

We're continuing in our series on the Parables of Jesus, and I think this morning's parable has the potential to generate some great discussion at lunch or in your small groups. We'll be looking at Matthew 22:1-14 so if you haven't yet opened your bible, now's the perfect time to get there. Today's parable follows directly what Buddy shared with us last week about the Wicked Tenants. This is the third of three parables Jesus told, one right after the other, that is a stern rebuke and warning to the religious leaders and everyone else listening. Failing to recognize Jesus as Messiah and entering the Kingdom of God only leads to a tragic end.

Some of you may have heard that the son of Asia's richest man got married last weekend in the culmination of a one-month long, star-studded, multi-event mega wedding.



Anant Ambani and his girlfriend Radhika Merchant had a guest list that included people like John Cena, Kim Kardashian, Mark Zuckerberg, famous cricket players, Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Bollywood stars, magician David Blaine, Disney CEO, Bob Iger and countless others!

During the Mediterranean cruise portion of the celebration, artists like Rhianna, Justin Bieber, and Katy Perry performed. Guests were set to enjoy 500 dishes created by 100 chefs. They were pampered by chartered flights, hair styling, makeup artists and Indian wear drapists. Total cost estimates range from \$150-\$400M. The father of the groom is supposed to be worth \$120B.

Imagine getting an invitation to that wedding!



It's going to be the event of the decade. To attend that event would be an unforgettable experience. I'm sure there were people who, legitimately, couldn't attend the celebration and they had to express their regrets in their RSVP. But an upscale event of this magnitude warranted making

almost any schedule adjustment necessary to attend because this wedding was a BIG deal. Who would reject an invite to such an event?

If that doesn't strike your fancy, think about what it would have been like to be invited to the wedding of Prince William and Kate.



Another lavish event, full of tradition, pomp and circumstance. The whole world watched as they got married and, to be there in person as an invited guest, forget about it!



No one in their right mind refuses to attend such an amazing event.

### **The Wedding Feast**

So, with that in mind, take a look at Matthew 22, beginning at verse one, and follow along with me as I read. [READ]

And again Jesus spoke to them [*the same audience He'd been speaking to*] in parables, saying, <sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, <sup>3</sup> and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup> 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.'" <sup>5</sup> But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup> while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. <sup>8</sup> Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those

invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup> Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. <sup>12</sup> And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.

<sup>13</sup> 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.' <sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen."

**A Wedding Feast (v 1-2)** (A little light-hearted bible reading for you this morning.) The Kingdom of Heaven is like a wedding feast. So, this is how it goes: A king is throwing a wedding party for his son and the event is going to be huge. The wedding feast symbolized the end time celebration of God's people. If you were part of the Kingdom, you'd be part of the feast. This represents enjoying deep intimacy with God in His kingdom and coming to the feast represents entering the kingdom. This was standard in Jewish thought and the listeners would have quickly grasped that.<sup>1</sup> So Jesus begins His parable by looking to the end of things.

**The Invitation Rejected (v 3-7)** People, far and wide, have been invited. It's a country-wide celebration. All the key people from all the regions under the king's reign have been issued invitations. Customarily there were a couple invitations for a wedding. The first, kind of a save-the-date invite, was delivered and the attendees would RSVP to let the king know they would attend. This initial invite was sent out way in advance of the wedding.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Blomberg, Craig L. *Interpreting the Parables, Second Edition* (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, 2012), 304.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The second invite was issued when everything was ready. The king's servants would get the word out to all the guests and say, 'Come on! Let's get this party started!'

Picture it: the king invites you to his son's wedding feast. Are you going to attend? Of course you are! *The king* has invited you. This isn't a work colleague who's invited you to a wedding of someone you don't know—it's the king! Not only will the event be extravagant and amazing in every conceivable way, but it's the *king* who's invited you. That's an even bigger deal than the president of the United States inviting you because, as a citizen of the kingdom, you serve the king. (We don't serve the president.) The king gets what he wants. That's part of being king. So, there's two important things to consider with these invites: not only will the gathering be incredible and a veritable who's who in attendance, but to say 'no' to the king's invite would be appallingly offensive. For the most part, people would say, 'I'll be there!'

But, when the celebration was ready, and the servants went out to the invited to let them know it's party time, that's when things got sideways. The invited, who had RSVP'd 'Yes,' decided they weren't coming. 'Yeah, I don't think I'll be able to come.' If you've ever planned a wedding and reception, can you imagine if, day of, *none* of your invited guests showed up? How would you feel if you found out the guests decided they had better things to do? To reject the king's invitation at this point is tantamount to high treason. But the king displayed incredible grace and kindness by sending out another round of servants to kind of whet the guests' appetites by describing all the deliciousness that awaited them at the feast. 'I've made every provision. We've got it ready for you. Best food ever! Get over here and enjoy the festivities.'

But still they wouldn't come. 'I have to work. I have weeds in my garden that need pulling.' And, worse, they killed the king's messengers.

*God's Patience*

Pause here for just a minute. God has called Israel to be His people. The religious leaders are the ones intended to guide the people and lead them to know and walk faithfully with Him. God provided for His people in amazing ways: deliverance from bondage, manna and quail in the desert, water from the rock, protection from raiding armies, faithful leaders. But Israel continued to brush Him off. Repeatedly, God sent His prophets to redirect and guide the Israelites when they got off track. Often, they didn't like what the prophets had to say, ignoring them, even killing them, so they could continue to pursue their selfish plans and worship their idols. God even sent His Son as Messiah to personally invite people into the Kingdom—but they didn't like His message and would eventually kill Him, too.

God wants them to be part of the end times celebration—the Wedding Feast. He has been patient with His people. But the leaders continue to do things their way, ignoring what God has called them to so they could continue to pursue their own interests. He's tried to whet their appetites with goodness and kindness that only He could provide, but they repeatedly snubbed Him. The leaders rebelled against their King.

We've done the same thing. He's repeatedly invited us to come close. We've heard the Good News of what God has done through Jesus' death and resurrection so that we could be saved from our sin, but many continue to brush Him off, unwilling to enter into relationship with the King and enter the Kingdom.

### *Consequences*

That's why verse seven is both painful and understandable. Those invited to the Feast should have been eager to attend, fully understanding the 'wow' of being part of the kingdom and called to be part of this incredible celebration, have said, 'Nah! I've got better things to do.' And killing a servant sent in the name of the king was a clear signal that they were no longer going to show allegiance to their sovereign.<sup>3</sup> They

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<sup>3</sup> Blomberg, 309.

committed treason and the consequence for treason is death. So, the king sends his army and destroys them. If that seems severe, that's because it is! Death is the penalty for insurrection, rebellion, mutiny, whatever you want to call it. The king will not, cannot, tolerate it. He graciously gave them repeated opportunities to change their minds, wanting them to be present, but they stubbornly refused. So, they got what they had coming to them.

Interestingly, Jesus' use of destruction of the city may be pointing back to the year 586-587 BC when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians because they turned their backs on God, became increasingly unfaithful and rejected the prophet God sent to redirect them.<sup>4</sup> This was a reminder to His listeners of what happens when God's messengers are rejected and ignored.<sup>5</sup> Jesus may also have been pointing ahead to the year 70 AD when, again, Jerusalem would fall—this time to the Romans.

Without a doubt, Jesus had the listeners' attention. They were probably stunned by the absurdity of rejecting the invite to begin with—who does that? And they were likely freaked out by the violence from both the invited guests and the king. They understood that one doesn't ignore the king, but that seemed to go from 0 to 60 really fast! That's what makes parables so effective... Just because you've had the *chance* to live as a citizen of the kingdom, doesn't mean you *are* living as a citizen of the kingdom. Some of Jesus' listeners figured they had reserved seats at the banquet because they were 'God's people.' The problem was, those religious leaders and self-righteous Jews didn't live like they belonged to God. They didn't follow God's lead. They didn't live in obedience to Him. They did their own thing and pursued their own priorities. That's not kingdom living, that's rebellion.

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:15-19; Jeremiah was the Prophet.

<sup>5</sup> Snodgrass, Klyne R. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2008), 319.



**The Open Invite (v 8-10)** The original guests were wiped out because they were unworthy, so the king sends the servants to invite as many as they can find. Most scholars believe that the open invitation is to tax collectors, prostitutes and other 'sinners' amongst the Israelites *and* to Gentiles. They're all being welcomed to the feast.<sup>6</sup> [The open invitation is for Israelites and Gentiles alike.] The gospel is going out to not just to Israel but to Gentiles, too. Anyone willing to cast aside their self-righteousness, their busyness, their preoccupation with everything *but* the kingdom, who will wholeheartedly accept the invite and attend the feast is welcome! It's all by the grace of the king that anyone's invited. He [The king] wants the banquet hall filled to the brim and anyone willing to attend on his terms is welcome. No one's getting into the end time banquet because they think they're great, because they're so holy and righteous. No one's getting in because they think they have a reserved seat since they went to church all their life. Some people believe that they'll be seated at the feast because, "God and I have an understanding." No, you don't. The only way anyone comes to the feast is on His terms—not yours. In the end, the wedding hall will be filled with undeserving recipients of the king's gracious invitation. That's the only way you get in—on His terms. Repent. Turn your back on your old way of living. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.<sup>7</sup> It's by grace you've been saved through faith...as a gift...not by what you've done.<sup>8</sup> We enter the Kingdom of Heaven on God's terms, not ours.

The king issued an open invitation and notice that the servants, quite literally, brought in the good and bad alike (which reminds us of what Dillon talked about a couple weeks ago with the parable of the wheat and the weeds). There's going to be some separation amongst those who have showed up.

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkins, Michael J. *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (p. 718). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 10:9

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9

### **Appropriate Attire (v 11-13)**

The wedding hall is full, guests everywhere, and the king walks among the people and sees a man who isn't appropriately dressed for the wedding. Everyone was invited, but proper wedding attire was still expected. Jesus' listeners understood this, but I didn't when I first read it, so let's unpack this a little bit. There are at least two possibilities for what this meant. First, there is some evidence in ancient culture that the king would supply garments for his guests.<sup>9</sup> Jesus could be alluding to God's righteousness that clothes a person who places their faith in Him.<sup>10</sup> Failure to have that 'clothing' suggests the person isn't really saved.

The other possibility is that this is referring, simply, to a clean garment. This garment might symbolize the fruitful righteousness in the man's life because he's living as God wants him to and it shows. He belongs in the Kingdom and his life makes it evident. We talked about this in chapter 3 of Colossians where Paul urges them to, "...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (v. 12). That's spiritual fruit. That's evidence of Christ's presence in your life. Since you're new in Christ, take off the old and put on the new. The clean garment for the wedding wasn't necessarily fancy but was required and the king would have given guests time to get their clean outfit before arriving at the party.<sup>11</sup>

We understand, even in our casual, California culture, that when you go to a wedding and reception, you go prepared, understanding the terms of attendance and participation (even if they're unspoken). You don't show up in your workout clothes or in your muck boots having been in the barn. You probably take a shower, put on some decent clothes, check your hair, confirm what time it starts so you don't arrive late and, when you get there, you conduct yourself appropriately. These are the 'terms' that we all know and understand as wedding participants. And those that

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<sup>9</sup> Blomberg, 310.

<sup>10</sup> Paul talks at length about this in the Romans 3 & 4.

<sup>11</sup> See Snodgrass, 321.

don't seem to understand these terms are immediately identified (the obnoxious loud talker before the service, the over-drinker at the reception). We show up prepared, understanding the terms.

That's why the man was speechless when the king asked him, "How did you get in here without a wedding garment?" Either he chose to *not* put on the provided garment or failed to put on a clean one from home. That's why he had no answer to the king's question. But by failing to wear an appropriate wedding garment the man rejected the king's terms for attendance, wanting instead [the man wanted] to attend on *his own* terms, but that's not how it works. 'I don't intend to change anything about me, but I still want to come to the banquet.' Nope! 'I don't want to change anything about me, but I still want to be in God's Kingdom.' Nope! He rejected the king in a different kind of way than the first batch of unworthy guests—but it was still rejection and that leads to judgment. Which is why the king had him tied up and thrown out into the darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's a common description of [=] eternal judgement. What we do with God's invitation into the Kingdom has eternal consequences. This guy responded to the invite, but only outwardly—there was no inward change—no inward desire to be there. No heart change. No fruit. 'Sure, I'll go. But I am who I am.' This guy represents anyone who hasn't genuinely placed their faith in Jesus Christ and is tragically unprepared for God's judgment.

### *Those listening*

Some of you listening this morning may have that guy's mindset. You'll go to church. You might give and be part of a small group, even volunteer, but you're still wearing the same clothes—you haven't changed. You haven't genuinely placed their faith in Jesus Christ yet. There's nothing about you that's different because you don't want to change. You like who you are. But remember you don't come to the king/to God on your terms. You come to Him on *His* terms. And if you won't let His Spirit shape and transform you, to clean you and make you new through faith in Jesus Christ, then you may end up like this guy. Don't assume, like the first group, that because you've gone through the motions that your seat at

the table is guaranteed. Going through the motions is an outward thing. But God knows the heart and He knows if your heart is fully His. He also knows if you really want to follow Him faithfully, but you struggle at times. His grace is sufficient for you. Keep trusting. Keep following. Keep allowing the Spirit to mold and shape you. Jesus is not saying that only perfect people are kingdom citizens and invited to the wedding feast. But those who are kingdom citizens and are invited to the wedding feast will live like people who belong in the kingdom. Your profession of faith and how you live ought to line up. Again, we're not talking about *perfection* in life but the *direction* of your life. Does the direction of your life look like you belong in the Kingdom of God?

### *Salvation opportunity*

Let's not miss the moment. If you're hearing this and you're thinking, I don't know if I've ever asked Jesus to be my Leader and Forgiver. I don't think I've ever repented and surrendered myself completely to Jesus. If that's you, then let's fix that. If you have never given your life to Christ, never repented of your sin, received His forgiveness and been made new and want to do that today, make this your prayer. "Jesus, I need Your forgiveness for my sin. I humbly receive Your grace, put my trust in You and what You accomplished when You died on the cross for me. I no longer want to live for myself, but for You. Please fill me with Your Spirit and empower me to live in ways that honor You. All I want is what You want for me. Amen." If that was your prayer and you genuinely surrendered your life to Jesus today, please raise your hand. We want to see you, celebrate with you, and encourage you as we journey together with Jesus. [Connect Card]

### **Many & Few (v 14)**

Jesus finishes up with some challenging words in verse 14. "For many are called, but few are chosen." Many have been invited to the wedding feast. But not everyone who shows up is prepared to be there. Only those who respond to the invitation on the king's terms will be allowed, chosen, to attend. There's a universal invitation—open to all—to become part of the Kingdom of God. But only those who accept Jesus Christ as their Leader

and Forgiver, their Lord and Savior, will become Kingdom citizens who will attend the wedding feast. Evidence of that citizenship will be seen in the fruitfulness of a person's life. The chosen are the ones who have genuinely placed their faith in Jesus Christ—whether Jew or Gentile. And there will be evidence of Christ's presence in the lives of the chosen because they will produce spiritual fruit. True followers are fruitful.

## **Wrap**

Remember, this is the third of three successive parables chastising the religious leaders for their gross failures and misunderstandings of who they are as God's people. They don't produce fruit consistent with repentance! Chosenness isn't about race (or being brought up in church for that matter), but on our response to God's invitation and coming to Him on His terms.<sup>12</sup> If you belong to Jesus Christ, your life will show it. His Spirit lives in you, you're being transformed, you're a new creation because the old has gone, the new has come. The old garments will be removed, and the new garments put on. Everyone's called, everyone's invited. But not everyone will want to takeoff the old and put on the new. Not everyone will want to remove self and put on Christ. But being clothed in Christ's righteousness is the only way to participate in the Wedding Feast.

## **Close**

When God's Kingdom comes in its fullness, and there is a Wedding Feast, a celebration with God and all His people, will you be there? The King has invited you. How could you say no? If you have responded positively to the Gospel and Jesus leads your life, you'll be there. Clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before His throne. It's not about you being good enough, fast enough, or smart enough. It's about what He's done and what He will do in you as you walk faithfully with Him. Let's pray.

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<sup>12</sup> France, R.T. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2007), 828.