered them in. This is an invitation, not a summons; it's an invitation which recognizes the right of the ones invited to reject if they so desire. It's without coercion or

compulsion. When God offers to us this marvelous gift of life in Jesus Christ, He doesn't threaten, coerce, or compel us to come. He offers it as an invitation which we're free to accept or reject. **Come, all you who are weary & heavy laden, Jesus says, & I will give you rest** (Mt 11:28). *Come if you really want to live*, is the nature of the invitation. We must go beyond repentance to a daily appropriation of the gospel. It's one thing to feel godly sorrow for our sins; it's another to see Jesus as having borne that sin in His body on the cross & to experience afresh the joy of forgiveness & acceptance because of His all-sufficient, finished work. Only then will we benefit from the teaching of this parable. PRAY