



## COME TO THE BANQUET – YOU ARE INVITED

MATTHEW 22:1-14

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A wedding in the Middle East is a lot of fun because when the happy couple gets to this day, they have dealt with all the nervousness and excitement. The big day on which there was much tension and drama was the engagement day. The engagement is when the groom puts his hopes and dreams on the line, hoping that the woman's family will accept him and accept his marriage proposal. At the engagement, the groom's family meets with the bride's family and proposes a contract between them from which a marriage will occur. There can be much back and forth and give and take until the two fathers shake hands and drink coffee together to seal the deal. It is announced that there will be a wedding at some time in the future; it is a "save the date" type of invitation. Preparations begin, and when everything is ready, the word goes out, telling people to come and celebrate the union of this man and this woman.

This is what has happened in this parable. There was an agreement between the king and another man for the marriage of their two children. Once the contract was agreed upon, the king sent out his "save the date" invitations to everyone, far and wide. This would include the influential people in the kingdom: officials in the government, officers in the army, and many rich and mighty. We can tell this from how the invitees ignore the invitation and go about their regular affairs. Imagine, the king has sent word that a lavish marriage feast has been created, and it is time to come and join the festivities, and it is ignored. This would be a massive insult to the king and his honor. There has been a period from the original announcement until the wedding's actual day, but this is the king issuing the invitation. Understanding that, the king sends out his servants to remind everyone that it is now time to come and join the celebration. Instead of heeding the call, they not only ignore the invitation but kill the servants, adding further insult and injury to the honor of the king. The king does two things in response: he sends his army to wreak vengeance on those who have dishonored him, and he also orders his servants to bring anyone who will come into the feast to celebrate this great day. He demands to have a full banquet. Once again, the servants go out and extend the invitation to anyone in the kingdom, inviting them to come and feast with the king on this great day.

Then, there is a little twist in the story. The king ordered his servants to invite all to the feast. It was now open to everyone, not just the nobility. Amid the crowd, the king spies one who is not "in wedding attire." The king gently asks him, "Friend, how did you get in without the appropriate attire?" The man has no response, and I can only imagine the guilty look on his face. The king then orders him to be removed and thrown out, and Jesus ends the story with this statement: "Many are called, but few are chosen."

I have always liked this parable except for that last statement. Why would you condemn someone that you invited because you did not like the way he was dressed? What was the problem? You knew he was not one of your rich friends, and therefore would not have the fine clothes as they would wear. How can this one person be discarded in such a way?

This parable is told in the context of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom, that is, the Kingdom of God, so let us look at this from that point of view. This parable is the third in a series of parables in which Jesus points at the Jewish leaders. In the parable of the two sons, in Ch. 21:28-32, we see the Jewish leadership's indictment for not heeding the call of the Spirit when John came preaching. Next, we have the parable of wicked tenants in Ch. 21:33-44. They killed the king's son and would not give the portion of the harvest that was due to the king. This is Jesus' statement of their sentence for the crime of not believing in the One whom God sent to them. In this parable, we see the leadership's utter demise for ignoring the king's invitation and, once again, killing the king's messengers. What does this mean for us?

First, it is clear that the king, in each of these parables, is God and the son represents the Messiah, Jesus. In this parable, the wedding that is foretold is the return of Jesus. We can see this represented in Revelation, Ch. 21, and we read of Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, adorned as a bride. We have been given the "save-the-date" invitation. Now we have only to wait for that day. Paul alludes to this in II Timothy 4 when he speaks about how he will receive his reward on that day along with all "who have longed for His appearing." We are to live fully in the light of today, but we are also to have that expectancy of Jesus' appearing. This is how we lived when we heard of the upcoming wedding of one of our friends in Palestine. We were often told of their engagement, and we knew that we had to be ready when we got word of the day of the marriage.

Are we living with an expectancy of the return of Jesus? In the early days of the church, this was a very present hope. They had seen Jesus die on the cross. They had witnessed his resurrection and then ascension back to the Father. They heard him say that if he left them, then he would return also. Time went on. The church began to grow and spread throughout the empire. The imminent return of Jesus was preached, but as time continued to pass, the believers began to wonder, "Where is he? When is it going to happen?" Then questions began to be asked about what would happen to the ones who had died before he came, and then rumors began to circulate that some had already been raised to be with God. Paul addresses this in I Thessalonians 4:13. He says that we will all be changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. It's easy to understand why they might lose their hope in his coming. Looking back over 2000 years, we, too, can wonder about this. But just like the king's invitation, we have to believe that it will happen. There will come a day when the bridegroom is joined with his bride. Therefore, we need to live fully engaged in what is happening today, but we also have to keep our hope alive that He will come again. As Paul states it, we should be longing for His appearing. This was the situation with the Jewish leaders. They had lost their hope in the appearance of the Messiah so that when he did appear, they ignored the invitation.

In the parable, we are told that when the king sent his messengers to remind them of the invitation, not only did they not heed the invitation, but they killed the messengers from the king. This is just like what happened in the Old Testament and what happened to John. The prophets were sent by God to warn his people and tell them to repent, turn around, and change their ways. The kings and religious leaders killed the prophets or, at best, imprisoned them so that they could no longer preach and possibly cause the people to repent. Are we like this? Do we reject God's message and his messengers because we don't like what they are telling us? Rather than listen to the message that God sends; we would rather

listen to those who tickle our ears with nice words. It's always easier to tend to our affairs and believe that everything is excellent and right than to interrupt our plans. But the king has sent the invitation, and it is not going away.

Another idea that is taught in this parable speaks to how we treat God's grace. God reaches out to us to help us and invites us to his table. Much like when we celebrate communion, we are invited to a feast. The table is prepared. All is made ready. As we often say in this service, "The gifts of God for the people of God." How do we respond? Do we comprehend all that went into preparing the feast to which we have been invited? Or do we treat it, as these folks did, as something we can either attend or not, acting like it's no big deal? In this story, the king went to great lengths to make a feast for his friends so that they could rejoice along with the king at the wedding of his son. Look at what God did for us so that we could be present at the marriage of the Lamb to His bride. Consider the gift of Calvary and all that Jesus endured. Are we going to respond to the invitation, or are we going to dishonor the king, that is, God, and ignore it? Or are we going to realize the great sacrifice that God made for us and come with hearts that rejoice and celebrate with him? Can we put aside all of the things that we think are so important, and rest, celebrate, and rejoice? When it comes to those who proclaim the word among us and bring news of the invitation that God is extending to us, are we ready to heed the call, or like the Jews in the Old Testament, do we want to still their voices and kill, or get rid, of them?

If we choose to decline and ignore the invitation, we also have to know that if we don't come to the banquet, the king, or God, is fully ready to invite all of those we would despise and think not worthy to come. This is what happened in our story today. The king invited anyone else who would come after the first invitees refused. The ones who refused the invitation were the first ones that the king wanted to come and expected to come. When they refused, the king opened the gates to everyone else.

God's first invitation went out to the ones to whom he had first given his grace. He was sure that when he announced it was time to come to the feast, they would willingly and happily respond. God wanted them there! But, when Jesus came, they didn't believe he was who he said he was. When God sent a messenger, John, to announce the bridegroom's arrival, they killed him. So, the invitation went to anyone who would come. In the parable, the king told his servants to go out to the town square and issue the invitation to anyone who would come. Everyone was welcome. In the book of Acts, we read how many Jews believed, but still, the high and mighty among them refused. The next thing we read is Peter, Paul, and Barnabas' stories, going to the Gentiles and reaping a large harvest for the Kingdom of God. At first, these non-Jewish believers were opposed, but after hearing the testimony of these three men, James declares that this is the work of God, and therefore these folks are welcome into the church, just as much as the Jewish believers. However, we must be careful that we make ourselves ready for the feast.

In the parable, we read that the king came into the banquet and saw someone not wearing the proper attire. The king approaches the man and sees how the man is dressed. The king calls him "friend." The man is welcome to be there, but something isn't right. When the king brings this to the man's attention, he doesn't say anything in response. The man knows that he is guilty and who wouldn't. Even the lowest person knows that you have to "dress up" as best you can if you are going to a wedding. You have to show some sign that you respect the occasion and the person or people who invited you. A person does not just leave the fields or their labors and go to the wedding. You spruce up a little bit. This guest didn't do that.

In this case, the guests represent all of us believers who will be welcomed into the banquet to celebrate the marriage of the Messiah to his bride, the church. We know this by the way the king addresses the

man. The king calls him “friend.” In John 15, Jesus says that I no longer call you servants, but I call you friends. We have to make ourselves ready to enter the banquet. How do we do this? Paul gives us the answer to this question when he says, “Take off the old man and put on the new man.” Like you take off an old coat and put on the new one, we are to take off all that is of the old life and put on the new life. Paul says that we are to wear the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness. We are to gird our loins with truth, and the shoes on our feet are to help us share the Gospel. We have to be dressed appropriately for the wedding. This means that we are to grow up into God’s grace and demonstrate this new life that we have been given in Christ Jesus. All believers will be invited to the Lamb’s marriage supper, but not all will be allowed to stay. Just as the king avenged the insult against the leaders who ignored him, in like manner, he will not allow the guests at the banquet to disrespect him either. As Paul states, we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Are we ready to attend the banquet when the king calls us? Do we have the proper attire to present ourselves to him?

The last thing to note in this parable is the final statement of Jesus. He ends the parable by saying, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” What does Jesus mean by this? This statement, among some others, gave rise to the Calvinist idea of predestination. This idea says that God has some people designated, or predestined, not to be saved, but this is not the meaning of this phrase. This phrase is a Semitic way of saying, “All are called...” In other words, God has not excluded anyone. We are all God’s children. We have all fallen from grace. We are all under the curse of sin, brought about by the fall of Adam and Eve. Every person ever created, and now living is a child of God. The difference is that some have found the way back to a relationship and fellowship with God, while others are still seeking. It is the job of those who “know” to take the Good News to all of the rest. We are to be bearers of the invitation that God has for us all, that is, to make ourselves ready and to come to the banquet. We are to be fully engaged in this life, but as believers, we need to keep our eyes and ears open for the “voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God” announcing the return of the bridegroom to receive his bride, that is, the church, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Brothers and sisters, we have a great day still to come. We don’t know when it will be, and it is not ours to try to figure it out. Time and again, God told his people to “close the book.” Jesus even told his disciples that even he did not know the hour. The one sign of the return of the Messiah that we can count upon is his return. Until that day happens, we have been given a “save the date” invitation. Like the guests to a wedding, we have only to keep our eyes and ears open and make sure that we are appropriately clothed so that when the word comes, we will be ready. Friends, the banquet is being prepared, and you are invited.

Amen.