

The Invitation

Matthew 22:1-14

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes the invitation is formal:

Mr. and Mrs. Roger Bryant
request the honor
Of your presence at the marriage of their daughter
Karen Sue Bryant
to
Thomas Michael Brodbeck
on Saturday, the twenty-eighth of June, nineteen hundred and eighty ...

Sometimes the invitation is more casual:

You are invited to a party in honor of the graduate
on Saturday, May 31

Sometimes the invitation is spontaneous:

Want to go to dinner with us tonight?

And then sometimes the invitation is downright folksy:

Y'all come now, ya hear?

Today's sermon is about an invitation. A king wants to throw a party. Our text reads:

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son ... everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet. (Matthew 22:2, 4)

It is going to be quite a party. In our Old Testament reading (Isaiah 25) we read the menu:

The Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. (Isaiah 25:6)

It doesn't specifically say so in the text, but I'm sure there will be chocolate cake for dessert. Maybe some peanut butter pie. Chocolate chip cookies. Yum. But I digress.

- What's the occasion? The king's son is getting married. And we are invited.

Here in Matthew 22, the parables of Jesus are becoming less cryptic. The message is clear.

- The king is God.
- The son is Jesus.

- The bride is all the faithful followers of Jesus Christ – all who have given their hearts to Him and Jesus is coming back for His bride (the church).
- But some people won't be at the banquet.

The Scriptures teach us that someday, some unknown day, Jesus will come back to claim His Bride. And the marriage banquet will commence! And on that day the heavens will rejoice:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give (God) glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready... Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:7, 9)

Last week I introduced to you the first in a series of sermons that point toward the return of Christ.

- I told you people of every generation have been looking forward to that return.
- And I mentioned that right now current events in this world are all eerily similar to what we see described in Scriptures as the "end times." So last week, we asked ourselves: "Are we there yet?"
 - Are we living in those last times? Could this be the time when Christ returns?

Today's text tells us that because that is a possibility, we need to get ready. There is a wedding banquet in our future. God has sent us an invitation to attend. Let me tell you about that invitation.

TRUTH #1: IT IS AN INVITATION TO A CELEBRATION

Look at verse 4:

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. (Matthew 22:4)

Unless there is a shotgun involved, weddings are joyous occasions. Have you ever seen wedding photos of a grumpy bride and groom? Oh, the mother of the bride might be crying, but those are tears of joy!

Even though it is a written text, you can hear the celebration in what you read in this Gospel text! The banquet is ready. Y'all come!

In Biblical times, party invitations were sent out well in advance of the actual event. There was no date or time on the invitation, because it was something that was going to happen in the future at an unknown time.

- It was sort of like a "Save the Date" card without the date.
- All you would know is that someone was getting married and you were invited.

As soon as everything was ready, the call went out to “come.”

- You and I would be expected to drop whatever we were doing and go.
- For those of us Type A personalities, that system would be frustrating. I need to get it on my calendar.

But the truth of the matter is, God is still operating that way today. The invitation to join Him in heaven for this wedding banquet was extended 2,000 years ago. No specific date. No specific time.

Jesus is coming back, and you are invited to celebrate with Him in heaven.

And, trust me, you won't want to miss it! It is going to be a great celebration!

TRUTH #2: IT IS AN INVITATION FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Look at verses 3-6:

He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come... 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. (Matthew 22:3-6)

Even though the king sent out this invitation, those on the receiving end evidently had the option of attending or not.

- We understand that. You and I don't necessarily attend every party to which we are invited.
- Sometimes we get invitations and have other plans.

Notice the text. The text does not say they “could not go.” It says they refused to go. Others ignored it, and some reacted violently.

Friends, not attending this party is a legitimate option. You don't have to come if you don't want to. No one is forced to go.

- If the invitation was mandatory, these verses would not be here.
- Whether you go or not is up to you.

TRUTH #3: IT IS AN INVITATION EXTENDED TO EVERYONE

Look at verses 9-10:

(The King speaking to his servants): 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 ... (Matthew 22:9-10)

The audience to whom Jesus was speaking would have been offended by these verses. The message came through to them loud and clear.

- If you were to read back a few paragraphs before this text, you would see that Jesus' audience is composed of the Jewish religious leaders ... people who believed they were guaranteed a spot at the wedding banquet simply because of their heritage.
- And, if you know the Bible story, you know that these Jewish religious leaders treated the things of God and the prophets of God with the same level of apathy that the list of invitees in this parable treated the king's invitation.

God expects a favorable response to His invitation.

- A response that puts His call as the highest of all priorities.

It's interesting, but nothing that these first invitees chose over the invitation was in itself wrong, Business, the farm, the family.

- It only became wrong when it took precedence over the invitation of God.

The message of the parable at this point is clear. The chosen people (the Jews) didn't respond, so the invitation was extended to the rest of us. You and I have a chance to respond because the first invitees ignored the invitation.

It is a beautiful invitation, offered on virtually every page of the Scriptures:

- Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened ... (Matthew 11:28)
- Let the little children come to me (Matthew 19:14)
- "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me. (John 7:37)

The great hymn writer Philip Bliss wrote the words to a hymn which proclaims this truth:

"Whosoever heareth," shout, shout the sound!
Spread the blessed tidings all the world around.
Tell the joyful news wherever man is found:
"Whosoever will may come."

Congratulations. You and I qualify as whosoever. You are invited. Everyone is.

TRUTH #4: IT IS AN INVITATION TO BE CHANGED

Look at verses 11-13:

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?' 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." (Matthew 22:11-13)

In some ways this final point of the parable comes as a shock, but in other ways it makes perfect sense.

- According to the story line, one of the whosoever failed to get dressed up for the wedding banquet. He declined the clothing offered, because he didn't want to change, so he was escorted out.

This text does not say that you have to dress up to go to church, or that if you don't have fancy clothes God doesn't want you.

- The only way you can get that idea from this text is to ignore the rest of the teachings of scripture.

This is a point about the transformation of our lives.

Throughout the Bible, the authors use clothing language to talk about the changes that need to occur in our lives as we come into a relationship with God.

For example:

The day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:12)

Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:24)

Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:10)

God invites just as we are, but He doesn't want us to stay that way. His call is also an invitation to become new in Him.

You do not have to have all the flaws worked out of your life in order to answer the invitation of God, but once you answer it, God will start working on you to eliminate those flaws.

The invitation of God is always an invitation to become something new.

In 1547 Ivan the IV became Grand Duke of Russia. He proclaimed himself "Czar," and actually claimed to be god on the earth. He would later become known as Ivan the Terrible, because he was a cruel, vicious leader.

- He not only had his critics murdered, but family members as well.
- He had seven wives and abused all of them.
- He had thousands of Russians massacred.
- In a fit of rage, he killed his eldest son, who was heir to the throne.
- He was one of the most brutal leaders in history.

He lived a wicked life, but just before he died, Ivan requested his head be shaved and he be ordained as a monk. Some say he was truly sorry for his sins, but the popular

opinion is he wanted to be buried in the clothes of a simple monk in hopes God would not recognize him, and he would slip into heaven under God's radar.

The only clothes acceptable in heaven are the clothes of the righteousness of Jesus-- and they aren't for sale. The King supplies them as a gift to all who accept His invitation.

Application

My great desire is that I will see everyone of you at that wedding banquet of the Lamb. I want it so much, that when the angels serve dessert, you can have my share of the chocolate chip cookies.

In all seriousness, Jesus is coming back. Look around. It may be soon. And you need to be ready.

Being ready begins with having a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Many of you do, and I am grateful. But maybe some of you listening to my voice (hear or online), don't have that kind of relationship. For you, I am deeply concerned.

Having that relationship can begin in any number of ways.

- For some it starts as a growing awareness of His presence in your life, perhaps prompted at your baptism or in a moment of Holy Communion.
- For others like me it starts with a prayer like this one:

Lord Jesus, I accept your invitation and I come to you right now, ready to be changed into the person You want to be. Amen.

How you begin that relationship makes no difference. But when the banquet is ready, you need to be ready too.

I am inviting you to talk with me about this matter at any time. Following worship, sometime this week. It's not a common practice here, but occasionally you will see people kneel at the railing when they come forward for communion. You always have permission to do that. And I would be honored to pray with you if you do. There are also dozens of other people in this congregation who would say the same.

Let's close with prayer:

Lord Jesus, we believe You are coming again. We don't know when, but we do know that it is closer than it was yesterday. The invitation is clear and so are the consequences. Help us individually and as a church to be ready and to be committed to helping others be ready.

Amen.