

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Matthew 22:1-14

Key Verse: 22: 2

“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.”

by Dr. Joseph Ahn

Today's passage is about a king who invited his people to the wedding banquet of his son. It is the Gospel message of great joy. His earnest invitation, “Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet,” reveals the great love of God for us. Our response to his invitation determines whether we will sing in eternal joy, or weep in the darkness. Let's listen together to the voice of God today, and by the work of the Holy Spirit, choose to accept his invitation to eternal life.

I. Come to the wedding banquet (1-4).

Let's read verse 1. **“Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying...”** As we learned last week, Jesus was in Jerusalem, and it was the time of the Passover, the Passion Week. He cleared out the temple and began healing and teaching in the temple courts. There was increasing conflict and intense pressure from the religious leaders as Jesus prepared himself for the waiting cross. During this difficult time, again and again, Jesus spoke to them about the kingdom of heaven. It is because the kingdom of heaven is what we most need. It is so easy for human beings to forget about the kingdom of heaven amidst the struggles to survive in this fallen world. News of war, nuclear proliferation, the housing crash, and global warming make us fearful. But it is our sins of selfishness, lust, pride, anger and hatred that make us miserable. We run after small pieces of rest and distractions to try to find peace. But only the kingdom of heaven can give us the peace and security we need.

Look at verse 2. Jesus said, **“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.”** The kingdom of heaven is like a wedding banquet. A wedding banquet is the most joyful event in a community, which brings its members together in celebration. How much greater was the anticipation for this wedding banquet, which was for the son of the king. It was far greater than the buildup to the wedding of Prince William and Kate. Children looked ahead to running around and taking delicious pastries off the table. Young people would wear their finest in anticipation and hope of meeting their own

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“forever after”. Mature matrons and even balding, middle aged men could remember their younger and thinner days when they said their “I dos”. Of course the bride and groom thought they were the happiest. But perhaps the only ones who could match their happiness were their parents, who couldn’t stop joyful tears welling up to their eyes when they saw their little one, all grown up to be a fine young man and beautiful young woman. Especially evident in this passage is the joyful and hopeful heart of the Father King, in preparing the wedding banquet. For this king was like a wedding planner as he followed up everything to make sure that the banquet was perfect. He did so out of his love for his son and his bride. The king was so happy and wanted everyone to share in his joy and happiness.

Of course, wedding invitations were sent out ahead of time, and reminders were provided to the guests when the banquet was ready. Verse 3 tells us, **“He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.”** What? This response was unbelievable. Who were these people who had been invited and accepted the invitation? They were the elite of the kingdom, and the best of the best.

But now they refused to come. They may have had many reasons and excuses. However, there are no reasonable excuses. Invitations from the king were not extended to just anyone, and the expected reply could only be a “Yes”. For a refusal has only one meaning: a deliberate rebellion. Perhaps, instead of being happy for the king, they felt suffocated by the king’s effusive joy and burdened at the thought of preparing gifts and wedding clothes. They decided that they didn’t want to celebrate or even attend; they refused to come. To us, the consequences of their refusal are obvious: retribution and judgment from the rejected king and a crushing of their rebellion.

But what was the king’s response? 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.’”** What is more surprising than the invitees’ rejection is the response of the king. The king did not send his army to destroy them or punish them, or force them to attend. The king should have been angered. The oxen and fattened cattle could not be un-butchered, and all was ready except for the absent wedding guests. He instead softened his voice and entreated them, “Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.” He gave them a second chance.

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Was he weak? Did he lack the will to rule or the armies to enforce his authority? Verse 7 shows us that the king had a capable army. No, the king was instead patient and humble, hopeful and forbearing. He was not like a typical king. 1 Corinthians 13 describes this king, **“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”** It was love that broke his heart at his subjects’ rebellion and it was love that stopped his hand of judgment. It was love expressed in his earnest invitation, **“Come to the wedding banquet.”**

The kingdom of heaven is the wedding banquet of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, prepared by God, the King. Since the fall from Eden, we have lived under the misery of sin and separation from God. But God promised us redemption from sin and a way to the kingdom of heaven. God kept his promise when he sent Jesus to die on the cross to pay the price for our sins and sanctify us by his blood so that we can enter the kingdom of heaven. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”** (Jn 3:16-17) The kingdom of heaven is the banquet of life, reconciliation, joy, salvation, and healing. It is made possible only because of the one-sided grace and love of God who says, **“Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”** Our response to his invitation determines whether we enter the eternal life of the kingdom of heaven or into the darkness. What will be your response?

II. Invite anyone you find (5-10)

Let’s read verse 5 together. **“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.”** Amazingly, the response to this second chance was indifference. They despised the king and went off to their business or fields. People continue to do so today as they work hard to further their careers and fulfill the American dream to obtain future security. They pursue their hobbies but have no time for Bible study or a relationship with God. These goal-oriented people seem very smart but they will find that they cannot buy the kingdom of heaven with their efforts. The truly wise are those who accept the invitation to the kingdom of heaven for they will receive eternal life.

What is worse is that **“The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.”** (6) They became murderers. What was the result? Look at verse 7,

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“The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.” The king was not weak or indecisive. The retribution of the king was quick, deliberate, and complete. This reminds us that there will be indeed be a judgment for those who reject God’s invitation. This was the result with the Israelites who were chosen by God to be his holy nation and a kingdom of priests. They made a covenant promise to be his chosen people, but time and again rejected his calling to be his holy people. God sent his servants, his prophets, whom they rejected and killed. He sent his Son whom they despised and rejected unto death on the cross. This judgment came in AD 70, when the Roman army with Tiberias at its helm sacked and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

At the conclusion of verse 7, it appears that everything was irrevocably ruined and unequivocally hopeless. But let’s see the king’s response in verse 8. **“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.’”** Sometimes we face situations we feel are so messed up beyond belief. We want to curse and just shake in helplessness when our life seems washed up or hopeless. Have you ever felt like this? I have. When I am confronted by my sins of hypocrisy, my critical and judgmental attitude, harsh words and mob boss mentality, which puts unbearable strains on my wife and children, I want to weep and give up. But our God does not give up. In God there is always hope and redemption. His love never fails. His love saves us from our sins. When I remember God’s love, and come to him in repentance, I find that in him everything is new and hopeful and possible. Thank God for his unfailing love which does not fail.

Look at verse 9. **“So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.”** The king sent his servants to the street corners to invite anyone they found to the banquet. Who were these people? They were the homeless, unemployed, the marginalized on the outskirts of society such as gangsters and prostitutes. They were the undeserving and underserved, the unsavory and disreputable. They had nowhere to go, no fields to work, and no businesses to attend to. They had no power to attack the servants, for they were crippled, broken, and powerless. But all of them were invited.

Verse 10 says, **“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.”** When the servants heard the king’s command, they were afraid and doubtful about gathering these street people. But they obeyed the king, for they knew that the king wanted to fill the wedding banquet. When they went out, they met all kinds of bad and good people. Some turned them down. Some

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wouldn't believe that the king was inviting them. But they also met waiting and willing people who accepted their invitation with great thankfulness and joy. Those who came were poor and hungry. None of them deserved to be invited. But whoever heard the invitation and accepted was welcomed into the wedding banquet. Our God wants to fill the wedding hall full of guests. Indeed, this is the good news of great joy that God wants all people to enter the kingdom of heaven and be redeemed to eternal life. Ezekiel 33:11 reads, **"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'"** Jesus said, **"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."** (Mt 9:13)

This is also our mission to invite people to the wedding banquet of the king. In this passage, there is no mention of who these servants are and where they came from. But servants are those who have a clear relationship with the king and know his heart. They are the prophets, evangelists and servants God sends. And we see how God works and raises his servants through Jesus' life. Jesus called and raised 12 disciples and sent them to the ends of the earth with this good news. He called Saul to be Apostle Paul and a light to the gentiles. Our UBF ministry began in the war-torn bowels of Korea when God called Dr. Lee and Mother Barry to invite campus students to be God's servants. Our ministry in UBF is still focused on God's calling to be his servants to invite students to the wedding banquet. In the course of time, and through repeated rejections and hardships, it is easy to forget who we are and what we are doing. We lose heart and wonder if we are indeed God's servants. Those who grew up in the church can easily question what our own calling is. But it is clear from this passage that it is God who prepares and sends his servants with this good news and that our calling is from God to be his servants. To be a Christian is to be God's servant. We also might fall into the trap of inviting only those whom we like or those who look promising and good. But this passage makes clear that God's invitation is extended to any and all, and the only qualification to entry is that this invitation be accepted. We are not here to build up a large ministry or establish a numerous chapter. We are here to obey God's world mission command to share the Gospel, and raise servants from college students who can continue his life-giving work. We are here to share the heart of our king who wants everyone to be saved. May God help us to do so in our everyday lives.

My family is moving to Portland in two weeks. Portland's motto is, "Keep Portland weird." It has one of the smallest percentages of Christians in America. As I traveled to and from Portland, I saw many people who looked too hip, too

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cool, too dirty, and street-cornerish to be interested in the gospel. They look too full to want to go to God's wedding banquet. Yet, I learned that my Father God wants even Portlandians to join him in the wedding banquet. He does not discriminate based on body piercings or hair color, by resume, but only whether the invitation is accepted. May God help our family to go with this calling as his servants sent to share his good invitation to the wedding banquet.

Moreover, we must remember who we were so that we do not become proud, hard-hearted or discouraged as we live in this world as his servants. Who were we? We were not the chosen holy people. We were the spiritually blind, lame, crippled, and mute. We were wandering, homeless, begging for love here and there with no reason to live or mission in life. We were the ones whom God's servants met and invited on the street corners in obedience to his world mission command. The only reason we are here today is because of the gracious love of God who sent his one and only Son to shed his holy blood for us on the cross. We are here not by our goodness, our religious activities or accomplishments, but because of this heart of our God. John 1:12 declares, **"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."** We were lost, and now, by the grace of God, we are the children of God. Praise God!

Revelations 19:6-10 declares, "Then I heard what sounded like a multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.'" Then the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And in the end of time, the wedding hall will be full, for God and his love will not fail. It will be full of peoples of all nationalities, races, and eras speaking all kinds of languages but with one voice singing, "Hallelujah!" They will share in the joy of the wedding banquet forever. Now, as the music of our hymns has quieted, this message draws to a close, and before the shouting of the world grows, there is a silence and in it is the question, "Will you be there?" It is the King's invitation, "Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." Let us answer, "Yes, Lord, I'm coming."

III. Wedding clothes (11-14)

Let's read verse 11. **"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes."** We see from this

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man that you must wear wedding clothes to the wedding banquet. Jesus' listeners would have understood, for it was the custom of those times for guests to be gifted wedding clothes for the banquet. "Everything was ready" and the king had generously provided wedding clothes for the attendants, especially since they came unprepared from the streets. Perhaps this man forgot or lost his given wedding clothes along the way. He may have refused to wear them. Maybe he was naked? Or he may have thought that his clothes were better, or at least good enough for the wedding. Regardless, the lack of wedding clothes was glaring, and indicated disrespect, rebellion, or at the least, a lack of preparation.

The king noticed this man immediately and questioned him. **"How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?"** The man was speechless. His speechlessness confirmed his guilt. He may have thought he would not be noticed amidst such a large number of guests. But the Bible tells us, **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."** (2 Cor 5:10) There will be judgment and consequences for being unprepared. Verse 13 reads, **"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.'"** We learn here that just as there will be the joyful light of the wedding banquet, there will be the darkness of judgment. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth for all those who reject the invitation and are unprepared without wedding clothes.

What are the wedding clothes and why do we need them? It is Jesus Christ himself and there is no other way for us to be clothed to enter into the presence of God. Sometimes we may feel that we are pretty good, until our sins, lustful thoughts, pride and prejudice, rebelliousness, hatred, selfishness pop up and remind us of the scars and stains we bear on our souls. But Romans 13:14 reads, **"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh."** It is clear that we must repent of our sins and by faith accept Jesus Christ as our righteousness. For only the blood of Jesus can remove the stains of our sins, heal our scarred souls and restore our broken hearts. Only Jesus can cover us with the beautiful and holy wedding garments of his presence. There are no other wedding clothes, no other way.

But even after we repent and accept the invitation to the kingdom of heaven, we sometimes fall into the trap of trying to prepare our own clothes for the wedding banquet. But our self-righteousness, our human goodness, our kind actions and efforts for the Lord cannot cover over our sins or consecrate us to enter

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God's presence. Our position in the ministry, the number of people we take care of, or 1:1 we taught, how many hours we pray, or number of morning prayers we attended cannot save us. These threadbare rags cannot substitute for the cleansing and saving power of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must take off these rags and lay down our fixed ideas and self-righteousness. Isaiah 64:6 declares, **"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags..."** When we repent and accept that everything is ready, God has done everything through Jesus on the cross, he will clothe us with garments of salvation and array us in a robe of his righteousness. (Isaiah 61:10) Let us praise God and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. For at the last day, the only question will be whether you are clothed with the Lord Jesus Christ. Revelations 22:14 declares, **"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."**

Jesus concludes, **"For many are invited, but few are chosen."** (14) Many are invited. Many sit in church, wearing their Sunday best, with dutiful offerings in hand feeling pretty self-satisfied. But unless there is the transformative work of the Holy Spirit through which we believe by faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, we cannot but remain burdened with our hidden sins and the suffocating weight of religiousness that CANNOT save. Rather, let's hear the invitation of our King, our God, **"Come to the wedding banquet."** Today, let's repent honestly of our sins and claim only the saving blood of Jesus Christ and accept his life-giving invitation to the kingdom of heaven. Let's choose to accept his calling to be his servants, his chosen people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation by sharing this Gospel message of our king's love to the ends of the earth, until the Hallelujah of the wedding banquet begins.