

The Banquet is Ready Matthew 22:1-14

INTRODUCTION

A young lady who chose not to sign her full name wrote the following on a recent social media website:

With my high school graduation still lingering in the air and college quickly arriving, I was beyond excited. As a final celebration of my graduating as Salutatorian, I hosted a graduation party to connect all of my family and friends as well as rake in some extra cash to finish my "what I still need for my dorm" list.

My mother and I spent weeks planning. We spent a few hundred dollars on food, games, and decorations. We could not wait for all the people who said they were coming to enjoy what we had planned for them. We had a photo booth, Pizza Hut, Subway (including the cookies) and even a game with a prize!

I wanted to enjoy my last few high school experiences with everyone. But it didn't quite happen as I planned. So here are a few lessons I learned after I threw a party where no one came.

She then rattled off five lessons that clearly express how deeply she was hurt and how despicable the rest of humanity is. I almost felt guilty for not going ... but then, I wasn't invited.

Today is the third sermon in my series titled "Tell Me a Story." As you are coming to know, these sermons will run throughout the months of October and November. All of them will be based on events that happen in the last week of the earthly life of Jesus. Why the last week? Because the last Sunday in November is "Christ the King Sunday," a day we celebrate that Jesus always wins. He will always reign as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

Most of these sermons – and again today is no exception – are based on stories told by Jesus. Parables. Simple stories with deep meanings. Stories of our faith and God's interaction with people. These are stories that tell us what God's kingdom is like and how Christ the King reigns in it. Unlike the last two weeks, our story does not take place in a vineyard. Today our setting is the banquet room in the king's palace.

The events in the parable were completely in accordance with normal Jewish customs and completely different from our way of doing things today. Back then when the invitations to a wedding feast went out there was no date or time on the invitation. Sort of like a "Save the Date" postcard without a date on it. Just "we're getting married and we want you to come!"

The problem was that the arrival of the invitation could be months ahead of the actual date ... and there were no updates in between. Updates weren't the custom. So if you were invited you had nothing you could put on your calendar.

But one day the banquet would be ready, and the call would go out “It’s time to eat!” If you had been invited, you would be expected to come. At that moment. Even if the Ohio State game was going on! Not going was a major insult to the host. But that is exactly what happened in this story that Jesus tells.

The king threw a party ... and no one came.

Now, these are kingdom parables, right? Stories that tell us about heaven and what life looks like from God’s point of view

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. (Matthew 22:1)

And the main character in these parables is God. The last two weeks God was a vineyard owner. This week God is the king. A king who invites people – including you! – to come to his banquet. It’s a huge banquet. Tables and tables of Chik-fil-A and chocolate chip cookies. (It’s my sermon, so I get to pick the menu.)

#1: IT IS AN INVITATION TO A CELEBRATION

This is not a funeral meal. It is not a wake. This is a wedding feast!

... Everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet. (Matthew 22:4)

The invitation of God is an invitation to something that is filled with joy!

I attended a wedding just a few days ago. Everyone was having fun! As it should be! In fact, I can’t think of a wedding where joy was absent.

The great evangelist Billy Sunday – who, by the way, held one of his famous tent revival meetings in Springfield across from what is now the STEM school – said,

To see some people today you would think that the essential quality of Christianity is to have a face so long you could eat oatmeal out of the end of a gas pipe. (Billy Sunday)

Commentator William Barclay added:

A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms, and nothing in all religious history has done Christianity more harm than its connection with black clothes and long faces. (William Barclay)

Over the years of my ministry, I’ve heard a lot of people describe Christians as the “no fun folks.” And we have probably earned that reputation, much to our shame. Life in the kingdom should never be a life of drudgery or gloom. It is a place of unspeakable

joy. Why? Because that is where we find Jesus. At the banquet table in the king's palace.

As author C.S. Lewis reminds us:

It is not so much the joy of the Lord we are seeking as the Lord of joy Himself. (C. S. Lewis)

#2: IT IS AN INVITATION OF GRACE

The king threw a party and no one came.

(Those invited) only shrugged their shoulders and went off, one to weed his garden, another to work in his shop. (Matthew 22:5, The Message)

Not “bad” activities in and of themselves. Gardens need weeded. There is work to get done. They weren't robbing banks or cheating on their taxes. They simply chose to do something else.

So a new invitation was sent out. The king ordered his servant to:

So 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, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. (Matthew 22:9)

In June of 1990, the Boston Globe told the story of a most wedding banquet. A young woman and her fiancé went to the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston and ordered the meal. The two of them poured over the menu, made selections of china and silver, and pointed to pictures of the flower arrangements they liked. They both had expensive taste, and the bill came to \$13,000.

The day the announcements were supposed to hit the mailbox, the groom got cold feet. "I'm just not sure," he said. "It's a big commitment. I want to think about this a little longer."

When the angry bride-to-be returned to the Hyatt to cancel the banquet, she was told: "The contract is binding. You have two options: to forfeit the rest of the down payment (loss of \$5,200) or go ahead with the banquet."

It seemed crazy but the more the jilted bride thought about it, the more she liked the idea of going ahead with the party--not a wedding banquet, but a big blowout. Ten years before this same woman had been living in a homeless shelter. She had got back on her feet, found a good job and set aside some money. Now she had the wild notion of using her savings to treat the down-and-outs of Boston to a night on the town.

And so it was that in June of 1990 the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston hosted a party such as it had never seen before. The bride changed the menu to boneless chicken – "in honor of the groom," she said – and sent invitations to rescue missions and homeless shelters.

That warm summer night, people who were used to rummaging through dumpsters dined instead on chicken cordon bleu. Hyatt waiters in tuxedos served appetizers. Bad ladies, vagrants, and drug addicts took one night off from the hard life on the sidewalks outside and instead ate chocolate wedding cake and danced to big band melodies late into the night.

Through the amazing grace of God, though we don't deserve it, you and I have been invited to a banquet. We welcome guests in the banquet room of the king.

#3: IT IS AN INVITATION TO BE CHANGED

The story Jesus tells concludes with a troubling moment. Knowing that the new guests would not have had time or resources to get a new dress or rent a tux for the banquet, the king generously provided all the necessary clothing for his invited guests. Such was the custom in that day.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, "How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?" (Matthew 22:11)

I am reminded of a couple of passages in the letters of the Apostle Paul that say something like this:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)

When I was a kid I had a pair of "church shoes" and some "church clothes." I was not allowed to wear my everyday clothes to God's house. And I most definitely was not allowed to get those church clothes and church shoes dirty! I wonder if this passage of Scripture had anything to do with that. I don't know.

I do know this passage is not talking about what clothing you are wearing today on the outside. It talks about how your heart is clothed. What is your heart wearing today?

Responding to the king's invitation results in a change in who we are on the inside. King David knew that was what he needed following his sin with Bathsheba, so he prayed:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me

the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:10-12).

APPLICATION

By His grace God has invited us to share in his kingdom. It is the best invitation you will ever receive.

With all the events that are happening in and around the Holy Land these past few days, I have been asked over and over again if this might be the beginning of Armageddon. I don't know. I've given up trying to predict those things long ago.

But I do know this. You have been invited to the wedding banquet. This doesn't seem like a good time to weed your garden or work in your shop. All of us need to get be putting our Sunday clothes on because the banquet is ready. It's suppertime!

I conclude with these words from the book of Revelation:

Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready ... Then the angel said to me, "Write this down: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 9:6-9)

Amen