

“You Are Invited”
The Parable of the Wedding Banquet”
Matthew 22:1-14

The words “you are invited” can make you feel a variety of things. They may make you feel honored, burdened, or obligated. It all depends on what you’re invited to and who invited you, right? There are different kinds of invitations.

There are those invitations that invite you to something, but really, they want something from you. I once received a fancy invitation to an exclusive black tie banquet held at an elite club hosted by an important official running for office. As I read the invitation, I discovered the privilege of accepting this invitation would only cost me \$5,000.

There are those invitations you receive that you know were only sent as a courtesy. Perhaps you were on a mailing list, or a member of some group and the whole group got invited. The host may not even know you. Perhaps they sent you the invitation because it was the expected thing to do. They probably don't even care if you come.

Then there are those invitations you’d rather not get, like the invitation to the principal’s office when you were a kid. You get invitations to events you don't want to attend. It’s boring, but you feel obligated to go. You don’t want to let a friend down. You have an image to maintain. You write it on the schedule just hoping something comes up.

However, there are those invitations that send a thrill through your body. You get goosebumps. You sit down and read it again just to make sure you read it right. It’s an incredible privilege. It’s a rare honor. You clear your calendar, but you don’t have to write it on your calendar, because you will not forget. You make plans and arrangements. You get a new suit, a new dress. You get your hair done.

In recent years we’ve seen the joys that come with College acceptance letters, program qualifications, and scholarships. Years ago, my mother was invited to tour with a well-known singing group. Thousands applied every year, but only a few dozen were chosen. She talks about it to this day. A couple of years ago my father was invited to do the opening invocation at a NASCAR race at Kansas Speedway. I was so happy for him, and I must admit a little jealous.

A couple of years ago I got my own NASCAR honor when I was invited to go the race at Texas Motor Speedway with a complimentary hotpass with full access to the garage area and

pits. I got to hang out behind the scenes with the drivers. I got to meet all the big names. We met the legends of the sport. We watched the teams as they wrenched on the cars. I got autographs. We got to watch the races sitting on top of the pit boxes. We smelled the gas and the rubber. Lug nuts are flying by us on the pit stops. It was soooo coool.

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus tells a story about a very important person who sent out some very special invitations.

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent his servants[a] to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 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.”’ 5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ 10 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.

11 “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12 And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. 13 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.’ 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.”

This story is one of Jesus’ parables, and some of his most important teachings are parables. The word parable comes from a word that means “to throw alongside.” That’s what a parable does. It’s a story you throw alongside of an important spiritual truth to explain it or illustrate it. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

The heavenly reality behind this story is the special invitation God has sent out to all people, first to the Jews, and finally all people, including us. But we also see that not all people receive this invitation with gladness. This is not the sort of invitation you set in a drawer and forget about. Jesus tells us there are four responses we can have to God’s invitation.

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who is hosting a wedding banquet for his son. The king represents God. The Jews would have quickly understood this connection

because the O.T. viewed God as a sovereign king. There was a long Jewish story-telling tradition that cast God in the role of king. The son, of course, represents Jesus. He is God's son. And the wedding of the son symbolizes the second coming of Jesus when he comes for His kingdom. The N.T. pictures the second coming of Jesus when He comes to gather His church as a groom coming for his bride. The whole scene of a wedding is how the book of Revelation pictures Jesus coming for his radiant bride, the church.

The invitation represents God's invitation to salvation. Jesus invites us in Jn. 7:37 *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."* This is an invitation that has been extended to all people 2 Pt. 3:9 says God does not want *"anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

An invitation from the king would have been the highest of honors, especially the celebration of a royal wedding, the wedding of the future king and queen. We read in our text that the invitation was to a wedding banquet. We should not make the mistake of thinking that these people were invited over for dinner or to a first century equivalent of our wedding reception. 1st Century Wedding banquets usually involved seven days of feasting and celebration. This was almost always true in the case of those in the higher classes. It was an invitation to a week of festivities.

A king would have sent invitations to all of his officials, governors, influential citizens. Such an invitation in the 1st century would have involved two parts: an advance invitation that would come a long time before with no specific time set, and then when the official dates are set, and second invitation would be sent. We see in our text that those first invited were invited three times. And it is with these honored dignitaries we see the first response we can have to God's invitation of salvation.

I. We Can Ignore the Invitation

Some of those invited simply ignored the invitation. Even when reminded they simply went back to whatever they were busy with. One works in his fields. Another tends to his business. Now an invitation from a king is not one to ignore. These guys probably weren't just expected to come, but given customs in their culture, they were legally required to come. To

not come was a statement of rebellion and insurrection against the king.

We see here the first response we can have to God's invitation. It is to simply ignore it; to live our lives as if they have no spiritual dimension; to go about our daily business as if our daily business is all that matters. It doesn't matter if you believe in God or not, if you go on living like there is not God. Notice that those who ignored the king's invitation weren't off doing wicked things. They were engaged in worthwhile pursuits. The crops do need tending. Businesses do need to be managed.

There will be many who miss the kingdom of God, simply because they were busy. They weren't hostile to the invitation. They weren't against it. They didn't respond, "no." They were simply preoccupied, distracted with other things. Busyness may very well be the biggest idol in our country today. People are busy with work, busy with families, busy with sports, busy with organizations, busy with interests and hobbies. Many probably intend on responding to the invitation... someday. But in the meantime it lies under a pile of other "more important" things. It lies forgotten.

But should you ignore the invitation of the king? There are so many people who claim to believe in God. They have positive feelings about God, and even about his invitation. But they do not respond. You do not have to be against God to reject him. You just have to do nothing; to be preoccupied and busy.

Is this you? Are you the busy, preoccupied person? Do you intend to respond to that invitation someday, but you just have to get this done first? Young people are you just waiting to get out of school? Maybe after you get married? Then we think we'll make it a priority when we have children, then when we get more established in our career. Then we find ourselves so neckdeep in work and family obligations. You know, after the kids leave home, then I will have the time. Maybe once I retire. And we keep putting God off until it's too late. Take that invitation out from under that pile. Realize how important it is.

With this first response we see the patience and mercy of God. Though they refuse to come, the king sends more servants with a more urgent invitation. God gives them chance after chance, but they go on about their business, and they miss the wedding entirely.

II. We Can Reject the Invitation

There are others, though, who respond to the invitation with more hostility. They actually beat and killed the king's servants who carry the invitation. The servants of a king were

seen as official representatives. When they bore an official proclamation of the king, it was as if they were the king himself. So to beat or kill these servants was a personal assault on the king himself. It would be considered an act of treason. This doesn't appear to be just the act of a couple of isolated individuals, but the entire village, either through indifference or active participation, they all play a part in assaulting the king's men. The king has no choice but to send out his troops to put down their insurrection. This is the second way we can respond to God's invitation. We can reject it.

For many reasons, there are those who respond in hostility. They intentionally live against God. They reject His ways. They lose themselves in sin and revel in it. They break the rules. They do their own thing and flaunt it. They don't just ignore God, but they openly revolt.

To this point Jesus is specifically targeting the Jewish people of the covenant. They were the original recipients of God's first invitation. They were the first ones called, the first ones chosen. The kingdom was first offered to them. But not only did they ignore God's call, they rebelled against it. They beat, persecuted, and even killed the prophets God sent.

But the Jews are not alone in this response. We can be just as guilty of rejecting God's invitation with hostility. Do you know the right thing to do, then intentionally go do the opposite? Do you say things about God, about Jesus, about Christianity that are insulting, that demean the faith? I'm not talking about calling out hypocrisy or bad behavior, but open hostility toward God. Many times this hostility is just a cover for our own unwillingness to deal personally with God, to confront our own sin, and our own need for forgiveness. There are a lot of people who call themselves atheist or agnostic, who are actively running from God.

So the king decides to change his tactics. I don't need those people at my son's wedding. They've forgotten that they still put on their underwear one leg at a time. Vs. 8 says, "*Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy.'*" The king says, I'll invite the common people, the street people, the average citizen. I'll invite everyone. I'll share the best the king has to offer to anyone who will accept the invitation. When the Jews refused God's invitation, He offered the invitation to everyone else.

III. We Can Respond but not Prepare

This brings us then to the third group of people. In Jesus' story, it just one guy, but I'm afraid he represents a whole bunch of people— and that is those who respond to the invitation, but they don't prepare. They accept the invitation, but they do not prepare

themselves appropriately. In verses 11-13, the king's servants find a man at the wedding who's not wearing the appropriate wedding attire. It's like showing up to an Eagles' game in Philadelphia wearing a Dallas Cowboys jersey. If you want to see your next birthday, you just don't do that.

The result is he is thrown out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, this isn't wedding imagery. Throughout the gospels, this is hell talk. Jesus is talking about eternal damnation, judgment, and hell. This is serious business we're talking about here.

Culture and custom required special dress for the wedding celebration. In fact, it was common in upper class weddings for the host of the wedding to provide the clothing to be worn at the banquet. But here is someone who shows up without the proper clothing. This was more than a social faux pas, but an act of insult and dishonor. Imagine accepting an invitation to an official White House reception and showing up in short shorts and a tank top.

We don't know why this fellow showed up unprepared. Perhaps he was too preoccupied, and ran out of time. Maybe he was neglectful and lost his wedding clothes. It could be he just didn't care enough. It doesn't really matter, because this guy illustrates a very important spiritual point. The first two characters portray unbelievers. These are people that never became Christians. They never made a commitment to Christ.

But this third guy represents those who become Christians; they respond to the invitation and make a commitment to Christ, but then they nullify God's grace through a lack of spiritual preparation. Scripture refers to this as receiving God's grace in vain. Heb. 6 warns against failing to grow in the faith. If we do not grow in our faith, we eventually strangle it and fall away.

The wedding clothes symbolize how we live—our lifestyle and behavior. Clothing is a consistent symbol throughout the Bible. It's a metaphor for our personal holiness, or lack of it.

Zech 3:3-4

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."

Rev 3:4-5

Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes (Speaking about

their lack of obedience). *They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.*

The one who shows up at the wedding banquet without wedding clothes represents the so-called believer whose life remains unchanged. They make an initial commitment to Christ, but there is a lack of obedience and a failure to grow in faith.

We need to respond to the invitation, but it's not something you should do lightly. Don't do it if you don't mean it. Accepting Jesus' invitation is not like getting a "Get Out of Jail Free" card when you play Monopoly. Great, I've got my fire insurance now I can live my life however I want. I'm covered. Jesus invites you to receive His salvation just as you are, but He does not save you to leave you just as you are. He plan to make you just as He is.

IV. We Can Respond With Appropriate Preparation

Lastly there are those who responded to the invitation with appropriate preparation. Let me help put this in perspective.

For 4 years she had dreamed of this day. For 3 years 11 months, 2 weeks and 3 days, it had seemed an impossibility; just a teenage girl fantasy. But a week and a half ago that fantasy became a reality with one phone call that changed everything. He had asked her to the prom. The right dress had been bought. More than a dozen stores had been searched, several more than an hour away, but it had to be just the right dress. Then there were the two last minute trips to the tanning salon. She had new shoes and jewelry. Her nails had been done. Her hair had been professionally permed and braided. She had started getting ready today at 1:00 in the afternoon. It was now 6:00 and he was at the front door. It was all for this moment. It was all worth it. This was her perfect day and she was ready.

Now that's response with preparation. Jesus concludes this parable with this declaration— and this is our core verse for this week. *"For many are invited, but few are chosen."* Jesus' invitation goes out to everyone. There is no one who does not receive it. But the sad reality is that when the big day arrives, very few will be there. Very few will have genuinely responded to the invitation.

Over the centuries there has been a lot of debate about what exactly this verse means. What does it mean to be invited, but not chosen? What all is involved in the choosing? But one

thing that this passage makes clear is that our response to the invitation matters.

You have been invited. Everyone here. It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter where you've been. It doesn't matter what you've done. What matters is where you go and what you do from this point forward.

Have you responded to the invitation? Are you prepared? When Jesus returns, will you be ready? Or will you be like, "Ah, crud, just give me a couple of months to get a couple of things in order."

Have you yet to accept Christ's invitation. It is an invitation to a joyous banquet. The king's wedding banquet would have been a week of feasting and festivities. There would have been music and dancing. It was an invitation of the highest privilege and honor. This is a picture of a heaven. A place of unspeakable joy unmatched by all of the best this world has to offer.

The invitation has been given. How will you answer?