

## Matthew 22:1-14

Trinity 20, October 16, 2024  
Pastor Sam Rodebaugh

*And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, <sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, <sup>3</sup> and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. <sup>4</sup> 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."' <sup>5</sup> But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup> while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. <sup>8</sup> Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup> Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. <sup>12</sup> And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup> 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.' <sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen."*

Imagine you were standing before God on Judgment Day. Imagine name after name being called, and one by one people stepping forward to be rendered judgment—some to everlasting life and some to everlasting condemnation. Imagine your name was called, and you finally step up to God's judgment throne. Imagine God leans in, looks right at you—right in your eyes—and asks: "Why should I let you into heaven?" What would your answer be? I really want you to think about that question and form an answer in your head. "Why should God let me into heaven?" And I'd ask you to keep that question circulating in your mind as we go through our text, and we'll find a good answer by the end.

In our parable this morning, Jesus describes heaven as a wedding feast, a great reception. And this is a fairly common picture throughout Scripture. We talked about it last weekend, Jesus frequently pictures His relationship with us as a marriage—He as the Groom and the Church as His bride. And so, there's various places in Scripture where heaven is described as a wedding feast, a wedding banquet. And that's really some great imagery for us to consider when *thinking* about heaven.

For one thing, who doesn't love a wedding reception? It's generally a pretty joyous occasion, a lot of times you are surrounded by family and friends. And that's a good description of heaven. Here it's not just called a wedding reception, but a wedding *feast!* I know that means there'll be a lot more than chicken and potatoes like a lot of our wedding receptions offer—this will be the best food, as Isaiah describes, "**A feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.**" (Isaiah 25:6) And when you think about some of the happiest times we have in this life, so many of them seem to revolve around delicious food—like at a restaurant with friends or gathered around the Thanksgiving table with family. Yes, a feast is a *great* way to picture heaven.

Another reason this is such a good illustration of heaven is that a wedding feast celebrates a marriage. In marriage we pledge our love, we give ourselves to another person; and that's exactly what Christ has done for us! In love, He chose to give up His own self-interest and give Himself to us, binding Himself to each one of us.

So, this is what you and I have to look forward to. This wonderful celebration, this delicious feast, this outpouring of love from our God to us. *Heaven*. It will be a wedding feast so glorious, that we have to ask: **Who wouldn't want to attend this wedding feast?**

That's a question that seems rhetorical; obviously the answer ought to be "no one." Everyone would want to go, right? Well, Jesus tells us in our text that that is actually *not* the case. Starting at verse 2: ***"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."***

He throws this tremendously lavish feast, and he sends out invitations to all the guests. Now, wedding feasts in those days weren't just a meal and a dance like we might have today; it was a full, week-long affair. And this one was hosted by a king, this was a can't miss opportunity! **Who wouldn't want to attend this wedding feast?** Well, here we run into some unexpected behavior! The invited guests simply refuse the invitation. ***"They would not come,"*** Jesus says. Many just didn't care to go.

Now, the King in this parable is God the Father, and His Son for whom He's put together this feast is obviously Jesus. And understanding that this parable is used as a picture of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is the work that God does to bring sinners *to* heaven, we see this reaction to God's invitation constantly. Today, the Word is preached in so many ways, and so many people hear the invitation and say, "Not interested." The same thing happened in Jesus' day, when the Word made flesh was among them, revealing the love of God to them, and so many refused to listen.

But, the King doesn't give up. ***"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.'"*** The King suffers long with those who couldn't be bothered to turn up. He sends out the invitation again, even to those who had already RSVP'd "no." He wants them to know just how great this feast will be—"all the best foods will be had, the best oxen and calves have been prepared, everything is ready, all *you* need to do is show up!" Again, **Who wouldn't want to attend this wedding feast?**

And again, we get an unexpected answer. ***"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."*** Two very sad responses to the invitation. And really, two responses that seem too unrealistic to be believed. If you were invited to a King's feast, who would say, "No, I've got to go to work instead"? If you were invited to a King's feast, who on earth would think, "I know, let's kill the messengers"? That wouldn't ever happen, would it?

And yet, that does happen, and it *has* happened. God sends out the invitation: "Come to the feast, join in the wedding celebration, the halls of heaven are open for you!" And the response to that invitation for *some* has been with violence. They killed the prophets, they killed the apostles, still today, they persecute and kill Christians. Others respond with much less fervor, and instead remain indifferent. For them, *work* is more important than God's invitation; sports are more important, relaxation time, family time, weekend projects that need to get done—for many, these are more important than hearing the Word of God and joining in heaven's celebration. And sadly, it's in that lackadaisical response that I see myself so clearly.

How often isn't it the case that God's Word just isn't as important to us as whatever else we have going on? "There's always more Sundays to go to church, there's always tomorrow to read my Bible, but I've got other stuff I have to do right now!" We *know* that God's Word is important and should be our priority, but since it's often *not* our priority, we feel the need to come up with excuses for ourselves for why we don't *do* family devotions or set aside time to listen to the Lord. The excuses come fast and readily, but every one of them is no better than the reasons given in our parable.

What's God's response going to be when we treat His invitation, when we treat His Word as an unimportant piece of mail that just gets moved to the back of the stack so that we can look at the rest of the mail first? ***"The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."*** Is He overreacting? I don't think so. That's what I deserve!

So, who's the King going to invite now? ***"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 bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests."*** The first invitees were unworthy because they had rejected the invitation. So now the invitation goes out to everyone—both bad and good. Now, that's speaking from the servants' perspective—they gave invitations both to the people who *appeared* to be good, and to the people they knew to be bad, like tax collectors and people openly living in sin. From the servants' vantage point, some of these were more suited to the feast than others, but from the King's perspective, they were all unworthy—all originally uninvited.

And we just have to take a step back here and consider how absurd this whole scenario is. The King has thrown this royal feast, and none of the initial invitees cared to come. So, He sends the invitation out to just *anyone*; the servants go out to the main roads and simply hand out invitations to *anyone* they come across. Invitations were going to the homeless, to the poor, to prostitutes—anyone and everyone—and *these* are the people who would fill that wedding hall, eating the best food, celebrating the marriage of the King's Son. It's just an unreal scenario.

If you've ever planned a wedding reception, you know just how difficult it is to manage the guest list. You pour over it for hours, making painful and difficult cuts along the way until you can get down to the correct number of guests for your wedding. And since it's so difficult to whittle the list down, you'd *never* invite random strangers off the street. You have to invite the most deserving guests.

Yet, as ridiculous as this picture is in our day-to-day experience, this is the perfect picture of God's invitation to you through His Word. Heaven's halls could not be filled only with people who deserved to be there—in fact, it would be vacant. So, God sends out His invitation to people like you and me, people who *don't* deserve it. God says to you, ***"Come to the wedding feast."*** You shouldn't have made the cut, but shockingly, your name is on the invitation. God wants *you* to join Him in heaven.

Now, that seems like it would be a good place to end the parable, but there's more. ***"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 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. For many are called, but few are chosen.'"***

I've been asked to stand up in a few weddings as a groomsman, and it's always an honor, but there's always that period of wondering about what you're going to be told to wear. Sometimes it's just, "Wear a black suit," sometimes it's, "Go down to Men's Warehouse and pay \$200 for a suit that you're going to have to return the next day." And especially when I was younger that was always difficult to stomach. But you always do it anyways! You wear what you're supposed to because it would be unconscionable to be invited for this special honor and then wear the wrong attire.

Well, that's what this one man does. And at first appearance, this all seems pretty shocking—a man bound and thrown out of the wedding banquet, all because he was wearing the wrong attire. What if he couldn't afford nice clothes? What if he didn't have time to go home and change? Well, I've read that in those days, it was customary for the king to *provide* the proper attire. Especially since the feast is already hot and prepared, for anyone to get a last minute invitation and show up properly dressed would require the garments to be provided at the door! This man however, apparently felt like his clothes were just as good as the king's robes. He didn't need to change! And he was wrong.

And this happens, too. And this *will* happen. When Jesus says, "***The king came in to look at the guests,***" He's describing Judgment Day, when the Lord will come in and sit at His judgment throne and take a look at how we're dressed for the heavenly feast to which He's invited us. What are you going to wear? How can you be certain you'll be properly attired? Maybe you've worried about that in the past. Not in these terms, perhaps, but maybe you've worried that you'll show up to Judgment Day thinking that you'll go to heaven only to find out that you don't fit in and you'll be cast out.

If you've been worried about that, it's probably because you've been thinking you'll have to wear your own clothes on that day. That is to say, that when the King comes out to survey the guests, He'll look at you and what you've done in your life. He'll see how lackadaisical you were regarding His Word; He'll see all your sins piled up before Him, a mountain of evidence against you. That's how the man at the end of the parable stood before the King. He figured that his clothes were good enough; figured that he could be judged based on his own merits. But all he merited was death in hell.

But that's not what you will wear, and that's not what God will see. In John's Revelation, he sees the saints in heaven, all dressed in royal, white robes, and the Elder tells him how they got them. "***These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.***" (7:14) God knows that we lack the proper attire. So, what we lack, God provides. He gives us the proper wedding garments. He washes us in Christ's blood, so that all of our sins, all of our stains, all of our lukewarm attitudes are scoured away; all that's left is the white robes of Christ's righteousness, the proper attire for entrance to the eternal, heavenly feast.

So, go back to our opening question. "Why should God let me into heaven?" For many, the answer to that question is, "I've been a good person, I've never hurt anybody, I go to church more often than not." All that answer means is that they want to stand before God on Judgment Day in their own clothes, being judged by what they've done. But that just won't work out for them. The right answer is, "I didn't deserve an invitation, but You gave it to me. I lack the proper attire, but Your Son Jesus gave me *His* own robes. Why should I be let into heaven? Because of Jesus, and that's it." And with Jesus as your answer, you will by no means be cast out. Thanks be to God, in Jesus' name. Amen.