



The Parable of the Wedding Feast

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 22:1-14

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We come this morning to the third of three parables that Jesus tells that expose the worthlessness of religiosity, the deadliness of spiritual hypocrisy, the wickedness of empty and vain professions of faith, the lie of fruitless “faith” and the insanity of a Christianity minus Christ as the cornerstone. These are strong words from Christ, no doubt. Words that cut a straight line and leave no room for equivocation or evasion. And we should expect that. That is the nature of God’s Word. Hebrews 4:12-13 says “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4:12–13, ESV) The Word of God cuts through all pretensions, all appearances, all defenses and reveals everything about us clearly. That is the truth about the texts that we have been looking at over the last several weeks.

I think it is safe to say that in the last week of His life, with the cross looming just days away, Jesus teaching became more and more pointed, more earnest, if that is possible. The theme of eternal life and eternal damnation became the central, overwhelming focus of His preaching. It is certainly the focus of these last three parables and the Jews, quite honestly, did not want to hear it. It offended them. It was an affront to their self-righteousness. In the same way, salvation and damnation are not popular sermon themes in the professing church today. There is the clamor for entertainment. There is a great demand for what is “practical,” or “useful,” or “relevant.” And yet, it is the theme that the Lord Jesus Christ, only a few days before His crucifixion, with the awareness that in His sacrificial and horrific death to redeem sinners pressing upon Him, His preaching coming to an end, was determined to preach with a resolute and unwavering earnestness. This is the great theme that occupied the heart and mind of the Son of God.

You can understand why. This last thrust of His preaching ministry was in the city of Jerusalem, the focus not upon His disciples but upon the religious leaders, the religious lost of Israel, those who were moral and spiritual according to their own standard of righteousness but who were utterly lost and oblivious to the fact that they were. They were certainly religious but they had departed from the faith, departed from the Word of God, from the faith that began with Abraham and was passed down through Moses and the prophets, so much so that they could not and would not recognize and worship the Messiah when He came to them in the power of God. And so, this parable today offers another picture of the Kingdom of Heaven. And we see that:

Indifference and Open Hostility to Christ Both Constitute Rejection of Christ (v. 1-13) Pick it up with me in verse 1 again: “And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.” (Matthew 22:1–3, ESV)

Here in this parable, Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven to a great wedding feast that a king gave for his son. Weddings were a huge event in the nation of Israel. Whereas a wedding celebration in our culture consists of a marriage ceremony and then a reception and in most cases is wrapped up in one day, a wedding celebration in Israel would last a full week. In the case of some of great importance and with great means, it could last up to two or three weeks of feasting and dancing and merriment. So Jesus pictures the Kingdom of Heaven as wedding feast held by a king to honor his son, a feast to which he invited a certain group of people to come and enjoy. It would have been a massive honor, an immense privilege to be invited by a king to such an event. The king of the realm was inviting people to rejoice with him and to take part in a very special event – the union of his beloved son, the prince, with his bride.

Now to understand this text, you need to understand how a wedding invitation worked in those days. Those who were invited would have already received and accepted an earlier invitation. Then, when the celebration was ready to commence, a second invitation would go out, calling the guests to come to the feast. It is kind of like the “Save the Date” announcement that is followed with the formal invitation to a wedding. Only in the case of the parable, the recipients of this invitation would have already promised to attend the celebration. So now, after the initial invitation was given and accepted, the day of celebration finally here, Jesus describes the

king sending out his servants to call all those who were invited to come to the wedding feast. But, unbelievably, the invited guests are unwilling to come.

Now, you have to understand, this is no small thing. This would have been a massive affront to the king, an insult to his glory and majesty, an insult to the honor of his son. This would have been an act of rebellion against his authority, rule, power, and generosity. Despite the contemptible response of the people, the king demonstrates amazing patience. He sends his servants once more. Verse 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.” ’” (Matthew 22:4, ESV)

The king emphasizes the bountiful provisions that he has made, the extravagant preparations made to honor his son and again, through his servants, implores the people to come to the wedding feast. The response of the people is horrible. Verses 5 and 6: “But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.” (Matthew 22:5–6, ESV) This is a shocking and unthinkable, inconceivable, ludicrous response to the invitation of the king. Some paid no attention to the invitation. Literally they “made light of it” and treated it with complete indifference and disregard. They ignored the pleading of the servants because they were consumed with other lesser pursuits – their farm or business. They were simply indifferent to the invitation altogether. But others, seized the servants, treated them with contempt and shameful disrespect and put them to death. When word of this atrocity reached the king, his servants shamefully treated and killed, his son’s honor despised, he was enraged. Jesus continues in the story saying: “The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” (Matthew 22:7, ESV)

After all of the repeated invitations given by the servants on behalf of the king, and after the indifference, mistreatment and murder, the king, justly angered, sent troops to go and to destroy the rebels. Like Proverbs 20:2 says: “The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; whoever provokes him to anger forfeits his life.” (Proverbs 20:2, ESV) Swiftly and shockingly severe judgment came upon the people.

Again, just as we saw last week in the parable of the wicked tenants, this is more than a story. This is a story of the nation of Israel. And again, it is not hard to understand who the players are in this parable. The king is God the Father. The Son is Jesus. The servants are the prophets of God, including John the Baptist, and the people are the unbelieving, the unsaved but religious people of Israel including the religious leaders but not limited to them. This parable is directed to the religious, those who would profess to be followers or believers in God – not the outsider.

Here's the deal. Israel was the recipient of the gracious invitation of God the Father to enjoy the full blessing of the kingdom reign in Jesus Christ. To them had been given the Scriptures, the oracles of God, the prophets and their prophecies, all pointing to the coming of her Messiah, the True King, Jesus. They had received the prophecies, the announcement of His coming. And yet when He was born into the world, though wise men from afar came to worship Him, the Jewish nation did not even seem to notice. When Christ grew to maturity and God commissioned John the Baptist to herald His coming, preaching in the wilderness and calling people to repent and to prepare their hearts for His coming, the Jewish leaders and so many of the nation, refused to listen.

God the Father had invited His covenant people to receive their king, to celebrate and rejoice at His coming, to honor Him and to give Him the praise and adoration of which He is worthy. They had been invited to enter into the full blessing of His kingdom reign but His invitation was met with indifference by some, and with ridicule, hostility and ultimately, violence by others. Jesus tells this parable knowing full well what the religious leaders of Israel are planning to do to Him and what they had done to the prophets and He wants them to know what is awaiting them as a result. God will rain judgment, destruction, and vengeance upon them for their rebellion against His authority, rule, power, and generous patience and for their rejection and dishonoring of Christ His Son. There will be no escape for them. To refuse the invitation to honor and glorify Christ is to invite destruction and judgment. God is not to be trifled with, not a God to be ignored. He will not forever tolerate wickedness and rebellion. There is judgment that awaits the rejecter of God and His Son.

And here is a key point that we need to see. Indifference and open hostility to Christ both constitute rejection of Him. They are two sides of the same coin. Some in Israel simply ignored Jesus or sought to use him for personal gain – for instance wanting to be healed by him or fed by him -- without any intention of following Him. Others were vehemently opposed to Him, to

His message, to His life, toward everything about Him and would eventually put Him to death. Both responses – indifference and open hostility -- are worthy of death. And remember, this is from those would have identified themselves as worshippers of God. This is a pointed word from Jesus and it doesn't let up. Indifference and open hostility are both sins worthy of death.

In the story, the king is so concerned that his son be honored, that he be given the honor that he is due that he sends out his messengers again so that the wedding hall will be filled. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' 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." (Matthew 22:8–10, ESV)

Now, the point of this is not that some are worthy to receive the invitation to the feast and some are not. The point that Jesus is making through the king is that those who refused the invitation showed themselves to be worthless. Their worthiness was not a function of their character but of their response to the invitation. They were found unworthy, though presumably they would have been people considered to be of great importance to be invited by the king to his son's wedding feast, because of their refusal to come and their rejection of the king's servants. So the king determines to send his servants out onto the main roads to invite everyone whom they saw, to gather them up and to bring them to the feast to honor his son. And that is what the servants did – those who in human eyes would be considered to be good and the bad, Without distinction, without qualification, whoever they may be, wherever they may be – people who themselves or anyone else, for that matter, would never have anticipated or expected to be so privileged, so blessed, as to sit at the wedding feast of the son of the king and yet they were gathered in.

When the servants were finished, the wedding hall was filled with glad, thankful, joyful guests feasting with the king and his son, enjoy fellowship and communion and celebrating together. The implications of this parable would have been obvious to anyone that was listening. The religious leaders and the religiously lost in the nation of Israel considered themselves to be worthy of God's kingdom. They thought they deserved it. And the very people whom they thought to be unworthy of God's kingdom – those whom they designated as sinners and the Gentiles – were the ones that were going to be welcomed into God's kingdom because of His great mercy and grace, because of His generosity and because of God's determination to see that His Son be honored and crowned with glory.

But the parable isn't finished. Jesus adds one more element. He pictures the king walking around the feast and listen to what He says: ""But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment." (Matthew 22:11, ESV) The king invited all of these people from throughout his realm, none of whom would have been prepared to come to a wedding, and so the inference is that he provided for them the wedding garment, the apparel that they would need in order to be a part of the celebration and all that they would have needed to do was to put it on. It was the sign that you belonged here like a ticket or a wristband at King's Dominion. When this king put on this great feast to honor his son, not only did he provide the invitation and all of the food but he also provided the necessary garments to wear at the feast for everyone that was invited. But, as the king walks in the midst of the guests, one guy stands out because he is not wearing the wedding garment. He tries to sneak into the wedding feast clothed in his own clothing, having refused to wear the garment that was supplied by the king himself. It doesn't go unnoticed.

Verse 12 continues: "And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless." (Matthew 22:12, ESV) The king confronts the man who lacks the proper clothing, who lacks the garment that identifies him as a welcome guest and asks him, "What are you doing here?" The intruder has no answer. He is speechless, without an excuse, without a defense at all. The king's response is not simply to ask the man to leave; it is far more ominous than that. Verse 13 says: "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.'" (Matthew 22:13, ESV) He is to be bound, without any hope of release, cast out into the outer darkness – outside of the kingdom, where there will only be torment and suffering picturesquely described as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth." A place of horrific suffering, anguish, misery, torment, and unending grief.

With that description, Jesus goes beyond a simple story to THE story. There will not be found in the Kingdom of Heaven anyone lacking the proper garment required for entrance and communion there. Instead, all who are not in the Kingdom will be found in the eternal suffering and torment of hell – all who have refused the invitation of the King of Heaven to come to the feast and be clothed with garment of His making.

Now the big question is this. What does this garment represent? The answer is simple – it is righteousness that comes only in one way – by the way of true, personal, living, active faith in Christ. The central issue is our response to the Lord Jesus Christ. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...” (Romans 3:23–25, ESV) He has put Jesus forward to be received by faith – by a personal, living, active, life-changing, heart-transforming, mind-renewing, soul-cleansing, worship-creating, obedience-producing, hope-giving, joy-generating, fruit-producing faith. This is the content, this is the character of faith as it has been described in the gospel of Matthew.

The garment necessary for inclusion in the great wedding feast of the Kingdom of Heaven is the robe of righteousness offered to us by virtue of the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. When Jesus went to the cross, and there bore the penalty of sinners in His body on the tree, He gave to believing sinners a righteousness that makes us acceptable, by faith, before the Holy God. We see this language in Isaiah 61, when he writes: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” (Isaiah 61:10, ESV) It is the imputed righteousness of Christ that is both received by faith and manifested by obedience to Christ. Like all of the other parables before it, the central issue is our response to Christ and His gospel. So how do we apply this parable?

The Parable Applied

This story has great relevance for us today because it is a parable easily applied to the professing church. It isn't hard to draw the lines. Now, remember that this is a parable and not an allegory. Unlike an allegory where every detail in the story has great significance, in most cases a parable has one or a couple of significant spiritual themes and explains spiritual truth in a way that will etch it into your mind and that is the case here. Remember, Jesus tells this story to those who would have identified themselves as God's people. He tells this story about those who would have considered themselves to be the people of God and it is a pointed story. He is confronting the religious professors of His day.

That is significant to see and here is why. Beloved, there is no doubt that the kingdom of darkness opposes the Kingdom of Heaven and the reign of Christ in very obvious and visible ways – the physical persecution of believers in other countries, the cultural opposition that we feel here, the mocking portrayals of Christianity, the liberal media that hates Christianity but is in love with Islam. There are obvious assaults against the Kingship of Christ in our culture but it is true that Satan does his best work in the professing church, in the religious but lost.

The falling away of the visible church from the centrality of Christ, the apostasy of the professing church in America from the centrality of the gospel, the great falling away from Christ by professing believers is strikingly obvious, stunningly apparent to anyone who has eyes to see. Within the church, there are a startling number of professing believers, people who call themselves Christians, but who are indifferent to the gospel, to its call, to its demands to respond in repentance and faith, and others, even in the church, who are openly hostile to the true biblical gospel, just like the religious people described in this parable. They are religious and they are lost.

How does that happen? The gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer for every need of the human soul. Forgiveness, peace with God, hope in the world and joy in the world to come, union with Christ, entrance into the family of God, the gift of His own righteousness, an inheritance with all of the saints, strength to live holy and fruitful lives in the Lord. It is an amazing offer. Still, there are professing believers, those who claim to be children of God who ignore the gospel and its demands altogether or who are hostile to the faithful preaching of the gospel. People who claim to be Christians but who reject nearly everything that the gospel teaches and who are hostile to its truth.

Those people will always be in the professing church. Some churches are full of them, others have some, but no church has none. There will always be those in the visible church who are invited time after time but who personally and spiritually will not come. They will not truly believe in Christ alone. They will not truly follow Him and bear fruit for the sake of His glory. Still they think they will have a seat at the great feast in the Kingdom of Heaven – not because they have loved God with their heart, soul, mind, and strength, not because they have laid hold of Christ as their great treasure and only hope for eternal life, not because they have believed God's Word, not because they love God and His Son and long to do His will, not because they have borne the fruit of real faith and served the Lord making their lives with the people of God. They think they will have a seat at the table of God, in His presence, just

because. They just will. They have deluded themselves. They hear these parables preached and walk away certain that whatever the preacher was talking about, it was not about them. They are blind, just like the Pharisees and elders. They cannot see the truth until it is too late.

Of the two, open hostility and indifference, probably the greatest challenge to us in this church is to be indifferent to the gospel that most of us could clearly articulate and confess. Indifference to Christ, not treating the gospel call as the precious treasure that it is and should be is the real issue. Take heed when I say this beloved, there are many professing believers who have fallen away from Christ, drawn away by worldliness, by passions, by evil desire, by pride, like Demas – in love with the present world; many who have given themselves and invested their lives in the things of this world, temporal things, things that are of merely temporal worth – sports, recreation, academia, living it up, achieving the good life, possessions and prestige -- all of those things which will not last and which will be burned up on the day of judgment, and they have done it at the expense of finding their lives in Christ and rooting their lives in him, who never knew that that was what they were doing until it was too late. Decision-by-decision, moment-by-moment, compromise-by-compromise they were drawn away to their destruction. And the worst part is this – they are self-deluded and would call themselves faithful Christians when their lives reveal the truth that Christ is not Lord, not valued, not treasured at all.

Listen, no professing believer seeks to be apostate or to fall away...they just do, decision-by-decision, moment-by-moment, and compromise-by-compromise. Be wise and persevere in the faith. What is perfectly clear in this text is that the invitation was worthless to some and priceless to others. No matter the circumstances, the state of affairs, the changes, the pressure, the stress, or the responsibilities of any individual life, that is the difference and always the difference between the saved and the lost. To some the invitation and the prize are priceless and to others it is not.

This parable clearly warns us, there will be no deception on the last day. JC Ryle says: The unerring eye of God will discern who are His own people, and who are not. Nothing but true faith shall abide the fire of His judgment. All spurious Christianity shall be weighed in the balance and found lacking. None but true believers shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. It shall avail the hypocrite nothing that he has been a loud talker about religion, and had the reputation of being an eminent Christian among men. His triumphing shall be but for a moment. He shall be stripped of all his borrowed plumage, and stand naked and shivering

before the bar of God, speechless, self-condemned, hopeless, and helpless. He shall be cast into outer darkness with shame, and reap according as he has sown.

So what do we do? We don't want to be like Demas, like the people in this parable. Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 gives excellent, concise, pithy counsel and a command in this regard: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love." (1 Corinthians 16:13-14, ESV) Be watchful--Be on the alert always evaluating what you see, what you hear, what you do and how it will affect your walk with Christ. Be watchful over your own soul and your walk with Christ, your spouse, your children, and the brethren. Be on the alert for falsehood in every form. Stand firm in the faith--Stand firm in the gospel truth, in the commands of the Lord and reject worldly wisdom. Hold fast to the wisdom and truth of God. Act like men -- Man up, be mature, be bold, engage the fight, be unswerving, rightly discerning what is of most value and giving your life to it, grow up and be a benefit to the Kingdom of Christ. Be strong--Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Engage the fight. Let all that you do be done in love-- love for Christ, love for your family, love for the brethren, love for those who are in darkness still.

Let's close by looking at the

The Epilogue of the Parable (v. 14) Jesus finishes this pointed story by saying these words: "For many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:14, ESV) The gospel call goes forth. Many hear the words of the gospel. Few in comparison respond. What makes the difference? Few are chosen – chosen by God for eternal life and for the work of regeneration by which the stony, rocky heart is made alive to God. Salvation is not a human accomplishment but the gift of God's sovereign grace.

Many were invited, but not all were chosen for entrance and fellowship at the great feast in the Kingdom of God. How, then, do you know if you are chosen? Answer these questions. Have you heard and received and acted upon the call of the gospel by placing your faith in Jesus Christ? Have you heard and received and believed the message of His sacrifice for you on the cross; and have you placed your personal trust in His sacrifice as payment for your sins and for the gift of forgiveness? Do you, by faith, count on His perfect righteousness alone to make you

accepted before God and a member of His family? And as a consequence, are you increasingly and actively turning from sin and following Him in loving obedience?

If so, you are among those who He not only called, but also chosen. And you will have a place awaiting you at the great feast to come, the joyous wedding feast of God's Son.

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