

The Kingdom Invitation

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[0 : 00] All right, now we are on to the sermon, and if you have a Bible, go ahead and turn to Matthew chapter 22. And we are continuing on in our series of looking at the parables of Jesus and how they reveal the kingdom.

And today's parable is interesting because it uses a wedding, and not just any wedding, a royal wedding. You know what's fascinating in the Bible is that it does key on the wedding motif quite a bit and uses it to help us understand and reveal God's plan and purposes of redemption in many ways. And so this one does as well, although maybe in a way that we wouldn't expect. And when we think about weddings, especially royal weddings, the closest thing we can kind of get to it is looking across the pond at the British royals, right?

And so we know that like, hey, Prince William and Prince Harry, they've had some like pretty big weddings that were quite lavish affairs. They were highly anticipated. They were well covered and televised.

All the A-listers and the most important people were invited to be there, and they all wanted to be there because it said something about how cool and amazing they were to be able to be a guest at such an affair.

[1 : 15] And, you know, when you think about who was in there, the insiders, it was the crowd of crowds, right? And all the talk was about what was going to happen at the wedding, what happened at the wedding, what the reception was like, who would be marrying them, where it was going to happen, what they were going to wear, who they were going to wear, the bride and the groom, all that stuff, how they would arrive.

Like it just like, it was just fawning over all those details, right? Ad nauseum for some of us. And for some, they couldn't get enough of it, right? Well, this parable is about a royal wedding, as we said, but its main focus is actually on the guests and what they're doing in response to this invitation to join in this royal wedding.

And by it, we understand the kingdom just a little bit more. And you and I, we come into this kingdom by invitation. But this invitation also has a certain requirement.

And then what we're going to see also is that there is a strong warning to those who do not attend or are thrown out. So Matthew 22, verses 1 to 14, it says this. 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.

Again, he sent other servants, saying, tell those who were invited, see, I've prepared my dinner. My oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered.

[2 : 51] There's Wagyu beef on the menu. And everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast. 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.

And the king was angry. He sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 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 good and bad.

So the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?

And he was speechless. Then the king said to his attendants, bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for many are

called, but few are chosen.

[4 : 07] This is God's word to us. Amen. Amen. So we see a royal wedding. Invitation goes out.

The messengers are beaten. Some are killed. The king takes revenge. The invitation gets ignored by some, accepted by others, and then there is the whole wedding garment scandal.

There's a lot going on in this parable. Now, and we can key on, we will key in on all those things, but, you know, it's really easy to overlook something very important at the center of this parable.

The king is inviting people to share in his joy. All of us have come to believe something about what God is like and what life with God is like. You know, I grew up in church. I was a pastor's kid, so like, man, from the cradle, that's where I was.

Day in, day out. I didn't miss anything that was going on. And my understanding is I got older and older and became a teenager and the hormones hit and what life in God was like.

[5 : 15] It was, I came to believe that life in God was a drudgery. That was my understanding. It was like, if I could describe it, it was like gray skies and eating porridge. That's what following Jesus was like.

It was rules and rules and rules and all the rules were saying, I can't do all the fun things. But in the end, you don't burn in hell, so trade off, you know, I guess.

Like, there you go. You know, in Christians, we can get that perspective, but when we live with that perspective, it gives a vibe off, right? Of what it means to follow Jesus.

Hey, come join us in the Christian life. That's all gray skies and porridge. And people hear that and they want that like a hole in the head. But this parable gives us a very different perspective.

God calls us to be with him so that we can share in his joy. The audience of Jesus' day, they had a grid for what happened at wedding feasts.

[6 : 14] It's a multi-day affair. And at that, at these feasts, these multi-day feasts, there's good wine and there's good food and there's singing and there's dancing together. It's a celebration more in the pattern of like a sanctified Lollapalooza or Coachella or something like that.

I mean, we have like such a limited view of how amazing these wedding feasts were. Getting invited to a wedding feast was a big deal. It was one that like, man, if you got the invite, you wouldn't want to pass that up.

It offered to those people a break from the mundane and the monotonous and even the morbidities of life. And it was a chance to step into a place where there was just this amazing infusion of pure joy.

And again, if you think about what Jesus is saying in this parable, hey, as amazing as those wedding feasts are, we're talking about the wedding of a king's son here. This is a royal wedding. What an invitation that is being offered here is. And one of the best ways that Christians can bear witness to the good news of the kingdom, aka life with God, is to live in that reality of his joy.

[7 : 22] We are made to enjoy God. Heaven is everlasting life, enjoying him, which means he's enjoyable. We don't have to like pretend he's enjoyable and try to make him enjoyable and you know, he is enjoyable.

To know him and to know God and all that he is is to experience a never-ending crescendo of joy. That is what heaven, that's what heaven is gonna be like.

And here's the good news. You don't have to wait for that. You can start enjoying him right now. All the means of grace. God extending himself to us and said, you can know me, you can experience me, I'm not far off, I'm right here with you.

He gives you at our disposal every single day so that we get to enjoy abundant life in him even right now in the midst of the scarcity of life in this world.

The foretaste of the feast begins now. That's what's on offer for us. You can enjoy him through things like worship and prayer and adoring him and beholding him and being an awe and wonder of him and offering up to him thanksgiving for the things that he has done for us and you get to enjoy him as you reflect on the truths that he reveals about himself in scripture.

[8 : 44] That he's a God of love and mercy and faithfulness. That he is a God of wisdom and truth and justice. We can marvel at those things about him. That he is eternal and infinite and unchanging in his power and perfections and his goodness and his glory and all those wonderful things that he is.

And then also to wonder at this king of joy who invites us to be with him in all his divine transcendence. He still draws near to people like you and me who occupy such a tiny little corner of

planet earth for such a small minuscule period of time and we can say like God why? Why would you condescend? And he just says because I love you and my joy is in you. That's not gray skies and porridge.

That's like springtime sunny days with chicken curry and carne asada burritos if you're like me. That's like good things. Life with God is full of joy.

And if that's not your experience as a Christian then I would find someone who is having that experience and spend time with them and listen and learn. Too often our life with God majors on doing for him and neglects the joy of just being with him.

[10:08] And if that's all that life with God is for you it's a surefire way to have a Christian life of gray skies and porridge. God is a fountain of all joy and he invites us to join us in that.

And that's the key word there invite. He invites us. Jesus didn't need to explain that to his audience. They knew you just didn't walk into any wedding feast you came across.

Right? It wasn't like driving around looking for garage sales on Saturday. You had to be invited. The kingdom isn't entered by good works or by good luck being in the right place at the right time or by forcing your way in or sneaking in.

It is a response to an invitation and that is what we do. We hold out the good news of the gospel. It is good news but it is a news that says you know what you because of what Jesus has done are being invited to join in this wedding feast as well.

The gospel is God's invitation and it requires a response. Do you remember as a kid when you got invited to a birthday party how excited you were?

[11:21] Because you knew what was going to happen. It is going to be fun with friends and play time and cake and pin the tail on the donkey or water balloon fights or just even like God forbid we used to go to the park on these you know in my day as a kid and the parents would just be like go and play and we will see you in an hour.

The good old days. And I would drive my parents crazy when I knew I got that like friend invite to their birthday party I would be like when is it? When is it? When is it? When is it?

Is it yet? Is it yet? Is it yet? Is it yet? I didn't want to miss it. And then somewhere along the way we kind of hit an age where getting a party invitation is kind of more like being invited to jury duty right? It's a lot less delight and it feels like a lot more duty. We start to get real picky about like well who's going to be there? Is there going to be food? What kind of food? Who's cooking? How long is this affair going to last?

Like what am I in for here? We start looking for ways to get out of going to parties and maybe I am the only one feeling this and I should be you're all like oh bless your heart Jesse.

[12:31] This is you're all alone in that one buddy. All right. All right. I do love coming to your parties by the way. Let me just say like yeah yeah yeah yeah no it's like Alex hey it was a blast.

No no no no no no it's good come on. Don't leave me out. Don't leave me out. But let's be honest. Sometimes we start to feel duty over the delight.

What changed along the way? Well we got responsibilities. We got jobs. We got kids. We got hobbies. We got stuff to fix. We got stuff to watch wash. We got we got we got and all of those things are legitimate and that's what's happening in this parable.

Verse three he sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast but they wouldn't come. Then in verse four he sent other servants but they paid no attention and went off one to his farm another to his business.

business. The king started to call all those he had invited. They got ignored so he sent out more servants. Well maybe they didn't get the invite.

[13:37] Maybe I'll just need to send another reminder. Nobody responds. They got reasons. They got farms. They got jobs. They got busy lives.

They got they got they got. But what they really got is their priorities all mixed up. The king's call to join in his joy must become your priority.

That's life with God one to one. Jesus said seek first the kingdom of God. No qualifiers. Seek first the kingdom of God.

He's not saying nothing else nothing else in your life really really matters. He's just saying that's got to be your priority above all other things make that your priority and everything else will fall into place because that is how God's purpose in life works the best.

That's how flourishing in him works the best. The kingdom invitation is a summons that demands a response and it will by nature confront expose and challenge our priorities.

[14:40] We talked about this last week. Several weeks ago sorry. But that's the nature of the kingdom. It challenges our priorities. The priorities we have in our life. Even good ones like work and family.

You know listen to one of Jesus's harder sayings. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters yes and even his own life he cannot be my disciple.

Okay how many sacred cows did he just expose there? Like hate? And Jesus that that's a little confusing my friend. But he's saying it's a literary device of getting a strong point across of saying hey in comparison to your love for me and where I should be in your life the priority I should be in your life nothing else should even come close.

So as good as it is to love your wife because the Bible says we should do that and to love your kids and to watch over them and care for them and do all those things as important and as that is a biblical truth Jesus says in comparison to the priority of me and being with me and enjoying life with me and knowing me and walking with me.

All those things are way down here. Seek first me and then everything else is going to work itself out. Sometimes that love for God isn't a rejection of your family but it's a rejection of other good things that put demands on our lives.

[16:11] That want to push God to the margins. But the nature of love demands us to prioritize in that way. It is right for me to prioritize my affections and desires and attention toward Haley my wife in such a unique way that every other woman on the earth should feel a massive difference by comparison.

That would not be a wrong thing. And that's right and good. But then also I don't prioritize Haley over my relationship with Jesus.

And actually she loves that and wants me to do that and she needs me to do that. Your kids need you to prioritize life and God over them.

How does that work out? Let me give you a simple example from our life of raising kids. So Asher was about 12 years old and he got invited to a soccer tryout for travel ball.

And he did well. He did too well. And the coach ran up after us amongst all the parents and said hey, hey, hey, I just want to let you know if your son signs up he will start and he will play for us.

[17:22] He will make, he'll make the team. He didn't run after any other parents' kids from what I could tell. So me and Haley went back home and we looked and we said oh what does travel ball look like?

Oh, it's a lot of money. Okay. Also, it's a lot of time away. Away from this community. Away from being integrated in any meaningful way into this community.

And so we had a decision to make. How were we going to disciple our kids? How were we going to live? What was our decision making thing? Well for us, Jesus was priority.

The kingdom was priority. And so we had to say no. Now, you can look at that and say like man, look at all the amazing things and experience that you missed out on and I would say maybe.

But saying yes to that would have been saying no to him knowing all of you in any meaningful way. You being in his life in any meaningful way. It would have been saying yes to that but no to us being around and growing in community and relationship with you all.

[18:30] There's a cost. There's priorities in our lives that we have to reckon with. That we have to figure out what is the proper order. And it's a deeply important thing to wrestle with.

In the same way our love for Jesus has to be specific and unique to what is only appropriate for him. This love for God must be the priority.

It is the first and great commandment. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul and all your strength.

And when we get that right everything begins to fall into place. And if you start anywhere else things start getting a little messy. Now it can be tempting to think that our right response to the invitation getting our priorities right that's all there is to this parable.

After all it says in verse 8 those who reject it are not worthy. Boom. Got it. Logically then it must follow that those who did accept the invitation were worthy. We'll see.

[19 : 41] There's a little more to it than that. A response to the invitation isn't what makes us worthy to be at the wedding feast. After the original invitees refuse to join the king the king extends the invitation to everybody.

Now let me push pause and explain that what Jesus is kind of alluding to here. And context is really helpful when he's sharing this parable. He's days from his crucifixion.

Not weeks. Days. He's already done the triumphal entry. So he's come in. Everyone's shouting Hosanna. Everyone's saying this guy's the Messiah. He's the one we've been waiting for.

Awesome. He's going to be coming.

He's ushering in this messianic kingdom we've been waiting for forever and ever and ever. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. He comes into the temple. He starts overthrowing the tables of the money changer and those who were selling pigeons and other animals for sacrifice and turning God's place of worship into commerce and ripping people off.

And he already knows Jesus does. He's going to be rejected by the Pharisees and Sadducees and the elders and the scribes. Just about all the religious leaders of God's people had already turned on him and were dead set of like we got to get rid of this guy.

[20 : 56] So what Jesus is saying to them in this parable knowing all this is that hey you guys had their chance to receive the invitation. But you rejected it. You were the ones who got the messengers and beat them.

Pretty soon you're going to kill one of them. So Jesus is saying that God is now going to offer his invitation to others. Go to the main roads. He sends his messengers.

He sends his servants to the main roads to invite to the wedding feast as many as you find it says in verse 9. And the servants went into the roads the highways. The main places where people traversed and gathered all whom they found but the good and the bad.

So the wedding hall was filled with guests. Now again they heard go to the main roads. They would have connected the dots. The main highways in and out of Judah and Judea and Jerusalem.

They were used by all kinds. Nationals foreigners rich poor you name it. They were all going up and down that road. God sends out his servants to invite without discrimination.

[22 : 08] And the wedding hall is filled with a ton of unlikely guests. Not the who's who not the A-listers. A hodgepodge bunch of people.

Look around the room it's people like you and me. This would seem to be a sufficient way to end the parable if Jesus is simply wanting to convey that God's salvation is available to everybody.

But we can't because that's not where Jesus ends. He goes on to say this the king came in to look at the guests and he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to them friend how did you get in here without a wedding garment?

And the man was speechless. And the king said to his attendants bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth for many are called and few are chosen.

Well what are we to make of this? Isn't accepting the invitation enough? Well according to this parable this invitation comes with a very specific requirement. So good news is we get to talk wedding garments of Jesus' day.

[23 : 18] Yay? Alright. I'm glad you're so excited about this. So you know the ancient east royal weddings it's pretty well known by that time it's a common custom that rich people and those like kings they had the ability to and often did provide wedding garments to wear for their guests when they show up.

And these wedding garments they were making a statement. They were expensive. They were very nice looking. And they were meant to convey a sense of like hey you are in royalty and you are looking like royalty in this royal wedding.

And those garments weren't a they weren't a please wear them they're like hey you gotta wear these. And it was a way of honoring and celebrating the royal hosts and the wedding occasion and to wear anything else was seen as unfit and it was seen as an act of impudence toward the king and arrogant disregard as well.

Think about that. The gospel invitation comes to us as we are but the king will not leave us in the condition upon which we heard it and responded to it.

Salvation is many things and it is responding to this good news of God that is through Jesus Christ. But when we are saved we are made a new creation.

[24 : 43] Something happens to us something that we cannot do to ourselves but nevertheless has to happen. And as this parable puts it salvation involves coming at the king's invitation coming as you are but you have to put on his wedding garment.

The one that he supplies not the one that you sewed at home and made up for yourself. Think about who who's listening in the audience. As Jesus is giving this parable it's all kinds of people but you know who else is in there?

Pharisees Sadducees scribes they had a uniform. They were known and identified by their outer garments. They were the righteous ones who carefully studied and obeyed God's laws but you knew that because of what they wore.

And Jesus is saying all that when you if you're coming to my wedding all that's got to be covered up. again think of a beggar or the poor in tattered clothes that maybe the servants found on the main highways that were brought into that wedding feast.

Their clothes had to also be covered in the same wedding garment that the king provided. Imagine what that did for them but in a very different way and what we see is the humble people are exalted but the exalted are humbled.

[26 : 14] You know what's interesting is that all are set apart by the wedding garment in one sense and yet none are set apart because of the wedding garment! In another sense the king comes and he looks around and he sees all the people in the same wedding garment.

he's not looking around and saying ooh there's a Pharisee oh there's a poor person there's a beggar ooh there's a prostitute and a sinner. He looks and he sees his wedding garments.

What these wedding garments do for all who are invited to this feast is that both our glory and our shame are covered in order to put on that which glorifies the king. So then where is our boasting and our shame?

It's no more. They're gone. Both are covered by that which only the king has provided for us to put on. Okay? Jesse that's great but what is that garment?

What are we meant to put on? The scriptures say the same thing about this putting on in many places and I'll pick two for the sake of time.

[27 : 24] Romans 13 14 it says put on the that was pathetic put on the all right sweet all right got your attention again and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires Colossians 3 verses 8 to 10 but now you must put them all away anger wrath malice slander and obscene talk from your mouth do not lie to one another seeing that you have put off the with its practices and have put on the which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator put on then as God's chosen ones holy and beloved compassionate hearts kindness humility meekness and patience bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against one another forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you must also forgive and above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony when God saves you something very important happens to you

Jesus comes and he covers you in his glory his righteousness right we spoke at length about that last week that is a beautiful thing his wedding garment he puts over you his righteousness what this parable is saying in conjunction with these verses about putting on Christ which is putting on the new self is that Jesus' righteousness does more than just cover us it begins to possess us Paul alludes to this in Romans chapter 6 prior to putting Christ on he says that you before him before you were baptized into him you were slaves to sin but now having put on Christ now having been baptized in him you have now become slaves to righteousness to his righteousness before salvation sin possessed you you were controlled by it after salvation the righteousness of Christ is now what controls you it's now what compels you it changes who you are yes it's a righteousness that covers us and it is a righteousness that works upon us and in us and through us because the very nature of Christ is at work upon us and in us and he does this by giving us the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit dwelling in us does this he works in our hearts he is constantly and patiently ongoingly changing the condition of who we are and our desires and our affections and our priorities and all of these things and those who put on Christ have put on that wedding garment and that means all of those things it means that they are covered in Christ's righteousness and what that does it robs us of any boasting in ourselves it covers us in his righteousness in a way that covers any guilt and shame of every sin that would cause us to want to hide from God but still there is more those who put on Christ have put on a wedding garment that does adorn us but it does more than adorn us it transforms us the man who was found at the wedding without the garment he wanted the benefits of the wedding but wished to remain as he was we don't know if he was a Pharisee

who loved his own glory or if he was a sinner who felt unashamed and reveled in his sin but what we do know is the king wasn't having it at his son's wedding and that man was thrown out so where do you stand today have you responded to the invitation or have you spurned it where do you stand today have you rejected the garments of the king to glory in your own righteousness or to justify your sin and for those who have put on the king's garment remember this we are also the servants who go out to invite all to join us in this wedding feast why because we have a king who wants us to share in his joy and who will cover us in his glory as the band comes up and we look to respond we're going to take communion in a moment but I want to say to you if you are not

Yoda follower of Jesus the invitation from the king is this come and believe come and believe that Jesus came and he was the only son of God begotten of him he was sent from heaven the prince of heaven who came lived a perfect life that you can never live die to death to pay for the penalty of sin that we deserve and he did this to make a way make a way of life with God make a way to come to the kingdom to come to this wedding feast he is the invitation take it take it there's going to be a prayer on the screen for you to pray to respond to that I want to encourage you to do that now if you're here and already a follower of Jesus we're going to come to the communion table and this is an invitation another kind of invitation from the king it anticipates the wedding feast we're going to enjoy in heaven one day but now we get to feast on the signs and symbols that we belong to Christ and we get to put him on every single day and we eat the bread and we drink the cup that point to his sacrifice his body sacrificed in our place broken for us his blood shed for the redemption of our sins and it's this that we come to that's like a wedding garment that we're reminded of and just maybe you're here and you feel like you've tossed that garment off Jesus is saying no no no just come if you gotta repent repent but he is putting that wedding garment on you and he will put that wedding garment on you you don't have to try to earn it in any other way let me pray and then you can go to the table nearest you when you're ready and take it back to your seat and take communion!

[34 : 00] to you right now spirit of the living God we ask that you would work in our hearts help us to understand the the glory of this invitation help us to understand that you are a God who invites us into your joy that everything in you is a celebration we thank you for that Lord God and we ask right now that we would be able to appreciate all that you have done for us to understand that these wedding garments are an amazing gift as much as the invitation is an amazing gift and you give it to us freely help us to put you on in this moment throughout this day tomorrow and the next and the next work in our hearts amen