

Invited to the Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14 (NIV)

¹ Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and 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 wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. ¹³ “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

There are many aspects about my wedding that I enjoyed planning and doing. One thing I didn't: the guest list. How do you decide who you will invite? Do you invite based on budget, how many people you can afford to feed? Do you invite based on location, how many people can fit in the venue, or do you pick a venue to accommodate your guest list? Is it relationship based, how close you are to these people, how closely they're related to you, or what kind of drama you will have to deal with if you invite some people and not others? And, of course, other people are going to tell you who you should be inviting, and it's always more than you planned.

Today, we heard about a wedding guest list. Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.” (verses 1-2) Although not explicitly spelled out as Jesus does in other parables, the king is God the Father and his son is Jesus. This is a story telling us how God invites people to be with him.

Where do we see ourselves in this parable? We start by seeing ourselves as one of the invitees, personally invited by the king through his servants. God prepared a feast specifically for us to enjoy. More than just physical blessings, this wedding banquet is about the spiritual feast that he offers, a feast for us in which he spared no expense.

God doesn't prepare the bare minimum for us, that he only pays for some of the sins that we've done and we have to cover the rest or that he pays all the expenses but then expects a gift in kind in return. No, he drenches us in the blood of his Son, blood given up in his suffering and death, which purifies us from every sin. It's not just that he cleanses us so that the stains are faded and barely noticeable; he completely wipes them out so that there is no evidence and no trace of the sins we've committed. He holds out to us with the feast of his Supper, that this is his body and his blood given and poured out for you for this total cleansing forgiveness.

On top of that, God gives us a set of clothes for this wedding feast. And it's not made from the material that he was able to get at a bulk discount made with cheap labor. No, he provided custom, tailor-made clothes of the finest materials, perfect materials. He clothes us with Christ's perfection. God the Holy Spirit covers us with these wedding clothes when he brings us to faith through the message of how Christ has paid for all of our sins with his holy and precious blood and how he lived a total and completely perfect life for us in our place. These perfect wedding clothes are also given to us through baptism, that with simple water and the Word of God, he clothes us with the Son's perfection. God our King has provided us with the finest of wedding clothes.

God spared no expense for us in personally inviting us to his wedding feast. Now, how do you respond? Jesus tells us that many “refused to come.” (Verse 3) Is that us?

Honestly, we have reasons to decline a wedding reception invite. Maybe we have prior engagements that we couldn't get out of, had to work or couldn't take time off of work. Maybe we couldn't afford the travel or a gift. Maybe we couldn't find a babysitter for the kids, and we didn't want to deal with wrangling them and keeping them entertained through all the festivities. Maybe we didn't have anything to wear. Maybe we just didn't want to go and wanted to do something else.

Do we treat God's invitation to worship, to join in his wedding feast here this side of heaven, the same way? Do we only come to church when it's convenient for me, when the kids are being very well behaved, when I don't have to work, when I don't have other things that I would rather do? Do I ever despise the messengers, the servants, who invite me, that I see it as an invitation from

people with hidden agendas instead of an invitation from God through them? Do I sometimes think it's not that important to be here, that I already know this stuff? Do I sometimes think: who needs a cardboard tasting piece of flour that you call bread and that cheap Mogen David wine? You know what, I could just stay at home on my couch in my pajamas instead of getting dressed up and interacting with people. I can take or leave Sunday morning. Sometimes we refuse to come at God's invitation.

But you're here today. So, I'm hoping that this isn't your attitude when you aren't here because things do come up and we can't always come. Even I'm not here every week. Maybe what you struggle with is the guest list. Remember that after those who were previously invited refused to come the king had his servants go out and invite anyone they could find. The result? "So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests." (verse 10)

God's wedding hall, his house, our worship, is filled with those we consider good and bad. Does that make you uncomfortable? Do you feel the tension because someone here did or said some awful things that make you keep your guard up, that you have a hard time forgiving? Do you know more about someone's personal life and the sins they are committing than you want to know and you don't know how to confront them? Do I look at another person and think that they really need to clean up their life if they are going to keep coming here? Do you just feel awkward when don't share common interests with people here and it makes it awkward to say anything beyond, "Hello"? Maybe I look at church time as purely me time, that this is what I need, and I honestly don't care about any of the other people here. I'm here for me and that's it. As soon as I can, I'm bolting for the door.

God purposefully and personally invites the good and the bad. No one invited was afterthought by God once the other invitees had refused to come. None of us come through these doors all put together. We all got problems. We all got struggles. We all got sins. Really, are any of those invited by God "good?" This is exactly why we need God to invite us to what he has to offer, for him to give us those perfectly fitted, tailor-made of the finest materials wedding clothes that he provides – his perfection covering over us, making us good. This is the only thing that makes us worthy to belong at his wedding feast, to belong with him in heaven. This is what we receive every time we come to worship. Here, we partake in the foretaste of this heavenly wedding banquet right now. Every time we gather to worship, the Divine interacts with us. God comes to us, calls to us, forgives us, and covers us with his perfection as the Holy Spirit does his work through his Word, through the Lord's Supper, through baptism.

Amazingly, even with all these good things prepared for us and with his authority over heaven and earth, God the king does not force us to take him up on his invitation. However, there are dire consequences if we refuse him. We heard how some of the invitees refused to attend and how some mistreated, even killed the messengers of the wedding feast invite. And, man, how evil do you have to be to kill someone who invited you to a wedding reception? In response to their evil actions, "the king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." (verse 7) Justice was served upon these murderers. Others never got to enjoy all that the king, God, had prepared for them. And those who tried to come in rejection of the tailor-made fine wedding clothes of perfection, who tried to get in on their merits, their works, were bound hand and foot, tossed outside into the darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth - the miserable existence of hell, separation from God and everything good.

I don't want this. You don't want this. We don't want this for anyone. So not only do we not want to despise God's personal invite to us and the perfect clothes he gives us, but we also want to look around our lives and ask, "Who can I invite? Who will I invite?" With whom will you share the beauty of this personal wedding feast invitation that's offered here week after week? I know it's easier to invite people to a community event like Trunk or Treat, and that's good too, please do that, but we want them to be invited to the lavishly prepared wedding feast of God.

When we invite people to come to church, we're not inviting them to tag along to go grocery shopping; we are inviting them to the wedding feast of God. God has personally invited them, purposefully prepared a feast of the forgiveness of sins and provided the fine custom-tailored clothes of perfection as made by Jesus for us. Who do you want to see enjoy what God has prepared for them? When and how will you be the servant of this parable and invite someone to God's wedding feast so that they can enjoy it? And when we do this, remember that it might take a lot of invitations before they take us up on it.

We do this because God has invited us to his wedding feast by name. He's prepared everything for us, sparing no expense. He has perfectly fitted, tailor-made clothes of perfection specifically made for you and me. He has that same personal invite for everyone. He is going to keep inviting through his servants, through us, until his wedding hall, heaven, is full of guests. God bless you as you extend God's invitation to his wedding feast. Amen.