

Week 27
March 22, 2009

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner **The Parable of the Banquet**

Matthew 22:1-14

This parable has similarities to the Parable of the Tenants, which we looked at last week. One group is unresponsive to the God - character in the story, so opportunity gets passed to a more promising cast. But instead of using the landowner motif to represent God, Jesus speaks more directly by representing God as a king.

The king prepares a banquet. It's a feast to honor his son. How is that banquet like the kingdom of heaven? How is the kingdom of heaven like a banquet?

In several places in scripture, heaven is described this way. All the way back to our favorite *Psalms*, the 23rd, God "prepares a table before us" and "our cups run over." While there are present applications of that fervent prayer, it is followed by the promise of "dwelling in the house of the Lord forever."

During the last supper, Jesus takes the wine and associates it with his own blood. He also says that they won't drink of it together again until they do so in heaven.

Luke 14 also says, "Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

Revelation 19 specifically uses the phrase, "marriage supper of the Lamb." That capstone book of the Bible paints the final things of earth and the kickoff of heaven as a wedding between Christ the Lamb of God and his church – the bride of Christ. The marriage supper of the Lamb is this feast honoring the Son as he revels with his new bride – us! Imagine what a feast!

The king, says Jesus, sends out invitations. The obvious invitees are the overtly religious people of his day. But Jesus has communicated more than once about his disdain for vain religion and hypocritical faith. This is one more moment where he digs the religious leaders. In the story, the obvious invitees push the king away and refuse his invitation. The king is lavish in his enticements, but they still want no part of the event. As the story is told in *Luke 14*, they make excuses about other engagements and tasks that they can't get out of.

When the king sends messengers to plead for them to come, the messengers are mistreated.

How does the king respond? He sends an army to punish those who killed the

messengers.

How is the kingdom of heaven like this? Some of the most obvious invitees will shun the invitation to heaven's feast and mistreat the messengers – not only the prophets and spokespersons for God, but even the Son of God. Even though God is lavish in his enticements, many people born into faith families and swimming in truth all their lives will still refuse the invitation. The king will pass the opportunity to others who are more receptive and eager.

Deuteronomy 1 tells us the story of Moses' generation destined to waste away in the desert because of their faithlessness. Even though they'd seen so many miracles they just didn't believe that the Promised Land could be theirs. The next generation would enter in.

Jeremiah 8 is only one of many examples of God expressing frustration with those who reject him and passing the benefits of relationship and blessing to "new owners."

In *Matthew 24*, Jesus says that in the last days the trumpet will sound and angels will gather people who have accepted the invitation from the corners of the earth.

So the king sends for new invitees. "Take it to the streets." Or as the older versions say, "Go to the highways and byways." Anyone who will come in is welcome. Good and bad; healthy and unwell; religious and irreligious – if you receive this invitation, you are welcome to this lavish feast for the son of a king.

The wedding hall fills up with altogether unlikely but altogether welcome guests.

How is the kingdom of heaven like that? Jesus says in *Matthew 7* that many will say at the last day, "Lord, we did this for you and that for you," but I will say, "I never knew you. Depart from me." In other words, "You should have known me, but you pushed me away, replacing me with poor substitutes for real relationship."

1 Thessalonians paints the hopeful picture of God gathering those who have received his invitation – first the dead and then the living – to meet the Lord in the air.

Revelation 7 speaks of a great multitude of people from every nation, tribe, language and people who are welcomed into the heavenly presence of God.

Then Jesus tells the peculiar and particular story of one invitee who answers the invitation but doesn't dress for the occasion. Apparently, he doesn't have a thing to wear!

The awful question is asked, "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" The man is speechless.

What would you say? I'd say, "I'm clothed in Christ."

The king responds again with a painfully sorrowful verdict on this man's fate. He's thrown into that place Jesus often mentions where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. I assume that this place is where people go who choose to reject God and his friendly

overtures. In other words, as much as God loves us, he will finally give us what we ask for, even if that is separation.

How is the kingdom of heaven like this? *Psalm 32* says, “Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.” This is reiterated in *Romans 4:7*.

In *Matthew 7:15*, Jesus says, “Watch out for wolves who come dressed in sheep’s clothing,” which would be the opposite of a humble sheep covered in God’s grace.

Romans 13:14 says, “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Colossians 3:12 tells us, “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

1 Peter 5:5 says, “Clothe yourselves with humility.”

The message is so clear – put on Christ as your covering; your clothing. Let Jesus be your ticket and your advocate. Not your deeds, though being clothed in Christ will make us clothed in a new righteousness that’s proven more each day by humility and gentleness and kindness and patience and compassion.

But Jesus is the key. Put on Jesus. This parable doesn’t use that phrase, but the ongoing testimony of scripture tells us exactly what our wardrobe needs to be if we’re serious about being included in that marvelous feast.

The aftermath of the story is summed up by Jesus:

For many are called but few are chosen.

In *Revelation 3:20*, Jesus is his own messenger, making a house call, bringing the feast to us. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. For anyone who opens that door, I will come in and feast with him.”

As I said last week, the kingdom of heaven is so much about choices: to come or to go; to submit or to rebel; to believe or to refuse belief; to receive or to shun. God does not and will not force himself, or else relationship means nothing. He uses attractive methods and not forceful methods for leading us into relationship, because he wants to honor our dignity as we learn to honor his.

Come to the party. Lay down what you’re doing. Accept the invitation. Enjoy the feast. It can start now.