

Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables. He said, ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent out his servants to summon those who were invited to the wedding banquet, but they did not want to come.

⁴“Then he sent out other servants and said, ‘Tell those who are invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and my fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet!’

⁵“But those who were invited paid no attention and went off, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized the king’s servants, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷As a result, the king was very angry. He sent his army and killed those murderers and burned their town.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹So go to the main crossroads and invite as many as you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those servants went out to the roads and gathered together everyone they found, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without wearing wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. ¹³Then the king told the servants, ‘Tie his hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The Feast Is Ready

I.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son” (Matthew 22:2, EHV). A wedding banquet seems like the perfect comparison for heaven, doesn’t it? For most people, the most lavish party they will ever throw is their wedding. If at all possible, the guest list includes most of the people who are special in their lives because, if everything goes according to plan, this will be the only time you have this kind of event.

Reluctantly you begin adding up the costs. The ceremony is one thing. Perhaps the least expensive things are the monetary gifts to the pastor, organist and any other musicians for the service. Rented tuxes for the groom and groomsmen; the bride bedecked in what is likely the most expensive gown of her life, with *her* attendants resplendent in *their* gowns, as well. Then there are the flowers and the decorations for the church. Whether real or silk, lots of time and effort and money go into the floral arrangements. According to a wedding cost estimate site I looked at, the flowers and decorations actually total up to a greater cost than the clothing for the average couple. Naturally you want the best photographer and videographer you can afford, too.

But then comes the reception. This is where the most money is typically spent. For the average wedding with a guest list of 140 people you can expect reception costs of \$12-15,000. By the time everything is all added up, the average couple spends \$25-30,000 for everything in their wedding. It’s not exactly a cheap day, is it?

Can you imagine a wedding feast that lasted a week or two? That was not out of the question in New Testament times. Such a lavish and expensive event certainly makes an appropriate comparison for heaven.

The king wants everything to be just right. Deposits to save the hall and reserve the catering staff were made far in advance. “Save the date” cards were sent months before the event so the guests would know something was being planned. Invitations went out precisely on schedule—not too early, not too late. Those invited *knew* the special feast-day was coming.

It’s that special day. Caterers are busy in their kitchen preparing all the food they have arranged over the last days and weeks—exactly the right cuts of meat were selected, the most tender

vegetables, the highest quality *everything* for this feast. Staff at the venue are making the last adjustments to those special silk slipcovers for the chairs and setting the table service just so. The lights and sound system are get the final checks so that they are ready for the dancing that will begin after the meal. All kinds of last minute details are being checked off everyone's to-do list.

Everything is ready. Get the guests. "He sent out his servants to summon those who were invited to the wedding banquet, but they did not want to come" (Matthew 22:3, EHV). How depressing! Friends, relatives—the people you care about most in the world—have no desire whatsoever to join you for your special day.

Maybe they don't realize just how carefully you have prepared. "Then he sent out other servants and said, 'Tell those who are invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and my fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet!'" (Matthew 22:4, EHV).

Sadly they realized—they just didn't care. "But those who were invited paid no attention and went off, one to his own farm, another to his business. 'The rest seized the king's servants, mistreated them, and killed them'" (Matthew 22:5-6, EHV). I've got business to attend to. Weekends are my only chance to enjoy my family, or do my hobbies, or enjoy my favorite source of entertainment—I'm not going to sacrifice "me" time to go to your wedding feast. The parable takes a seriously dark turn when some of those invited kill the messengers sent to extend the invitation yet again.

If none of your special guests want to come, what would you feel? "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy'" (Matthew 22:8, EHV). The king makes it official and rescinds their invitation; *that*, after all, is what they wanted.

II.

What to do? Do you let thousands of dollars of food and wine go to waste? Maybe some would, but not the king. "Go to the main crossroads and invite as many as you find to the wedding banquet" (Matthew 22:9, EHV).

There goes the quality control on the guest list. If you're just grabbing random people from the street, they have no historical connection with your family, they don't know what you and your family have gone through to get to this point. What kind of people are you bringing in to this feast on which you spent all this time and money?

"Those servants went out to the roads and gathered together everyone they found, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests" (Matthew 22:10, EHV). Remember what the king said before? "Those who were invited were not worthy" (Matthew 22:8, EHV). Do you suppose the good and the bad gathered from the street corners were more worthy than the family and friends originally invited? How *could* they be? With no knowledge of the family and no real connections, they were *obviously* unworthy. The king wanted them there anyway, worthy or not.

III.

And yet... "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wearing wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. ¹³Then the king told the servants, 'Tie him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matthew 22:11-13, EHV).

"Bring 'em all," the king had said, "worthy or not." So why throw out this one particular "unworthy" guest when he was among all kinds of other unworthys? Was *he* somehow worse than the rest of those in the "bad" category of the good and the bad that had been found and brought in to the feast?

Of all the good and bad who had been brought in to the feast, this particular fellow was wearing the wrong clothing. That sounds odd to us, because we typically rummage through the closet and find something appropriate to wear to a wedding. The bride and groom are unlikely to throw anyone out just because they happened to pick something that seemed unusual. In the culture of

ancient Israel, however, special clothing was typically *required* at a wedding. But it was provided by the host. This guy refused to put on the very clothing provided him by the king.

IV.

Throughout the whole parable it has been obvious that the King is God the Father. The first batch of invited guests were his chosen people of Israel. The second batch are the Gentiles—the rest of the world.

The feast is ready. The banquet hall of heaven has been secured. Jesus made the payment necessary for *everyone*—both Jew and Gentile, every human being—on the cross. No cheap meal is this one. It required the most precious thing our Heavenly Father had—his One and only Son as the sacrifice for sin so we could enter heaven.

Some people ignore the invitation. They're too busy at work, making the money necessary to feed the appetites of their chosen earthly lifestyles. Perhaps it's the family that takes first place. Something that seems so noble ends up taking first place in their hearts ahead of God, and they push aside their invitation to the feast. God can end up far down the list of priorities: planning for retirement, enjoying your hobbies, going to ball games or expensive dinners, partying with your friends, and others too numerous to count can all wind up in front of God.

Some of the invited guests abused the servants of the King. Those whom God has called to be his spokesmen are often treated with contempt. They are there to remind you of the invitation God has made to his banquet hall of heaven, and that the price has been paid. Yet they are often shunned and ignored when they present the special message of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Some of those invited from the highways and the byways seem to “accept” the invitation, but only do so on their own terms. They don't want to wear the wedding clothes of Jesus' righteousness purchased for them and provided for them. They want, instead, to wrap themselves in their own attempts at good deeds, their own prayers, their own righteousness, or their church attendance or special offerings.

“The man was speechless” (Matthew 22:12, EHV) when confronted. There is no excuse for trying to get in your own way. Jesus himself has provided the proper attire.

In his mercy, God the Father has provided everything. The invitation has been provided. The price has been paid. In baptism, the Holy Spirit clothes us with the garments of righteousness provided by our Lord Jesus that we wear into eternity.

These days we tend to be pretty casual in most day to day situations, but sometimes there are special clothes to wear. When God the Father invites us to his eternal wedding banquet, he supplies us with the right thing to wear—the righteousness of our Lord Jesus, purchased and won for us on the cross. Don't try to add your own touches to it. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, you are ready for the feast. The feast is ready, come to the feast. Amen.