

A Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

A wedding banquet is a familiar image in the Bible for the kingdom of God. Indeed, heaven itself is described in those terms, as we read in,

Rev. 19:6 “And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9 Then he said to me, “Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’ ” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.”

In the prophecy of the Old Testament, we hear these words from the Lord through the prophet Isaiah,

Is. 61:10 “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. 11 For as the earth brings forth its bud, As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, So the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.”

Even more personally, the relationship between Jesus and his church is presented to us in that same context, as the relationship between a bride and her bridegroom.

Eph. 5:28 “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as

the Lord does the church. 30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 31 “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

That most intimate of all human relationships is again referred to in,

Rev. 21:1 “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

So the overall context of our parable this afternoon is not hard to identify.

v.2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding.”

The wedding ceremony and banquet represent the kingdom of God; specifically, entrance into the kingdom. So attendance at this wedding refers to those who are made citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The king has planned an elaborate feast on the occasion of his son’s wedding, and he, the King, without question represents God himself, God the father. So this banquet is nothing less than the union of Jesus and his church. And our focus for this parable is upon the invitation to that wedding. In

other words, the invitation of the gospel.

What becomes obvious at the very outset is the emphasis upon those who decline the invitation, those who choose not to attend, representing those who reject the gospel. We see in the parable,

I. AN INVITATION CARELESSLY REJECTED.

Specifically, we read,

v.3 "...and they were not willing to come."

We the foolishness of that right away, because the king had a great celebration planned, a glorious banquet. It was going to be spectacular.

v.4

But they were not willing to come, and we see why in,

v.5 "But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business."

They were too busy, busy in the matters of the world. Worldliness. They were too busy attending to the matters of the kingdoms of this world rather than the kingdom of God. So we see,

A. The foolishness of worldliness.

It was foolishness because of the value and benefit of what they turned down. Foolishness because they seemingly love the world so much that they missed that which was far better. They attended to their own business, so enamored with their own worldly experiences that they missed the occasion to enjoy a banquet of the oxen and fatted cattle of the king!

That's the story of the parable, and that danger is so clearly

described and defined by John.

1 John 2:15 "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

James is even more blunt.

James 4:4 "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

When it comes to the things of this world, Jesus is equally pointed,

Mat. 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Such foolishness we see here. The king invites his guests to a fabulous celebration of great delights, and they are too busy with the matters of their own lives to accept the invitation. They are so easily distracted by the things of this world, what I am calling,

B. The deadly distraction of worldliness.

v.5

Then it got even worse, and much more violent in the imagery of the parable,

v.6

Now they have really caused trouble for themselves. Not only

are they distracted in their love of the world, but they now resort to violence instead of simply attending the wedding. It wasn't enough simply to decline the invitation. They actually kill the servants of the king, an action that understandably results in easily predictable consequences.

v.7

Such judgment and destruction is,

C. The consequences of worldliness.

If you reject the invitation of the king with violent opposition, you will be condemned to death. That's the power a king possesses. Your city will be destroyed, burned to the ground. Such is God's judgment, God as represented in this parable by this king.

And we know that judgment is real. Peter would express it this way,

2 Peter 3:7 "But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. 8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

Similarly,

Rev. 20:11 "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small

and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

That is the consequence of worldliness in rebellion against God and in rejection of the invitation of the gospel, the second death.

Let me step back just a minute and make an observation about this parable that I believe is well fitting. These first invitees to the kingdom of God should be understood as referring to the nation of Israel, the Old Covenant people of God to whom Jesus came. He came as a Jew, the gospel came to the Jew first. So this careless rejection of the invitation to the wedding feast call all be connected with the careless rejection of Jesus the Messiah by the nation of God's people in the Old Covenant, the nation of Israel. That rejection became violent as well, did it not? They crucified Jesus himself!

So the gospel proclaimed by Peter on the day of Pentecost focused upon these words,

Acts 2:22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; 24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He

should be held by it.”

You crucified him. You put him to death. You men of Israel. And that is what we have before us in this parable. And that judgment of God’s retribution was inflicted upon the nation of Israel in history, with the destruction of the temple and all of Jerusalem by the Roman army in AD 70. That destruction is well described by the words of,

Rev. 14:17 “Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” 19 So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.”

Even further,

Rev. 18:21 “Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. 22 The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. 23 The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. 24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.”

So the kingdom of God was taken from the nation of Israel, for

they were those who so carelessly, and wicked, rejected the invitation to this wedding banquet. We saw the same truth presented in the parable in the previous chapter, the wicked vinedressers,

Mat. 21:33 “Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 34 Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. 35 And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. 37 Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38 But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ 39 So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?” 41 They said to Him, “He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.” 42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43 “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”

There it is, a warning to this day to those who would carelessly reject the invitation of God enter the kingdom of heaven. And with that rejection comes,

II. AN INVITATION BROADLY EXTENDED.

This, too, is not hard to interpret. The nation of Israel rejected Jesus, and they were cut off. So now the gospel goes to the Gentiles, to all the nations. No longer does outward ethnic identify have any reference to the kingdom of God. In fact, we read,

Gal. 3:26 “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

There is no Jew nor Greek any longer. Not even male of female. So when it comes to the gospel,

Col. 3:11 “...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

In other words, this parable demonstrates to us,

A. The universal proclamation of the gospel.

That’s the point.

Paul expresses this universal invitation of the gospel when he writes to the church at Rome,

Rom. 10:8 “But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto

salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

“Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” And that was the significance of Pentecost, when the gospel truly went to all the nations, in their own languages, that by hearing they might believe and be saved. Peter quotes on that great day from the prophet,

Joel 2:28 “And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29 And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. 30 “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. 32 And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.”

That is the gospel I preach today, and the gospel that will be preached until the end of the age when Jesus returns, “That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.” And that proclamation will be successful, in the imagery of this parable of the wedding feast.

v.10 “So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

The wedding hall was filled, demonstrating,

B. The success of the gospel invitation.

There is so much of this in the New Testament, so much of this universal emphasis, the invitation of the gospel going to all the nations, and God's people being saved and redeemed in all those nations! I preach to you in that context, and the work of evangelism should be carried out in that light as well, the context of the gospel going to the whole world. Or, in the language of the parable, "Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding."

Then we come to something that might seem strange. In the parable, a man without a wedding garment.

v.11-12

Evidently, entrance into this great wedding feast included some sort of wedding garment, a cloak or a robe of some sort. And some entered without it. Needless to say, he was put out of the banquet. The language is of eternal judgment,

v.13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Evidently, in the story of the parable, there was,

III. A PERSONAL GUEST LIST.

Don't forget what we just studied. There is a universal invitation, an invitation to all the nations. But there was still a prerequisite for entrance, a requirement that had to be met, a cloak, a robe, a wedding garment. Without it there was no hope. So what does all that mean?

I believe it means this, that the wedding garment in the parable represents that which is required to enter the kingdom of God, namely righteousness. But we have none ourselves, clearly

no personal righteousness of our own that is sufficient to be qualified to enter the kingdom of heaven. But we must have righteousness, we must be righteous, to be in God's presence at all. Thus, the Scripture teaches us that we gain a righteousness not by our own law-keeping, for none of us measures up. Rather, we can a righteousness by faith, we receive the righteousness of Jesus which is credited to us. Or the accurate theological word, imputed to us. So in this parable we learn of,

A. The necessity of imputed righteousness.

We need a wedding garment, and we are insufficient ourselves to accomplish it. So we need a righteousness that is credited to us, and received by faith. So these words define the very essence of the gospel itself,

Rom. 3:21 "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

We need a wedding garment, and Jesus gives us one. He gives us his own righteousness, and that is with what we are clothed!

Rev. 3:5 "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

Rev. 3:18 “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.”

So how do you gain entrance to this wedding feast? How do you become qualified to enter the kingdom of heaven? You need to be clothed in Jesus’ righteousness!

And then we come to,
v.14

B. The blessing of election.

You might think this a strange verse in a strange place, in a parable about the universal invitation of the gospel. But here it is. “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

It’s not enough to claim ethnic heritage. The unbelieving nation of Israel is cut off. It’s not enough to claim heritage at all, in our day. It’s not enough to claim a family heritage, or a church heritage. It’s not enough to live in the Bible Belt or even to be a member of the church. It has to be real, genuine. And God has to be at work.

For this righteousness that you need, this wedding garment, is not something you earn. It’s not something you work for or accomplish the power of your own strength. And for you who have received that righteousness of Jesus, by faith, you still have to ask yourself, “Why me?” Why am I among the recipients of such a great and glorious spiritual blessing?

There is such a simple and straightforward answer to that question. It has to do with choice, God’s choice. “For many are called, but few are chosen.” Thus the blessings we enjoy in the heavenly realms, all the blessings we enjoy as citizens of that

heavenly kingdom, all of those blessing come to us because of the sovereign, electing love of God.

Eph. 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

May that be your song, and your delight, as you consider this great wedding banquet, and God would so love you as to choose you to receive the wedding garment as a gift of his grace.