

# The Parable of the Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

Parables are not harmless stories illustrating timeless truths. Jesus has come to Jerusalem to overthrow the principalities and powers and establish His everlasting kingdom. He is the humble king who rides on a donkey, welcomed by multitudes shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of Yahweh” (20:9). He cleanses the temple and throws the chief priests and scribes into a tizzy (20:16). This is the third parable Jesus tells to answer their question “By what authority are you doing these things?” (21:23). Each one reveals their roles in the story and the way His kingdom will triumph. The parable of the two sons tells us who enters Christ’s kingdom. The parable of the wicked vinedressers shows how the old workers will be dealt with and new workers welcomed. The parable of the wedding feast demonstrates what the kingdom is like, how everyone is invited, and even though some will not come, the Lord will pack it with guests.

## Overview of the Text

This is another parable with a son at the center. The king arranges a wedding for his son and sends servants to call all those invited, but they are not willing to come (vv. 2-3). He then sends out more servants with a personal message letting everyone know the oxen and fatted cattle have been made into steaks and the party is about to begin (v. 4). Some who hear this brush it off and instead attend to what they feel are more important matters of business (v. 5). Others, when they encounter the servants, seize, abuse, and kill them (v. 6). When the king hears about this, he becomes furious and sends armies to destroy the murderers and burn their city (v. 7). He then sends out servants again, this time into the highways and byways to invite everyone they find, which turns out to be so many good and bad people that the wedding hall is packed (vv. 8-10). When the king enters, he finds someone without a wedding garment, a wedding crasher. He has no answer for how he got there, and so is thrown out into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (vv. 11-13). Jesus comments on the parable: “For many are called, but few are chosen” (v. 14).

## The Invitation

In the ancient world especially but still commonly today, royal weddings are affairs of state. The prince will receive the kingdom, and those invited to his wedding are powerful figures with vested interest in who will influence and be allied to the nation. The king invites those who ought to be loyal and cheerful guests. This is a patient king who even after being rejected sends out servants again to graciously describe how wonderful the party will be. It’s not until some recipients murder his servants that they are met with justice. But the king uses his rejection as an opportunity to invite anyone who will come to the wedding. Jesus already pointed out that though the chief priests and elders wouldn’t listen to John, the tax collectors and prostitutes did (21:32). The rejection of John, Jesus, and the apostles did not cause them to give up or doubt the message, but to take it to those who would listen (cf. 10:14). Some people are not ready to respond yet, and others never will (though we remain hopeful), but the truth of the gospel is to be declared to every person under heaven: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Notice that the king wants the invited to come, but he is not insecure or desperate. We should not preach the gospel as if God is needy and desperate for people to believe. This creates a man-centered gospel and evangelistic events that try to

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flatter and emote people into the kingdom. We shouldn't tell people to ask Jesus into their hearts but instead to repent of their sins and believe the good news of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. The gospel is either the aroma of life or the aroma of death (2 Cor. 2:16), and when the invitation is accurately and lovingly given, it's powerful unto salvation. Although the call to trust God necessarily humbles us, it's the greatest honor to receive this invitation to the wedding feast. Weddings are still the biggest, most expensive, and most important celebrations in our lives. The kingdom of God is like a royal wedding feast. Being a Christian is to be a confirmed guest, enjoying a life with God of fellowship and celebration. Of course we still have sorrow, suffering, hardship, and persecution, but joy always comes in the morning (Ps. 30:5).

## Four Responses

There are four responses to the invitation. The first group is indifferent and would rather attend to "practical" affairs (v. 5). "Some people are so busy making a living they forget to make a life." If you are at the center of your universe, it's hard to think that investing time, talent, and treasure in Christ and His kingdom will add anything to you. But it will add everything. In the parable, the people who go on with life as usual commit no high-handed sins, but instead fade off from the story. They miss the wedding, the community, and the abundant generosity of the king. The high priests and elders were so filled with self-importance and the busyness of their ritualistic endeavors that they didn't listen to Christ or His apostles. No doubt they heard about Jesus, but as soon as He threatened their program and prestige, they wanted nothing to do with Him. G.K. Chesterton said Satan fell by the force of gravity. It's the easiest thing in the world to become a presumptuous Christian, assuming that because your parents trust Jesus, because you grew up in the church, because you went to Bible college, because you've heard all that Jesus stuff before, you really don't have to believe for yourself and aren't in dire need of grace. The guests in the parable were invited because they were already in the kingdom. They knew the king. And yet they really didn't. The second group violently rejects the king by way of mistreating and even killing some of his servants. This is how Stephen describes it to the high priest: "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it" (Acts 7:51-53). Within the people of God there have always been enemies of God (Gal. 4:24). It usually takes some conflict to reveal them, like Stephen preaching to the high priest and Paul (Acts 7:54, 58). Just as the devil appears as an angel of light, so false Christians appear like true ones for a time. The third response comes from the blessed mob gathered from the highways and byways, some good, successful, and respected, and some bad, down on their luck, and shady (v. 10). They're all happy to come and fill the wedding hall. The king himself interacts with the fourth kind of response, the man at the wedding but without a garment (v. 12). He wants to be there, but only on his terms. He wants to do quietly and slowly what the violent tried to do quickly—ignore the king and ultimately overthrow him. The king won't let him ruin the wedding and so has him cast out (v. 13). Outside of God's grace there is only the void of self-pity, rivalry, accusation, and the sadness that follows. The call of the gospel goes out to everyone, but in case we are tempted to think it's our worthiness, insight, wisdom, humility, or anything else, Jesus says it's God alone in His mercy who chose us.

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