

October 31, 2021

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST/BANQUET

Matthew 22:1-14



Special Music: "Who am I" Casting Crowns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBcqria2wmg>

Matthew 22:1-14

- 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.”

IT'S TIME TO CELEBRATE

**Good food,
Good music.
Good friends,
Laughter oozing
From every soul
And cubbyhole.
It's time to celebrate!**

**Let's gather and celebrate.
No reason to wait
If we don't have a reason
We'll just ease in
To a made-up an occasion
Of any persuasion
Dance and sing,
Together
It's time to celebrate!**

**Send out the invites
Call on the phone
Ask them in person
To join in this milestone.
No need to postpone
Gather your family.
And all of your friends.
It's time to celebrate!**

The band starts to play
The fun's on its way
But where are guests?
Perhaps their just testing
My patience.
Soon they will come.
Well then, maybe not
The food's getting cold.
And before I'm too old
Let's rethink our guests
It's time to celebrate!

I head to the street
Approach all that I meet
I beg them to come
Because I am undone
That the ones that I know
Never did show.
But even a stranger must eat
It's time to celebrate!

Get Joe on the corner,
And Frank at the mill
Bonnie the foreigner,
And Becky the shill.
Get Tony the Barber
And Francis the fool
Bring Billy the forger

**And Tracy the cruel
Ask Sylvester the butcher
And Willis the snitch
Ask Jack the policeman
And Sally the rich.
It's time to celebrate!**

**The house filled with laughter
The party was on
People were singing
The gayest of songs
As they danced
And they drank
And they ate to their fill
If the guests will not come
Then invite those that will.
It's time to celebrate!**

Did you ever throw a party, and no one came? I have. It can be so embarrassing. You start asking yourself, “Did I put the right time and date on the invitations?” “Did I put the invitations in the mail?” “People said they were coming, why aren’t they here?” But all that is really beside the point. Everything’s ready, decorations are hung, food has been prepared, music has been selected, and you have no one to partake of the merriment. What do you do? I’ve also had too many people show up including many who were not invited. I actually prefer that. I’ve even been invited to my own surprise party. That’s a little embarrassing, too. It takes a great deal of effort to act surprised when you know what’s coming.

What do we do when our expectations are one thing and the reality turns out to be something different? In today’s story, the person throwing the wedding celebration is the king. He really does expect the people that he invited to show up. This soiree is for his son, the prince. Even if someone is not fond of the king, we would think that people would be smart enough to see that it is important to show up. Imagine we’ve been invited to our boss’s son’s or daughter’s wedding and we RSVP. Then we decide at the last minute that it really isn’t important and choose to stay home and watch the latest episode of NCIS or may sort our sock drawers. But hey, we don’t need to cancel. No one will miss us. We just don’t show up. And there’s an empty seat with our name in fancy calligraphy embossed on a card, and everyone knows that didn’t show up. Come Monday morning, we might want to think about taking a sick day or start our job search.

Especially when we realize our assistant did show up with his beautiful wife and beautifully wrapped crockpot to wish the couple a wonderful union.

There are two ways to approach this kind of invitation. 1) We can either put ourselves in a position of arrogance and ignore our obligations and responsibilities or 2) we can realize that we are privileged to be invited and embrace the opportunity to share in the celebration with people who care enough about us to invite us. They would not be sending us an invitation if they did not want us there. They probably did not invite us just because they needed another crockpot.

But our story today is really another story about the nature of Kingdom of Heaven, and I don't want to drift too far from that. In the story of "The Wedding Feast," the king represents Jesus. Those who were originally invited to the feast are the Jewish elite, the hardliners, the Pharisees and Sadducees. And the second group of invitees are everyone else, including you and me. People that the Jewish elite wouldn't be caught dead attending a party where they allowed the riff raff to attend.

In the story, the king gives the original invitees every chance to come. He tells them all about the glories of the banquet (the Kingdom of Heaven). The food is of the highest caliber. But the invitees just don't care much. They go off to work in the field or attend to their business. He even gives them multiple chances and they get downright rude with the messengers. Maybe it's just too much trouble to get dressed up to go. Whatever the reason, they are totally ungrateful for this opportunity. They seem to have lost touch with their purpose

and position in the kingdom, choosing instead to believe it is all about the work. That was the nature of the Jewish elite. They were more concerned with the law and how to use it to control the people than they were about God's intentions.

We've talked about the disciples in the field before, where they picked and ate the heads of grain on the Sabbath. The Pharisees hated that. After all it was the Sabbath and picking those head of grain was considered work. Working on the Sabbath was a sin of the highest order. But Jesus tells them that they are confused, that they have it all wrong. **"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."** **Mark 2:27** This was a not so subtle way of telling the Pharisees that God did not place it in their hands to control the law and sit in judgement. God didn't tell them to point fingers. They had taken this responsibility on their own, and Jesus didn't appreciate it. The Pharisees were telling Jesus that it was their party, their celebration, that they could invite or admonish anyone they felt needed it. Jesus is responding by letting them know that no, this was not their party. This was His party. A party being thrown by His Father. And no, they were not in control of the invitations.

Now, do understand that invitations had been extended to the Jewish leaders, they just chose to ignore those invitations because they felt they didn't need to have an invitation to attend a banquet. If they did choose to come, even without an invitation, they expected to be sat at the head table because of their importance in the community. If they chose not to come, then they wouldn't come. They just assumed they had an open invitation to any party because of

who they were. If they chose to show up, then whoever the party was for should be grateful for their appearance and have a seat of importance ready for them.

The Jewish leaders felt they didn't need an invitation to heaven, especially one from an itinerant preacher from Nazareth. So, they ignored it. If, by some chance they chose to change their mind at the last minute, they knew that God would have a place of honor in heaven waiting for them, nicely engraved calligraphy card marking their spot at the head table.

If we throw a celebration banquet, is that they kind of people we want at our table? Ungrateful people that think of it more as an obligation than a privilege? People who probably won't come because they don't really know us that well anyway, and attending the party might take them down a notch on the social scale? But Jesus did not hesitate to attend banquets with the very people the Sadducees and Pharisees chose to condemn and ignore. Again, we read in Mark 2:15-17:

15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's (Matthew's) house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

When King Jesus throws a celebration, who do we think He will invite? Inviting the poor, the hungry, the downcast, the disheartened, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the rebels, the downtrodden, the miserable, and the sick was Jesus' way of reaching those in the midst of struggles, that were acknowledging that they were in need and could seize the opportunity to attend this important banquet that the Jewish leaders would have no part of. Jesus throws a party for those who need one, not those who believe they deserve one. He throws the celebration for us. We are all invited to the table of our Lord. There is no way to earn a seat at the table. We are invited because Jesus loves us, warts and all.

Even if it doesn't mention it in our parable, I will tell you that each and every seat at the banquet had a beautifully inscribed calligraphy card with our names on them. The food is still of the highest caliber. The wine is the best that can be had. The music is magnificent. The plates are still the best china. The glass is crystal. The tableware is the finest silver. The caliber of the banquet doesn't diminish due to the change in the guest list.

If we choose to turn down the invitation, that chair is still there for us. It is reserved for us. But He will know if we are not there, and He will continually send His messengers to find us and keep inviting us. He truly wants us there and the only gift He needs is for us to show up and admit that we are broken and ready to party.

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.”

These last four verses are hard for us to put into context. What in the world is Jesus talking about? I thought this was all about come as we are? Here is a guy who gets tied up and thrown out for not wearing the right clothes! We have to remember that this is a parable and we and there is always a problem when we try to take a parable too literally. I believe that the clothes that Jesus is referring to here is a contrite heart. If we show up believing that we belong there because we have earned the privilege, then we aren't wearing the wedding clothes. We are in our own adornments and expecting Jesus to treat us extra special because of who we are.

That just isn't the case. We are at the celebration by His invitation, and we are expected to come to the table with gratitude and with the understanding that we have done nothing to deserve it. We can't fool Jesus. He can see our motives.

Everyone gets invited, but of those who show up, only a few will choose to stick around. Jesus will never force us to stay if we don't want to. The Creator gave us free will for a reason. But if we choose to stay, we must choose out of a humble and repentant spirit.

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Good music.

**Good friends,
Laughter oozing
From every soul
And cubbyhole.
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We'll just ease in
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Of any persuasion
Dance and sing,
Together
It's time to celebrate!**

I'm just the messenger. And the message is that Jesus wants us all at the banquet. He's waiting. The food's ready. The music is playing. Our seats are reserved. Invite your friends and neighbors. Let's celebrate!

AMEN

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