

**Stories
Invited**
Matthew 22:1-14

July 16, 2023

HDBC

This is the second in the series where we are looking at some of the stories told by Jesus. They were never told simply for entertainment value, like we do. **For those seeking the truth**, He used stories to teach truth, to make points, and to provide understanding. **For those whose hearts were hard** and whose minds were made up already, He used stories to keep them in the dark.

Most of His stories dealt with the kinds of everyday things that the people experienced or at least understood. The story found in Matthew 22 would have been easily understood by his hearers. It was the story of a wedding celebration. Most would experience it in their lifetimes, but not with the extravagance described by Jesus, or with the surprising twists and turns He added. **The focus** is more on those who were invited than on the event itself.

Sounds like a happy story. Weddings are happy occasions with dancing and laughter and fun. You might think a story that begins with a wedding scene would end on a positive note, something like, **they lived happily ever after**. But this story does not. As with most good stories, there is a surprising twist at the end.

It naturally divides itself into two parts. The characters that are common to both parts are easily identified. **The king** is clearly a picture of God, the Father. **The son** is clearly a picture of Jesus, His Son. **The wedding feast** is a picture of the kingdom of heaven. Notice it is pictured as a great celebration, a party! Let me just say, Heaven is going to be better than we could ever imagine. Don't ever worry about being bored in Heaven!

But there are some **important differences** in these two parts of the story. Each one focuses on a **different group of people** and on **a different historical time**. Also, the **responses to the invitations** are different. It's important to understand these distinctions. But when we take both parts, we will see there are important lessons to be learned that are universal in application. I hope I have piqued your interest.

Let's read one part of the story at a time. First, Matt 22:1-7.

1. National Invitation (1-7)

To understand this part of the story we must understand the particular focus group and time frame. We also need to remember who the characters are.

The king is God. He is the one who has provided a future in heaven. He desires for people to be forgiven of their sins and to be brought into His family and into His presence for all eternity in a place called Heaven. He has prepared a celebration for all who will respond to His invitation,

The son is Jesus. He is pictured as the groom and the church the bride. Because of His role in our salvation, the Father has chosen to exalt the Son and to celebrate what He has done in offering salvation to all.

The wedding feast is the kingdom of heaven. Being saved. The invitation is an invitation to be saved. Coming to the wedding is a picture of trusting Jesus. As part of our entrance into Heaven, God has prepared a great feast to celebrate what He has done for us and our future together in Heaven. Referenced in Matthew 25. The clearest picture is found in Revelation 19. When you enter into a saving relationship with Jesus, you are entering into a grand and thrilling future that will include this great celebration.

The slaves are those who are sharing the invitation to be saved. In this part of the story that would include the prophets of the Old Testament, John the Baptist and the apostles of the N.T. They were constantly preaching the Kingdom of Heaven and inviting people to move toward and enter into the kingdom of God through faith.

Those invited include the nation of Israel and particularly the spiritual leaders. Though all were invited to trust God and be saved, the primary focus was on the nation of Israel. We have evidence of Gentiles being saved, so we know it happened, but the primary focus was on Israel.

The time frame. Let me add one more element that I think is important to understand. This part of the story illustrates what happened during the life of Jesus and up to 70 A.D. I'll explain that in a moment. When Jesus was telling the story, He related what had happened in the past, what was happening in the present and what would happen in the near future. Note two important scenes.

1) The rejection by those invited

The important thing in this part of the story is the rejection of those invited to the feast. Though many Jews were saved during the early days of the New Testament, for the most part they rejected Jesus and His invitation to be saved. Jesus mentions two groups.

The indifferent (5)

This first group just didn't pay attention, didn't care. Their focus was on what was right before them with no thought for the future or for more important things. Many are like that today. Just get through the day. Just make it to the next payday or the weekend or our vacation. Just make it through this stage of life and things will get better. No thought for eternal things. No time to consider what happens after this life. **Birth, life, death. What then?** Many people miss this kingdom of God because of indifference. Just don't care.

The violent (6)

The second group was different. They attacked the messengers of God. That was true of almost all of the apostles and early church leaders. **We seem to be slowly moving in that direction in our nation.** In the first generation of Christianity, there was a violent response to the gospel. Whether they rejected the invitation through indifference or violence the results would be the same.

2) The judgment of the king (7)

The original hearers could not perceive what this meant because it had not happened. It did in 70 A.D. Almost all Bible scholars recognize that Jesus is referring to what happened then. That year the Roman army conquered and destroyed Jerusalem, essentially killing Israel as a nation.

It may seem harsh. But remember this, **long before the king sent his soldiers with weapons of destruction He sent his messengers with invitations of grace.**

This was the first story Jesus told illustrating the rejection of Israel, and particularly the religious leaders. And they were getting it. They understood He was talking about them. Rather than soften their hearts, it stiffened their resolve to have Him killed.

Quick review of the meaning of this part of the story:

God patiently and persistently invited His people to be forgiven and saved. The nation persistently rejected the invitation, killing many of His servants. God justifiably brought judgment for their rejection of His offer.

We live in a culture and time when we think it unfair of God to judge sin. But those who do so are being hypocritical. We all understand and appreciate a sense of justice. **We praise justice when we see it.** Our nation rejoiced at the death of Osama Bin Ladin because we recognized it as justice. When a serial killer, a child molester, a rapist is captured, convicted & sentenced, we are grateful. It is an act of justice. In verse 7, we are see justice in action.

2. Universal Invitation (8-14)

So, this part of the story has a broader focus and time frame. The focus here is on the universal nature of those invited to the feast and a broader time, leading up to the coming of Jesus. Most of the characters are the same. King is God. Son is Jesus. Slaves are those who share the gospel. The invitations go not only to the nation of Israel but to all people. The response is a bit different. But there is also a surprising twist at the end. **Read Mt 22:8-14**

1) The scope of the invitation (9-10)

The invitation is going to everyone. No place was to be excluded. No type of person was to be excluded. Let me just say the gospel is offered to everyone. God's invitation is for us all. None are excluded from the invitation. Think of the **whoever** verses. Whoever believes, comes.

2) The response to the invitation (10)

The response is much more favorable than in the first part of the story. Many come. The bad and the good. In fact, Jesus says the wedding hall was full. What is this a picture of? We need to be a little nuanced here. It would be too simplistic, and I think wrong to say this full wedding feast is a picture of heaven or of the kingdom of God. **It is a picture of the visible church.** Churches like ours and the ones down the street. Verses 11-14 make this clear.

Here's the picture. When the invitation is offered, many respond. Some churches are full. Others are partially full. Many come and many join churches. On the outside it appears they are in the kingdom. From our

vantage point it is impossible to be sure who is and who is not truly saved. Jesus told another parable to illustrate this. Story of the wheat and the tares. While growing it is impossible to tell the difference between the true grain and the weeds. Only in the harvest will it become clear.

3) The warning with the invitation (11-14)

This is where the story takes a surprising turn. The party is going on, when the king singled out a person who was not dressed in the proper clothing. Note the question asked by the king (12). BTW, he uses the same word Jesus used when addressing the betrayer, Judas. **Friend**. No animosity. He was not dressed for the wedding, and therefore was not allowed to stay. He was thrown out of the light of the feast and into the darkness where there would be only sorrow & regret.

A few important observations.

This is not about clothes. You don't have to dress up for church/heaven. This is not about getting kicked out of heaven. About faking it at church. This is a picture of what makes us worthy of heaven.

The clothing here represents the righteousness of Christ. The Bible speaks of Jesus putting our sins upon Himself and putting His righteousness upon us when we trust Him. Without his righteousness you can be in the church, but you cannot be in Heaven.

All are invited. The only ones chosen are the ones who have received the righteousness of Christ, through faith in Him. In other words, those who said **Yes** to the invitation. And those who do not have the righteousness of Christ will have no answer, no excuse. Why? Because it is the king who provides the wedding dress for all who say yes to His invitation.

Ted Kidd was five years older than Janet, finished college before her, and started to work in a city hundreds of miles from her. They always seemed to be at different places in their lives. Every Valentine's Day, Ted proposed to her. Every Valentine's Day, Janet would say, "No, not yet." For seven years!

Finally, when they were both living in Dallas, Tedd reached the end of his patience. He bought a ring, took Janet to a romantic restaurant, and was prepared to as one last time.

After salad, entree, and dessert, it was time. Ted summoned up his courage. Knowing that Janet had a gift for him, however, he decided to wait. "What did you bring me?" he asked. She handed him a box the size of a book. He opened the package and slowly peeled away the tissue paper. It was a cross-stitch Janet had made that simply said, "Yes."

Yes: it is the word that God, in his merciful pursuit of the sinner, longs to hear.

Lessons learned?

1. God is the sovereign ruler.
2. God has a son, named Jesus, whom He loves dearly.
3. God is gracious and generous, inviting all to come to His party.
4. God is patient. He sends invitation after invitation.
5. God is faithful. He welcomes those who accept His invitation by faith.
6. God is just. He will bring judgment, but only to those who deserve it,

During the presidency of Andrew Jackson, George Wilson, a postal clerk, robbed a federal payroll from a train and in the process killed a guard. The court convicted him and sentenced him to hang. Because of public sentiment against capital punishment, however, a movement began to secure a presidential pardon for Wilson. It was his first offense. Eventually Jackson intervened with a pardon. Amazingly, Wilson refused it.

Since this had never happened before, the Supreme Court was asked to rule on whether someone could indeed refuse a presidential pardon. Chief Justice John Marshall handed down the court's decision:

A pardon is a parchment whose only value must be determined by the receiver of the pardon. It has no value apart from that which the receiver gives to it. George Wilson has refused to accept the pardon. We cannot conceive why he would do so, but he has. Therefore, George Wilson must die. And he did.

Do you know what an unaccepted pardon is worth? Nothing.

Do you know what an unaccepted invitation to salvation is worth? Nothing.