

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET

Matthew 22:1-22

Key Verse: 22:1,2

“Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.’”

In this passage Jesus speaks again in a parable to the Jewish leaders. It is the third and final parable in a series that explains Jesus’ authority as God’s King. When the religious leaders understood, they got upset. They wanted to arrest Jesus and kill him. Yet Jesus did not react emotionally. Jesus helped them with great wisdom in the hope that they would repent. Jesus also explained how the flow of God’s history was changing. The nation Israel would no longer be the focal point of God’s work on earth. God would raise the church as his instrument.

The parable of the wedding banquet teaches us God’s heart for the people of all nations. God is not willing that anyone perish, but wants everyone to enter his kingdom and have salvation. So he invites people diligently with much sacrifice. Some do not know how to receive God’s invitation and fail to enter. Others enter, but get thrown out because they did not prepare. Today, we must learn how to obtain the kingdom. Most of all, we must learn God’s heart. Lord, teach us your heart!

First, God’s invitation, “Come to the wedding banquet” (1-7).

The hearts of the religious leaders were hard because they were in rebellion against God’s King, Jesus. It is not easy to help hardhearted people. But Jesus was determined to do so. He spoke to them in parables. Parables are interesting stories that indirectly impart truth. For example, if we want to suggest that someone lose weight, it is good to speak in parables by talking about the national problem, or a hypothetical person. Jesus taught the religious leaders in parables so they could understand and accept the truth, truth that would save them.

Look at verse 2. “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.” Here the king is God and the Son is Jesus Christ. To a king, his son’s wedding is most meaningful and joyful. His heart and kingdom will focus on this event. To most parents, the wedding of their child is so joyful. One woman missionary said that when her son marries, she will spare no expense to celebrate with joy. Perhaps, on that day, she will be even happier than her son. God prepares his Son’s wedding with great joy. God is a King, and his Son is the crown prince. This was a royal wedding. The king prepared perfectly, using all of his kingdom resources. He declared a national holiday. He built a special wedding hall with a grand stage. He prepared the best carriage drawn by white horses. He trained his top army officers to march in a military parade. He commissioned the royal musicians to compose the most excellent new music, and trained the royal orchestra, singers and dancers. He called in the best cooks and ordered large quantities of the finest food. He prepared a top class fireworks display. The king did these things with overflowing joy.

Spiritually speaking, the Father God is preparing the wedding of his Son Jesus to his bride, the church (Rev 19:6-8; 21:1-4). God saves sinners, and sanctifies and glorifies us through longsuffering patience to present us to Christ. God does this for the glory of his Son. Though many things seem to be happening in this world, there is one thing that is most important. God is preparing the wedding banquet for his Son. As he does so, he is full of love, joy and hope.

What people really long for is the love, joy and peace of the kingdom of heaven. Life in this world is full of sorrow. One woman suffers from jealousy and becomes irrational. She needs to taste the joy of the kingdom of heaven. This joy heals our wounds and gives us new strength. When Jesus comes into our hearts, he brings this joy of heaven with him. The Christian life is not marked by sadness, but by joy and love. Three weeks ago, Shepherd Joshua and Dana Brinkerhoff married in God. Their love and joy overflowed. Several days later, Dana went out to invite students to Bible study. One after another they said, “Yes,” and came willingly. They tasted the joy of heaven through her.

Look at verse 3a. “He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come....” Only VIP’s would be invited to this wedding banquet. No one ranking lower than a cabinet member, senator, or governor could expect an invitation. These special guests had been notified well in advance. Now it was time to come. The servants must have knocked on each door. As it opened, they bowed down with the full measure of royal etiquette

and extended the king's invitation. We might expect the guests to say, "Oh, thank you! Let's go to the wedding banquet." However, verse 3b says, "...they refused to come." They said, "No," and slammed the door in the servant's faces. They were rejecting not just the servants, but the king. It is really surprising. There are many who cannot say "No" to their boss. One young man did not want to attend his annual company picnic. But when his boss sent a personal invitation, he agreed to go. He knew that his boss was his boss. We might expect these subjects to accept the king's invitation out of respect for him as king. But they rejected him bluntly.

Such an action could be interpreted as rebellion and dealt with harshly. But this king was patient and humble. He tried again. Look at verse 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.'" The king appealed to them by advertising the dinner menu. Oxen and fattened cattle were premium cuisine. In our time he would say, "We have prime rib, filet mignon, sliced Black Angus beef au jus, New York steak, barbequed ribs, smoked salmon, a sushi bar, 27 kinds of pizza, 98 flavors of ice cream, a complete selection of both fruit and cream pies, and an endless supply of smoothies, imported teas and Starbucks coffee." It was enough to make their mouths water; it should motivate them to come.

How did they react? Look at verse 5. "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business." What a surprise! The invited guests were so preoccupied with other things that they paid no attention to the servants. The invitation went in one ear and out the other. How could this happen? When they first received the invitation they must have been excited, sensing that it was a great privilege. But in the course of time they changed their attitude. Now they gave their full attention to their fields and businesses. They were so engrossed in these things that they totally lost the value and meaning of the king's invitation. God is so gracious that he always invites us to his kingdom. We fully intend to accept. But as we live and work in this world, it can pull us away from God. If love for the world increases in our hearts, love for God decreases. For example, we may want to attend a Bible conference. But instead we study more to get an "A++", work overtime in hopes of a promotion, or start our own internet business. Or instead, perhaps we work hard to date that special someone, go to the party of the decade or take advantage of a great computer sale. In the course of pursuing these things we can lose our spiritual desire completely. Then we can become hardhearted toward God's invitation.

Look at verse 6. "The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them." Why? The servants were very persistent. They invited the guests again and again. When they would not give up, the guests became angry and mistreated the servants. One servant had a black eye. Another had many bruises. Still another was missing several teeth. Some were even killed. Yet the servants persisted in inviting the guests. It was because they loved the king. They were faithful to the king. We learn from them how to be useful servants to God. We must invite young people to his kingdom persistently. We may be rejected, but so be it. Actually, no one has been killed so far. The most difficult suffering for most of us is to hear the word "No." How did the king respond? Look at verse 7. "The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." God is a righteous Judge. Though he is patient, he will destroy all rebellion and unrighteousness. Listen to God's invitation, "Come to the wedding banquet." To accept this invitation we must honor God first and make it our top priority to attend.

Second, God's heart to fill the wedding hall (8-10).

Look at verse 8. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.'" The king grieved over the invited guests. They were highly favored, but in their selfishness and worldly desires they forfeited their blessing to attend. Yet the king did not cancel the banquet. He was determined to honor his Son. So he decided to fill the wedding hall by any means.

Look at verses 9-10. "'Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests." The king opened the banquet to anyone and everyone. Now the lower class people, who would never have imagined attending this banquet, were suddenly invited to come. To them, the invitation was the most precious news and they gladly accepted. All kinds of people streamed into the banquet hall, and soon it was filled with guests. There were all colors of people: red, yellow, black and white. There were all types of people: nerds, artists, criminals, athletes, fashion models, and beggars. Some had long hair that was dyed bright green. Others had pierced body parts and wore gaudy jewelry. They were all welcomed by the sheer generosity of the king. Here we learn the heart of God. God loves all peoples of all nations. God wants to save all men from their sins and sufferings by

bringing us to his kingdom. So he issues his invitation to anyone and everyone to fill his wedding hall. Historically, the first invited guests refer to the Jews. They rejected God's invitation when they rejected his Son Jesus and handed him over to be crucified. Then God opened the door of his kingdom to the Gentiles. All kinds of people have come in. Statistics show that more than two billion people identify themselves as Christians in our world today. However, there are so many who do not know Christ. According to Dr. John Armstrong, if we took all the "unchurched people" in the United States and put them in a country, it would be the fourth most populous country in the world. We must know the heart of God and diligently invite people to his kingdom.

Third, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (11-14).

Although anyone and everyone was welcome to come in, there was a requirement to attend this banquet. The guests had to wear wedding clothes. The bride and groom were dressed in shining white garments that dazzled in the light. The members of the wedding party all wore expensive tuxedos and formal dresses. All of the guests were expected to wear wedding clothes as their expression of respect and to increase the glory of the wedding. Customarily, anyone who did not own such clothes, would be provided for by the host as he entered the banquet. But one guy refused to wear the wedding clothes. He was uncomfortable with formal wear and insisted on wearing his ripped blue jeans, his sweatshirt with his school logo on it, and his baseball cap turned backwards. He really liked his own clothes because they reflected his style. But in that holy and glorious wedding banquet he was an eyesore. Suddenly the king was beside him. Look at verses 11-12. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless."

What then are the wedding clothes? Simply speaking, the wedding clothes are the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:29). When we believe in Jesus God covers our dirty sins and gives us true righteousness by faith in his blood. Romans 3:25-26 say, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." Our own righteousness is like dirty, smelly, ripped rags. But Jesus clothes us with the righteousness of God through faith in his blood. We must be clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ.

What happened to the man who wore ripped blue jeans? Look at verse 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.'" Jesus concluded in verse 14, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." God invites many people to his banquet out of his broken heart for people who suffer under the power of sin and death. But only those clothed in God's righteousness through Jesus' blood will dwell in heaven. God will throw out of his kingdom anything that is impure, unholy and inglorious. Let's put our faith in Jesus Christ, and him alone, for our righteousness and salvation.

Fourth, give to Caesar, give to God (15-22).

In this part, some Pharisees and Herodians come to Jesus to try to trap him in his words. They raise the question of whether it is right to pay taxes to Caesar. They thought they trapped Jesus. For if he answered that it was right, he would alienate many zealous Jews who wanted to pay taxes only to God. On the other hand, if Jesus resisted in paying taxes, he would be liable to charges by the Roman government. But Jesus avoided their trap, answering with divine wisdom. Procuring from them a coin, he showed them its inscription and said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." This is God's wisdom to live in this real world as Christians. First, we must give to Caesar what is Caesar's. This means we must be good citizens who fulfill all of our basic duties for our nation and people. We must work hard to support our families, pay taxes, vote intelligently, take our turn for jury duty, and buy all the city stickers and state licenses that are required. When we do our best to be good citizens, it strengthens the credibility of our testimony and brings glory to God.

Most importantly we must give to God what is God's. As the coin has the image of Caesar stamped on it, we human beings have the image of God stamped on us. We belong to God. We must give ourselves to God in worship and service as our Creator, Savior and true Owner. This is a spiritual act of worship and it is our first priority.

In today's passage we learned that our heavenly Father is generous and joyful as he prepares his Son's wedding banquet. Our heavenly Father invites all kinds of people to share his joy and the glory of his kingdom. We should

participate in the heart of God. Then we are happy to share the gospel with others and to invite them to his kingdom. But so often, our hearts are narrow and hardened. What can we do? We must ask God to renew our hearts by sharing his own heart with us. God will do so when we ask him with repentant prayer.