

The Banquet is Ready. Come to the Feast!
Matthew 22:1-14

Pastor Michael Ewart
October 5, 2008
Pentecost 21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

If you ever spend any amount of time talking to unbelievers, you will quickly be amazed at how they misunderstand what Christianity is all about. The majority of unbelievers I have talked to have a false understanding of what we believe and teach. And based on that false understanding, they reject the teachings of Christianity out of hand. Have you ever run across that in your life?

For example, I have heard unbelievers say, “I will never become a Christian. Christianity is all about a set of rules to follow, and then threatening people with eternal torture in the unquenchable fires of hell! Terrified of eternal torture, people are scared into being faithful Christians.” Do you recognize the wrong thinking there? Is fear what motivates us? Is potential torture for eternity in hell what motivates us to come to church and serve Christ?

For that matter, is that the way you witness to others and “evangelize” the lost? Do you say to a friend or co-worker... “Look, hell is really painful! And it’s forever! Become a Christian... or else!” I’ve never witnessed that way, and I pray you haven’t either.

In today’s sermon, then, we correct that false notion that many have. We’ll look at how our God does approach us and deal with us... not by threat of fire and brimstone, but by gentle invitation and glorious promises. So the title of today’s message is *not* “The fires of hell are stoked! Repent or be condemned!” Rather the title reflects the content of the parable Jesus told: “The Banquet is ready! Come to the feast!”

Matthew 22:1-14: " Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.””

Jesus has so much to teach us in this parable! The parable naturally divides into three parts, and each part teaches something a little bit different. The first part Jesus seems to primarily

have in his sites the unbelieving Jews of his day, but we learn much from this part as well. *“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.”* With just the one sentence the setting of the parable is set. I’m sure most of you have been to wedding receptions. You know how good the food is. You know what a joyful celebration it is. As far as parties go, it’s hard to beat a good wedding reception! But this wasn’t just any wedding reception. It was one that a king was throwing for his son. It was special. It was lavish. It was huge. In those days, the wedding celebration was typically days long.

Perhaps the closest equivalent would be to the wedding banquet of a billionaire today. I did a little research into the most expensive wedding celebrations of modern times. Listen to how they celebrated: One couple rented every single hotel room on the Hawaiian island of Lanai. They flew the guests out there at their own expense. Another decorated the wedding hall with over 50,000 flowers. One rich couple had a 110 piece orchestra accompany the event. Another paid Whitney Houston \$3.6 million to perform at the wedding. Another wedding banquet was catered by none other than celebrity chef Wolfgang Puck. In the biggest wedding of all time, a rich sheik invited 20,000 guests to his wedding, built a stadium to accommodate them all, and celebrated for a full 7 days. And most of the weddings were capped off with an elaborate fireworks display at the end of the evening.

How would you like to be invited as a guest at such a wedding banquet? It would be amazing, wouldn’t it? So Jesus tells the story of just such a wedding banquet... one hosted by a king in honor of his son! This banquet being described is the heavenly wedding banquet. God, the source of all that is good, invites people to an all expense paid trip to eternal paradise.

The text continues: *“He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.”* Note that these people had been notified that this banquet was being prepared well ahead time. The servants went out, then, with the specific invitation for the particular time. *“But they refused to come.”* Those invited to this unbelievable wedding banquet refused to come!

Who is Jesus speaking of in this first part of the parable? It seems his sites were set on the unbelieving Jews. From the time God called Abraham to be the father of a great nation, the Jews knew God’s great feast was being prepared. Again and again, God renewed his promises to them of the coming Savior who would forgive their sins and make them suitable for entrance into this elaborate banquet. But when Jesus came, *“they refused to come.”* They refused to trust in Jesus as the promises Messiah. They rejected Jesus as the long-promised Christ who would remove their guilt, heal their wounded souls, and establish eternal peace between God and man. They refused to come.

The parable continues: *“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’* Look how determined the king was! He wouldn’t take no for an answer. He sent the servants out again... to say what? Threats? No! No threats! Instead, the servants go out with an even clearer description of the banquet. The dinner is prepared. The fattened cattle are butchered and prepared. Everything is ready! Please come! Please, celebrate with the king and enjoy!

The reaction to this more earnest and specific invitation? *“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.”* Some were indifferent and paid no attention. Others were hostile... even killing the servants. This part of the parable was mainly aimed at the unbelieving Jews of Jesus’ day.

They received the invitation numerous times to God's feast. God elaborated and explained in ever-clearer detail. Some were indifferent. Some were hostile to God... killing his prophets, and finally crucifying God's son.

With this, the king is done inviting. The generous invitation is revoked. "*The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.*" Those who reject God's gracious invitation will finally be the objects of God's wrath and punishment. They receive what is just for their stubborn arrogance, and willful snubbing of God. God is patient, but his patience is not eternal. Ultimately, justice must rule in eternity.

Again, though directed specifically at the unbelieving Jews, we learn much about God here. God deals with man primarily in terms of promise, love and generosity. Not in terms of threats and punishments. God doesn't hold a gun to our heads and say, "Believe... or else." Instead he describes amazing blessings and benefits that he wants to share on us generously... just because he wants to! He shows us all the blessings he wants to bestow on us now and eternity, he smiles at us warmly and gently, and he says, "Come! All is ready!"

Friends when you share God's invitation with others, do the same. Yes, we must talk about sin and its dreadful consequences... but only so people see the extreme need for a Savior from sin. Be sure to stress the amazing love and generosity of God that he displays through his Son Jesus. Stress the blessings God gives through Jesus: forgiveness, life, salvation, acceptance, guidance, help, protection, and an eternal dwelling place of happiness. It's that Gospel message which melts hard hearts and turns sinners to God. And when we do invite others, don't be surprised if you see indifference or hostile rejection.

Now this would make a logical end to the parable, but there's more: "*Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.'* So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests." This king is absolutely intent on continuing this celebration! He will be generous... if not with the guests invited first, then with guests newly invited.

For centuries the promise of the Savior... and God's generosity was given and carried forward by the Jewish people. But when the majority of them rejected Christ, God in his mercy extended the invitation to those who knew nothing of his generous invitation beforehand. The Gospel was extended to all people... not just the Jewish people. Everyone is invited to God's eternal wedding banquet. Everyone! God doesn't show favoritism or preference.

This is made clear in Galatians 3:26-29: "*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*" What amazing love!

God is intent on filling his banquet hall. He will keep inviting until the feast is to begin.

Now, once again, the parable could end here... but God has one more important truth to teach us: "*But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. 'Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*" "*For many are invited, but few are chosen.*"

One of the guests was at the banquet, but not wearing appropriate wedding clothes. At first we might say, "But he was invited in off the streets, of course he wasn't wearing wedding clothes!" But for this very reason, we must presume that the generous king was providing appropriate clothing for all who attended. This wasn't an unheard of custom at the time, so certainly he would have had to provide wedding clothing considering the circumstances. ILL: When my wife and I got married, we decided that the groomsmen would all wear charcoal grey suits and identical ties. (We were very practical.) Our gift to the groomsmen was that tie that they were to wear to the wedding. Can you imagine one of the groomsmen showing up at the church wearing a suit and tie of his own choosing? What an insult! We have a similar situation in this parable. A man is at the wedding not wearing the appropriate attire.

So the king questions him. The man knows his behavior is defenseless. He doesn't say a word. The king has him thrown out.

What is Jesus teaching here? The appropriate attire for God's eternal banquet is provided by God himself. We already read what that clothing was earlier: "*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*" Clothed in Christ, we are dressed for life. Yet some insult God by presuming they can come to his banquet on their own terms. Some think that clothed in their own good works, they can stand in God's presence. They are wrong. Some think that trusting in Allah, they are ready for the banquet. They are wrong. Still others enter the banquet flashing their "Jesus" badge at the door, dressed in tattered clothes. They sin without apology and carry on as if simply mouthing the words and showing up in church now and then really does make one clothed in Christ. When by their hypocrisy and willful disobedience, they cast off the garment of Christ long ago.

None of these are wearing the wedding clothes which God himself provides. Only when Christ's perfect life is our clothing... only when our guilt and filthy life is covered up by his blood... only then are we fit for heaven. All others will be cast out.

"*Many are invited, but few are chosen.*" Those are the final words of our text. It's shocking but true... in spite of the fact that this incredible banquet is offered to all... the invitation is out there for everyone... few make it into those eternal halls. Indifference, rejection, arrogance... different reactions with the same result... cast out of God's eternal presence.

Friends, now is the time to heed God's invitation. Take it seriously. Rejoice in his generosity! The banquet is ready! Come to the feast! We'd be fools not to! And extend that invitation to all you meet. The king has room for all! Share God's love and his generosity in Christ Jesus with everyone you meet. It is this gospel good news which changes people's hearts, clothes them in Christ, and prepares them for the feast. Come! For all is ready. And bring a friend, too. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen (Philippians 4:7)