

DATE: October 19, 2008
SERIES: The Good News, as Reported by Matthew
SERMON: Are You Coming to the Wedding?
SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:1-14
SPEAKER: Phil Thengvall

*Mr. and Mrs. Robert Evans Smith
and
Mr. and Mrs. Scott Robert Planter
request the honor of your presence
at the marriage of
Lisa Marie Smith
and
Tyler Reno Planter
on Saturday, the 15th of November
two thousand and eight
at six o'clock in the evening
at the Church of the Inadequate Collection
265 Main Street
Wichita, KS*

*Reception
immediately following the ceremony
at the Petroleum Club*

We've all been invited; do you think you will come? One of the joys of pastoral work has been that of preparing couples for marriage. Thankfully the role that I have does not involve one of the sticky issues in planning for a wedding that being deciding on the guest list. Having been a groom, and also the father of three sons who got married I know that this can be a source of disagreement for the couple and for the families represented. Where do you draw the line? Who gets invited and who does not?

Let's also look at this issue from the other side, the perspective of those who are invited. Do you attend every wedding to which you are invited? If not, how do you decide which ones to attend and which ones to respectfully decline? Sometimes it is easy to decide because you already have an event that prevents your being able to attend. But let's say there is no conflict in your schedule. Here are some questions that can help you make your decision.

How well do you know the couple or their respective parents?

Is it a work associate, a supervisor or employee?

Will the reception include a sit-down dinner at a well-known place?

Is this a wedding everyone is talking about and dying to attend?

The wedding in Jesus' parable from Matthew 22 happened to be just such a wedding.

This parable is the third in Jesus' trilogy of judgment parables in response to the Jewish religious leaders who challenged his authority. It is among the most dramatic and powerful of all of his parables, and though it was directed specifically at unbelieving Israel and her leaders, it has far-reaching significance for ensuing times, including our own.

In some ways this is the easiest parable of all to interpret because there is an obvious meaning lying right on the surface. This parable grew out of our Lord's controversy with the Pharisees during the last week of his ministry.

The enmity against him had sharpened tremendously throughout the city and the Pharisees, scribes, and rulers were plotting together to kill him. Knowing this, Jesus informed them very clearly about what was going to happen. Part of that information was given in the form of this parable, which is built upon what he had said to them earlier in Matthew 21:43: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it."

Here is a key to understand the meaning of the parable:

the king is God.

The king's son is Jesus Christ.

The servants of the king are the OT and NT prophets.

The people who refuse the invitation to the banquet are the nation of Israel.

The people who accept the invitation are the Gentiles, the nations of the earth.

I will wait till later to identify the final character in the parable.

We will look at the parable as a play with four scenes.

Scene 1 – The Invitation to the Wedding Feast is Rejected (vs. 1-6)

¹ Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" meant for the OT Jew the kingdom of God, and represented the realm of God's sovereign rule. When Jesus used the term he expanded it to mean the ongoing sphere of God's rule by grace, which included his divine program of gracious salvation. In this parable the kingdom of heaven represents the spiritual community of God's redeemed people, those who are under his reign because they have personally placed their trust in His Son as their savior.

Notice first that this occasion is a wedding feast. Today we call them receptions, and it falls to my lot as a pastor to be present at many weddings and receptions. Usually I find them joyful occasions marked by gladness, music, and laughter.

In Jesus' day a wedding feast was inseparable from the wedding itself, which involved a week-long series of meals and festivities and was the highlight of all social life. For a royal wedding such as the one in the parable, the celebration could last for several weeks. It would be held in the palace and the guests would

all stay for the entire time, enjoying unlimited food and drink and festivities that were fit for the son of the king. It was the ultimate celebration in the land.

It is important for us to understand that this is the way our Lord characterized God's invitation to come into relationship with him – to be a follower of Christ. It is not an invitation to a funeral, even though some people act as though becoming a Christian is equivalent to being soaked in formaldehyde for a week. It is an invitation to joy. It is not an invitation to a formal state dinner, but to a relaxed, cheerful, joyful occasion.

It is an invitation to the greatest festival imaginable, given by the greatest monarch imaginable, for the most honored guests you can imagine. Who wouldn't want to come!

3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

The custom in Jesus' day was to invite people to the wedding feast a long time before it actually occurred. The invitations went out and were acknowledged and accepted. Then, when the preparations were complete, servants were sent out to bid those who had already accepted the invitation to come. To be a pre-invited guest to the king's son's wedding was the greatest honor possible, and I imagine those who had been invited were quick to boast of their honor to their friends and neighbors.

The invited guests in this parable are Israelites. They had been invited to the wedding long, long before, through the prophets whom God had sent them. The invitation was to come and have fellowship with the Messiah, the Son. But now, centuries later all things are ready. The Son is there in their midst and is himself extending this final call, "Come now, everything is ready. Come and enter into fellowship with me." It is therefore beyond belief that when the actual call came to attend, they were unwilling to come. Can you imagine such a response, what a shock!

Those listening to the parable were probably thinking to themselves, "Who would do such an unbelievable thing as to refuse an invitation to the wedding of the king's son?"

Attending the wedding would be an even greater experience than receiving an invitation to the royal wedding. On the other hand, to refuse an invitation from one's king was to dishonor him, which was a serious offense.

But, even stranger than this refusal of the invitation was the response of the king to their rejection. Very few monarchs were known for humility and graciousness, especially in the face of such open insult and flagrant refusal. This king was no ordinary king.

4 "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."

The kindly king renews his summons, and with more urgency adds a glimpse of the food that is to be served at this lavish event. He finishes with a personal, very hearty invitation, "Come to the wedding banquet!"

5 "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business.

Many who were invited were coldly indifferent; refusing the invitation of the king, to come to an event of monumental significance, they returned to “everyday employments”, business as usual. Attendance at weddings was a social obligation in Judaism, so for the people in the parable to refuse the king’s invitation was a grievous insult of major proportions. Such action warranted severe punishment. For all the invited guests to refuse to come would greatly shame the king.

A unanimous refusal would appear to be an orchestrated effort to deliberately insult the host. This was a traumatic breach of social order. Jesus’ listeners would be incensed at the contemptible behavior of the people in the parable.

What were they saying “no” to? This was an invitation to enjoy what these people wanted more than anything else. It was what they desired, what they were made for, what they were looking for in life -- joy and gladness, fellowship, and companionship – life abundant.

This invitation to experience everything they wanted most of all they downgraded and treated with scorn and indifference. When the day to day existence of eating, working, sleeping took priority over an invitation to a life full of purpose and meaning, it indicated of a loss of perspective. They were more concerned about their own best interests than the king’s honor.

But others were worse than indifferent.

6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.

Some who received the second gracious invitation of the king took offense at being invited and went postal on the servants. They were guilty of a capital crime, an act of flagrant rebellion.

Application: All of this reveals a very great mystery about human nature. It tells us that what this marriage feast symbolizes -- this fellowship with the Son -- is so essential, so necessary to man that, without it, man cannot remain human.

What happens to those who have decided to refuse the invitation? Some begin to deteriorate, to fall apart. In an effort to satisfy the need for fellowship with something other than God, they lose perspective and turn life upside down. Trivial things become all-important, all consuming, while really important things are treated lightly and even with scorn. That is, they live in an unreal world, an *Alice in Wonderland* existence, where everything is out of proportion, a world of unreality.

Others become animalistic, fierce, hateful, and dangerous, so that they actually breathe out anger, hatred, and threats against the very message that could set them free. This is acted out in the parable, but also in the response of Israel to the prophets of the OT and to John the Baptist and Jesus and eventually to the disciples.

The late Ray Stedman of Peninsula Bible Church said, “Is it not striking that the two major problems of the day in which we live are meaninglessness and violence? It is because men turn a deaf ear to the message of the king to come to the wedding feast, to come into fellowship with the Son. And when they refuse that, they are refusing such an essential element of human life that they no longer can remain human beings in the true sense but drift off instead into one or the other of these two extremes.”

Scene 2 – The Rejection of the Invitation is Punished (vs. 7-8)

7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

The patience and understanding of the king has its limits. He would have been justified in punishing the offenders when they first refused his invitation.

But after his repeated calls, and their repeated wicked responses, the king was enraged, a very strong word used here. It is not unlike God's response to the wickedness in the days of Noah, when he said, "My Spirit will not strive with man forever."

Troops were dispatched to take care of these rebels and their properties. The parable's hearers would naturally applaud the king's rage as justified, except those who were aware that the parable was describing them. This destruction actually occurred in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was conquered by Titus and over 1 million Jews were killed and their mutilated bodies were thrown over the walls of the city.

In the parable the king gives a word of explanation to his servants regarding all of those who had been invited and refused to come.

8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.'

They showed they were undeserving by their response to the invitation. It was not because they lacked the required righteousness that they were deemed unworthy. They were declared unworthy because they refused to accept an invitation that was not based on their individual worth in any sense of the word. As we will see in a few minutes, that which makes a person worthy of receiving God's invitation is not any sort of personal goodness or merit, but simply saying yes to God's invitation to receive his son, Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior.

Scene 3 – New Guests are Invited and Accept (vs. 9-10)

Having dealt with the rebellious actions of the citizens, the king turns his attention back to his empty banquet hall and his son's impending wedding celebration. He turns to his servants and says,

9 'Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.'

This time the invitation goes out, literally, "to the partings of the highways," to the place "where cross the crowded ways of life," where people mingle and mix without distinction, where there are all kinds -- the respectable and the disreputable, the up-and-outers and the down-and-outers. The invitation goes out to anyone who will hear, anyone who wants to may attend the lavish banquet of the king.

This is clearly our Lord's prediction that the Gospel message, with its invitation to be in fellowship with the Son, is to go out to the entire world. We know history has confirmed that this pattern has been followed exactly. The gospel has gone out to the entire world, and it has been "whosoever will, may come." And through the centuries many have come, out of the highways and byways of life.

The OT prophet Hosea had foretold this invitation to the Gentiles when he said, "I will call those who were not My people, "My people"." Because of Israel's refusal the invitation went to the Gentiles, and that includes us.

10 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.

Those who had not been previously invited came right away, without hesitation, and soon all the seats were filled; it was SRO in the wedding hall. Are you surprised at the make up of those who were invited? The banquet hall was filled with the good and bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the wealthy and the poor. But this was the make up of the first folks who were invited too. No one who was ever invited to the wedding feast was worthy to come, all were equally unworthy, whether Jew or Gentile. God has always extended his call for salvation to both evil and good people, because neither is righteous enough and both are equally in need of his grace and mercy.

Scene 4 – An Intruder is Expelled (vs. 11-14)

At this point the parable takes an unexpected turn. It was customary that after the food was served the host would enter the hall to greet his guests. This was the high point of the occasion, the opportunity to have a personal audience with the king and his son.

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.

This man was not a gate-crasher; he had been invited to the banquet. However, he did not have on the suitable garments for the occasion; he was not wearing his wedding clothes. He must have stood out in the packed hall, being the only one without the proper garment. The fact that all the other guests were properly attired, though gathered from all places, from all walks of life, wearing all kinds of garb when they agreed to attend, meant the king had furnished wedding garments for all of his guests as they arrived for the banquet.

The guilty man, though personally responsible for being improperly clad, was addressed kindly and politely by the king, and given an opportunity to justify himself.

12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless.

The offending guest had no excuse for his behavior when questioned. His goose was cooked. From the way the king asked the question, it is obvious the guest was offered the outfit and refused to wear it. We can rephrase the king's remark in this way, "Look, friend, you are here under false pretenses. You are deliberately refusing to wear what has been provided. Your being here without wedding clothes implies that you are in rebellion against all that this wedding feast stands for. You are here as a phony, a sham." Arrogantly defying the royal etiquette, the man was determined to call the shots. "I Did it My Way" was going to be his swan song, his curtain call.

13 "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.'

Binding him would make it impossible for him to reenter the hall, and also leave him helpless in the darkness. The outside would be very dark in comparison to the brilliantly lit banquet hall. A place "of weeping and gnashing of teeth" can only be understood as the wretchedness of hell, a place of eternal punishment.

Ever since Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, attempted to please God by offering a sacrifice of his own choosing, people have been trying to come to God on their own terms. They may fellowship with Christians, join the church, become active in leading and serving, and speak of their love for God. Yet they sustain an inner rebellion in their hearts, an inner refusal to accept the gift of righteousness through Jesus Christ. Instead they cling to something in themselves upon which they are depending for favor before God, and they refuse to heed the authority and acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ. Like the tares that grow among the wheat they will coexist for a while with God's children. But on the day of inspection, the Day of Judgment, their deception will be made plain and their removal will be certain.

Jesus gave a clear warning about this in Matthew 7:21- 23.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

You may be asking, what is the wedding garment that God accepts? The proper wedding garment of a true Christian is God-provided righteousness, and without this no one can enter the kingdom of God. Our own righteousness is inadequate because none of us are without sin. The righteousness that God offers is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. To be dressed in this wedding garment we need to abandon any dependence upon ourselves, or upon anything we have done.

We must renounce any trust our background, heredity, ancestry or whatever else we might think is of value, and rely on Christ alone as our only hope of salvation.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of this when he said,

“I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” Isaiah 61:10.

The apostle Paul explains it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

He made Him (speaking of Jesus Christ) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Following the two previous parables Jesus had a question for the Jewish leaders, and in each case they condemned themselves by their answers. Knowing their hearts, that they were deciding how to trap him and condemn him to death, he closed this parable with a simple but insightful statement, "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Scores of people have wondered what this phrase means. I have heard it paraphrased, "Many are cold, and a few are frozen," and I will leave it to you to figure out what that is referring to. This phrase captures the delicate balance between God's sovereignty and man's free will. The wedding invitation went out to many – everyone was told they were welcome to attend the ceremony and reception for the wedding of the king's son.

In the same way the gospel is to be spread to all peoples of all nations because it is not God's will that a single person be excluded from His kingdom and perish in the outer darkness of hell (2 Peter 3:9). But in

the parable few of those many who were invited accepted the call and were thereby among the chosen. Many do not want God, or at least do not want God on his terms, and so reject the invitation to the Kingdom.

Heather Fredrickson is now going to share her story.

I grew up going to church with my family. I thought I was a Christian.

I continued to attend church some when I moved out of my parent's house. But, It wasn't until 3 ½ years ago that I met Jesus :-)

It was 2004 and the church that we belonged to in Alaska had a FAITH training class. I wanted to learn how to share my FAITH so I took the class. One night I lead a young lady in the prayer of Salvation. When my calling team returned and shared that this young lady had accepted Christ as her Savior everyone cheered. I did too...on the outside. But when I went home that night I kept on asking myself, why is Jesus such a big deal? Why didn't I have the inner Joy that those others had? I knew Who Jesus was; He was God's Son and He died on the Cross. But what difference did He make in Salvation? I asked that question to myself several times throughout the next few weeks. Why Jesus? Why not just believe in God? Why didn't I react the way the rest of the people did that night?

About a month later I met a young lady at church and she shared with me that she had been at an evangelistic meeting at the church she attended. When the evangelist invited people to come forward who wanted to receive Jesus as their savior she did that.

I share that story because the very next morning at church I realized for the very first time in my life that I was a sinner in need of a Savior. Matthew 7:21a was fresh in my mind at that moment where Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven."

The Holy Spirit was letting me know that was me. And immediately after that 2 Corinthians 6:2b was in my thoughts "...Now is the day of Salvation." A scene flashed in my mind of a time that I could have died but didn't. If I would have been killed I knew right then that I would have perished and been eternally separated from God in hell for all eternity. I knew that I was a member of a church but that didn't matter to me. For the first time in my life I didn't care what anyone else thought about what I was doing. I HAD TO get my heart RIGHT with the Lord. I was ready! I finally saw myself as God saw me "lost and condemned." Our Pastor started his message and guess what it was titled..."Who is this Jesus?" Wow! What a confirmation! God really was talking to me! He loved me enough to speak directly to me. I went forward after the service and told Pastor Johnny that I wanted to "NAIL IT DOWN" I had to and wanted to get my heart right and receive Jesus as my Savior.

How I Praise my heavenly Father for knowing my heart when I didn't and no one else did either. Now, I have the inner joy I was missing and I am eagerly awaiting the Wedding Feast. I hope you are too!

Conclusion: The gracious invitation of God to enter into fellowship with His Son is in the form of a command - come, and keep on coming, don't cease to come, come now, come often, and come always. It is the same invitation given by Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30. The call to come is issued anew to every disciple, every day, as long as they are followers of Jesus. "Come and spend time with me in the morning before other distractions take your attention from me. Come to me with your worries, your fears, your joys, and your sorrows. Come sit with me, be with me, and enjoy me. I am your Light, come. I am your bread, come. I am the way, the truth, the life, come."

So, will you come? Will you invite others to come? Do you know the joy of the King and his Son? Are you feasting daily at his lavish table, getting appetizers, samples of what he is planning for the main course in heaven? If not, why not?

Maybe you are like Heather, and this morning you realize you need to get your wedding garment from Jesus, will you come and do that?

Is the Christian life you experience one you want to invite others to enjoy? Life on this side of heaven is lived in anticipation one big wedding feast!