

The Ultimate Wedding Banquet

Matthew 22:1-14

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February 19, 2017

It is a true blessing to have the privilege of sharing today's message with you on this Family Day weekend. As the Family and Marriage Ministry Coordinator, it seems fitting to speak on this weekend. Today's passage, which we will get to in a few moments, also seems fitting.

Indeed, with a wonderful wedding taking place here last week, the season of love (Valentine's) having just come and gone, speaking about a wedding feast is almost apropos – although the one in Matthew 22, as we will find out, has a bit more in store than just love, love, love.

Pastor Tom has been taking us through the book of Matthew, and last week we looked at the latter part of chapter 22. So, what I would like to do first is just take us back 2 weeks to situate where Chapter 22, verses 1 – 14 take place. Of course, we have been in the Holy week for several weeks now. We have seen Jesus make some bold statements about who He is; He cleared the Temple; and, in the past couple of weeks, have seen Him take particular aim at the Temple leadership.

On Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus presents three extended parables showing God's judgement on the leaders for not encouraging the people to accept Jesus' invitation to the kingdom of heaven. We have watched Jesus in the parable of the Two Sons and the parable of the Tenants confront the leadership with a message showing how they have missed God's plan (their invitation to eternal glory) and how a new people would be taking their place in God's plan.

Today is the third of these three parables that are directly targeted to the Temple leadership in this way. The parable of the wedding feast

describes the consequences that will befall the derelict religious leaders. Let's look at the passage.

The parable is found in Matthew chapter 22, verses 1 to 14. I encourage you to open your Bibles or devices to that passage, or you can find it on page 696 in the Bibles in the pews, or you can follow along on the screen behind me. I will be reading from the English Standard Version:

22 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

As we consider this parable, and go through the verses, let's remember the context. As part of Jesus' running dialogue with the religious

leaders, and in succession to the two parables Pastor Tom preached on two weeks ago, this story speaks about the failure of the religious leaders to meet God's requirements and about a consequent change in the composition of the people of God. In other words, this is classic allegory – a parable- designed to convey a lesson, not mirror real life.

Having said that, Jesus chose stories to which His listeners could relate. This story of the wedding banquet related to these people as wedding feasts, and other feasts that kings and other prominent members of society held, had established decorum around them.

Attendance at weddings was a social obligation in Palestinian Judaism and one normally accepted banquet invitations even if one did not like the host. Dinner invitations of all sorts were quite common. Those invited to some kinds of banquets might need to consider whether they could afford to reciprocate the honor later, but clients owed patrons (their social superiors) primarily *honor*; patrons often based invitations on past flattery. To be the only ones of one's social status not invited to a royal banquet was to feel snubbed; in such a society, not inviting the right person, or inviting the wrong person, could have disastrous, even mortal, consequences. Thus, for example, one who invited to a town banquet the townsfolk but not the king merited much severer punishment than one who invited neither.

By refusing to come, the guests insulted the dignity of the king who had counted on their attendance and graciously prepared food for them. To protect their honor guests might refuse to come to a particular person's banquet if others did. Those invited might reject an invitation if they wished to insult the status of the host or questioned the security of his future; thus guests as well as hosts could play a role in the distribution

of honor and shame. For *all* the invited guests to refuse to come would shame the host. However, rudeness such as is depicted here would never be directed toward a king or someone of extreme power in the community, before whom one could not even expect “safety in numbers.” Ignoring a king’s proclamation warranted severe punishment.

Furthermore, those who knew their Scriptures understood that a banquet symbolizes the blessings of God’s salvation. The religious leaders would have particularly known that in parables a “king” usually referred to God and in this case, it included reference to the King and His son.

So, Jesus directs these harsh words, once again to Israel’s leaders. This parable is aimed at the already religious, not at outsiders who reject God’s invitation at the first hearing.

This parable falls into three sections:

1. (vv. 1 to 7) Proclamation the banquet is ready and judgement will befall the religious leaders for their rejection of his invitation We’ll see how this really means that they failed to repent and enter the kingdom.
2. (vv. 8 to 10) a description of those who will be invited to replace them, and
3. (vv. 11 to 14) the requirements for participation in the kingdom.

Vv.1 and 2 describe a wedding feast. In any case – a countrywide celebration that would last for several days. This “feast” represents enjoying fellowship with God in his kingdom and coming to the feast represents entering the kingdom. Perhaps, the fact that it was for the

king's son should not be lost on us either. Often these banquets would be for the king, but in the case of this parable Jesus chose to make it for the king's son. This could simply be a part of the story or it could be significant in showing Jesus as the son of God.

In verse 3 we read that those who were invited refused to come. As we already learned, to refuse a direct invitation from a king was an extreme insult and a dangerous affront to his authority.

Once again, a second invitation is extended in verse 4. Both of these invitations would be a follow-up to a much earlier invitation that would already have been received and accepted. As Temple leaders they would have already said "yes" to God's invitation.

Like our weddings today, where we receive an invitation, RSVP and then the wedding is much later. The difference is that today we know that supper will be ready at a certain time. Back then, they wouldn't know for certain, so servants were sent out to let those invited know that the banquet was now ready.

So, the "invitations" in this parable are really more-so notice that all of the preparations required to get such a lavish banquet ready are complete. Jesus, in speaking to the Temple leaders knows that they have already said "yes" to God's invitation but Jesus is now telling them that (in His coming) the banquet is ready.

In any case, telling those invited that the meal was ready and that they should now come was not enough to have them come. They have now cemented their refusal to honour their initial commitment to attend. To make things even worse – even more insulting – are the weak excuses they provide in verse 5 for not attending. Basically they just ignored

those bringing news of the feast being ready. They simply keep on with their daily chores and business. Hearers of this parable would marvel at the treasonous foolishness of those who would insult the king and they would know that, in those days, doing so would lead to severe judgment from the king – and so it is with God.

Now, if a king had invited you to a wedding banquet. And you RSVP'd yes. Then you were told that everything was ready, please come, would you just ignore the servants telling you everything is ready and just carry on with whatever you were doing? It would be unthinkable, and we would probably expect to never be invited back – and back in those days one could expect a lot worse.

Then it gets even worse in verse 6. Not only do they ignore the invitation, now some go so far as capturing these servant messengers, mistreating them and killing them - exactly what would happen to Jesus later this Holy week (and what had already happened to John the Baptist and previous messengers in the Old Testament). So, what is the king's response? He sends his army, destroys them and burns their city.

Destroy and burn...? Isn't that a little harsh? Not really. Most listeners would have celebrated this as true vindication by the king to those who would insult him in such a way. The only listeners that wouldn't celebrate would be the ones who could feel that this parable was being directed at them.

Now, the burning of their city portion of this parable could simply be a part of the allegory and parable. It shows how harsh the judgment would be from the king to those who declined the king's invitation. But many commentators state that it is a specific reference to the

destruction of Jerusalem and (even to this day) the never-restored Temple, in the year 70. It can also, obviously, be both.

Well, we move on to what is now a familiar theme in the past two parables and is emphasized again in this third one. In the next few verses that same theme of a different, and unexpected, people of God taking the place of those who failed to respond. Jesus once again confronts the temple leaders with this message of their being cast aside and the calling of a new church – one where class, religiosity and even heritage is not of concern. Indeed, this points to the new Testament Church and the saving grace promised by God for ALL nations, though Abraham, in Genesis 22. The wedding invitation will go out to those not previously invited. This anticipates the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Well, the supper is ready. Much effort and expense went into this feast. The king is upset with those who were initially invited now spurning the invitation. So, what's a king to do? Not let the feast go to waste. Instead, invite others to come and enjoy all that is offered.

In verses 8 to 10, the king now tasks his servants to invite a “replacement” group to come and enjoy the wedding banquet. These servants go about inviting everyone they come across – much like we, as Christians, are called to do in sharing the gospel. They do not consider whom they invite – they simply obey the king and do as he instructed. They invite. The wedding hall is now filled with undeserving guests who respond to the gracious invitation.

I just want to pause on this thought for a moment. Perhaps you can relate to me, and if not Hallelujah, but I know that I can be pretty picky and make a lot of excuses as to why I don't simply share the gospel as

we are called to do in the Great Commission. This is a whole other topic for discussion, but I can't help but take a moment to ask God to help us all be more willing to extend wedding banquet invitations on his behalf. I'll move on, but talk with Tom Kerdeikes about equipping that he has available to assist in this area.

Verses 11 to 13 bring us toward the conclusion of this parable, and introduce a second message within the parable. So far, this parable was like the previous two: A corrupt leadership, unwilling to accept God's invitation, will be replaced with a new group. But these next few verses introduce a message that relates to this new group of invitees. What about them? Was it good enough to simply come and dine at the feast? Is everyone a part of this "crowd" forever?

Verses 11 and 12 focus on a garment. What is this wedding garment? Again, commentators have varying thoughts on this. Some say that in weddings and other such feasts around that time, those who could not afford their own appropriate attire would be provided a garment at the entrance so that they would "fit in" with everyone else and not insult the host by being out of dress. If we came to a special banquet and were all disheveled and dirty, we wouldn't feel as comfortable to dine and enjoy as we see everyone around us dressed in their best. It would also distract others from enjoying themselves and would certainly not be very honoring to the king or host.

Other commentators say that this isn't necessarily proven to be fact. And other commentators say that this "garment" really refers to what a person does with the invitation – and it is this one that I would suggest is worth noting. This person has also insulted the king by how he responded to the king's grace. Of note, is that the king refers to him as

“friend” and that this person pauses before answering – like most of us would when caught in the act of doing something we know to be wrong. The implication is that this guest had proper clothing available but declined to wear them.

The significance in this part of the parable is to highlight that, just like the Jewish leaders were unprepared at Jesus’ first coming, some professing disciples will be unprepared for His second coming – which is sad.

Once the king has made his judgment, he calls his servants to bind this person without a garment and cast them out. The “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in verse 13 is a common description of eternal judgement; leading us to the final verse.

There are a couple of ways to look at the final verse in today’s message. Verse 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.” Many commentators say that this talks about how the gospel message is widely proclaimed, but only some are effectively called – that is the chosen or the elect. This verse can also be considered from the point of view that, simply, fewer people than hear the gospel actually accept the calling – or invitation.

So, once invited to this kingdom feast, what is our individual response? In light of the reference to being called to eternal glory, are we living a life appropriate to one of God’s new people or are we (like the leaders of the Israelites at that time) continuing to live the same old way? We are all individually accountable to God for our response to Jesus’ invitation.

A big point to remember here is, Christ will be the one to judge. Our part is to take up His invitation and then put on the garment He freely provides – in other words, to respond worthily to His grace as a covenant people – His Church.

You may be wondering, so how is this the ultimate wedding banquet? Most commentators suggest that this parable is not so much about the final wedding banquet – the one to celebrate the great marriage of Jesus and His bride, the Church. But it sure alludes to the messianic banquet that Isaiah stated in Isaiah 25: 6-8, that Jesus and others touched upon in the New Testament and that John then revealed in Revelation chapter 19 verses 6 to 9. This latter one is the marriage that, as Christians, we will all be a part of. It is the ultimate marriage feast – “the marriage supper of the Lamb”. So, let’s look at it briefly. John shares in Revelation 19: 6 to 9:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure” —

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

In short, these verses announce the Lamb’s (Christ’s) pure Bride (the Church), arrayed in purity. Her gown of righteous deeds is her groom’s gift of grace. Those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are believers who belong to his beloved bride, the Church, who have been called by the gospel of grace. The voice calls to praise because the marriage of the Lamb is about to take place. The bride has made herself ready – or has been made ready.

Friends, do not be like the Temple leadership and miss this invitation. Today’s message is important and maybe hard for the lost to hear – but it is even harder for the “religious” lost to hear. Brother, sister... don’t let yourself get lost in religiosity that ultimately doesn’t save you. Friend, if you have never considered being a part of Christ’s kingdom, Jesus extends His invitation to you today. Do not let it pass you by. Come, accept His invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb by simply saying yes to His grace; by accepting Jesus as your Lord and saviour. Be ready. You can do that right now by simply praying something like this:

God, I know that I sin and this separates me from you forever. Thank you that you have provided a way for my sins to be taken care of. Thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross, in my place, for my sins. I’m sorry. Forgive me for sinning and please come into my life Lord Jesus. I want to follow you and learn more about you. I want to be there for that ultimate wedding and to feast with you, and worship you, forever in heaven. In Jesus name. Amen.