

The King and The Kingdom Part 8

Turn to Matthew 22 as we continue our series. We are learning about the King and His Kingdom by examining the Kingdom Parables of Jesus in Matthew's gospel. These are the stories Jesus told that begin with "the kingdom of heaven is like..." This morning we are looking at what is called the parable of the wedding banquet. In it Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He explains that the invited guests refused to come and so the king opened the invitation to others, to everyone. It's talking about the invitation to come experience his grace, to become a citizen of his kingdom. But before we look at this parable, I want to go back to Matthew 21 and provide a bit of context.

In chapter 21 Jesus engages in a discussion about John the Baptist. Basically he says John came preaching repentance, preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. The religious leaders went to hear John, but when they saw prostitutes and tax collectors and other notorious sinners coming to John to repent and be baptized, they turned away from him. They should have rejoiced in seeing the poor and the lost coming to God. They should have recognized it as a sign of the coming of the Messiah, that good news was being preached to the poor and folks were returning to faith, but instead they rejected the message and the messenger and in the process they rejected the invitation of their heavenly Father. Jesus told them, **"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."** Matthew 21:31-32

Out of pride they rejected the message of John the Baptist, the invitation of the Father to come and repent. But in his mercy, the Father sends Jesus the Son to extend the invitation again. Once again they reject the message and the messenger. To illustrate this, Jesus tells the parable of the tenants. It's the story of a landowner who plants a vineyard, fixes it up, rents it out and then sends servants to collect payment. Instead of paying the rent, the tenants beat the servants and even killed some. Finally the owner sends his own Son saying "they will respect my son" but the tenants killed the son as well. The idea of this parable is that Israel is the vineyard (Is. 5 speaks of Israel as God's vineyard). God provided for them and then sent his prophets to call them to obedience, to bear good and righteous fruit, but they beat and killed the prophets, rejecting them and their message. Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 23, "you who kill the prophets

and stone those sent to you...” Out of mercy God sends his Son, but now they reject the son also. John writes, **“He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:11-12**

Jesus then tells the religious leaders, **“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit...When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.” Matthew 21:43-46**

“The kingdom will be taken away from you.” Jesus wasn’t giving up on the Jews. He is still calling them to come to faith, but the point is they are not the sole heirs of the kingdom. Because they rejected him, the door is open and the invitation extended to all the world.

It’s in that context, with the leaders already angry and upset, Jesus tells this parable. **“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.’” Matthew 22:1-14**

Let’s look at a few key points in the story. First, **Notice the repeated invitation!** The king invited the guests. Then he sent his servants to those who had been invited to tell them to

come. Then he sent more servants to tell them everything was ready. At least three times the invitation is extended. Everything is ready for you. The table is spread. Come on. It's going to get cold. It's time for the banquet! He wanted them to come share in his happiness, share in blessing his son, but the invited guests ignored the invitation, ignored the servants who came personally calling them to the banquet. They offered trivial excuses. "I have to go to work, I have to check on some land." Finally, it wasn't enough to just ignore the invitation, or to insult the king by boycotting the banquet, they turned violent and attacked the servants of the king. They turned against the king. This was treason!

Verse 7 tells us the king was enraged and sent his army to destroy the ones who killed his servants and to burn their city. It's unsettling to read that in the parable. It's a reminder that justice and judgment will ultimately fall on the enemies of God, the King. The wicked will not go unpunished forever, but forgiveness and mercy and grace are extended. The invitation is there to come to the wedding banquet. They didn't have to suffer judgement. They made the choice!

Let me make it plain. The bible says God is not willing that any should perish but wants everyone to come to repentance and be saved. Judgement will come, but mercy is available to you today! Judgment came once but mercy was extended multiple times. Repeated invitations!

Verse 8 the king tells his servants to go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find. Luke's gospel is more specific. "Go to the streets and alleys and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Go to the highways and hedges, the roads and country lanes." In other words, go everywhere to everyone and invite them to come.

The religious leaders of the day were offended by the prostitutes and tax collectors that were coming to John and to Jesus to repent. They didn't like this parable much either. The undeserving and undesirable are invited to the banquet. Verse 10 says both the good and the bad were invited. Jesus' message is for everyone. You don't have to get cleaned up before you come to Jesus! Remember when Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah at the beginning of his public ministry. **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, release from darkness for prisoners, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve."** Isaiah 61:1-3 He was sent to those who know loss and suffering and hard times. Jesus has always been about good news to those who desperately need it: the broken, the

outcast, the prisoner, the least and last. It's even good news for the self-righteous and proud. They can humble themselves and come to Jesus. If you've been making excuses like some of these invited guests did, if you've been running from Jesus – running off to the field or off to other business, or even if you've been openly hostile, rejecting him, warring against him, the invitation is still there for you! If you feel like you are one of the outcast, don't fit in society, look – the invitation went to the good and the bad, that covers us all. Come to Jesus! Come to the banquet. Come to the party!

Consider how unprecedented this banquet was. Imagine the most formal setting at the White House and then instead of Washington Insiders and the wealthy and influential, they bring in the homeless and the poor and the outcast for the banquet. That was part of the scandal of this story. The poor didn't get invited to the wedding banquets of kings. But they do by this king. They do in his kingdom. That's good news for all of us. There's a place for us!

But wasn't that an embarrassment for the king? Scandal? Well, don't you imagine the people that came to the banquet were more grateful than the first invited guests? After all, the rich could eat "fattened cattle" and delicacies all the time, but not the poor, not the prostitutes and the outcasts. There was no doubt more joy experienced and expressed, more hope and healing, more celebrating done at this wedding banquet than at any other banquet the king had ever given. It may have been a scandal to the self-righteous, to those who refused the invitation, but it was good news for the rest of us. Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher of the late 1800's said of this parable, "Dear friends, when the Lord saved some of us by his grace, it was no common event. When he brought us great sinners to his feet and washed us, and clothed us, and fed us, and made us his own, it was a wonder to be talked of for ever and ever. We will never leave off praising his name throughout eternity. That which looked as though it would defame the King turned out to his honor and the wedding was furnished with guests."

It's good news. But look at this. **While everyone was invited, proper attire was required!** The king notices a man who was not wearing wedding clothes. How could the poor and those that had just come in off the street be expected to have wedding clothes? The only answer seems to be the king himself provided the clothing. It was perhaps a robe of some kind, a garment that would cover the rags and dirty and worn clothing of the newly invited guests. No one would feel out of place or conspicuous because they were all clothed in the garments of the king.

There is only one way to be properly attired for the wedding banquet in his kingdom: it is through repentance of sin and trusting in Jesus for salvation. It is to put on what we could call the righteousness of Christ. What am I talking about? What does it mean to be righteous? To be righteous means you are godly, you are upright. Righteousness is the condition of being righteous, godly. Jesus' righteousness is perfect righteousness. Right? He never sinned so he is perfectly righteous in every way. Compared to him and his righteousness, the bible says we have all sinned and come up short. The bible speaks of our righteousness and compares our best attempts at being good to filthy rags, unclean garments. **“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” Isaiah 64:6**

So how are we supposed to be made righteous? How can we ever be right before God? Through repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus to save us. The bible says, **“But now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Romans 3:21-22.** The bible tells us we can't be justified or made righteous through our own efforts, (keeping the law) but instead, **“[We] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Romans 3:24** We are made righteous, declared to be righteous, when we repent of our sins and make Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. The bible goes on to say “God will credit righteousness for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” Romans 4:24.

We sing about being “dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.” When we repent of our sins and believe in him, he clothes us in his righteousness. **“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...” Isaiah 61:10.** That's why we rejoice! I was a sinner, an outcast. I didn't have an invitation to the banquet, but then, by the king's great mercy and grace, he extends an invitation to me. But then, I don't have the appropriate wedding garments and then God says, “Believe in me, believe in my Son and his gift of salvation, that he took your place and bore your sins, dying for you. Believe that and when you do I'll clothe you with the garments of salvation, I'll array you in a robe of righteousness...my righteousness, not your meager attempts at righteousness.”

He extends an invitation to you, but you have to accept the invitation and put on the wedding garment of salvation. **Notice the personal responsibility of everyone involved!**

Everyone in the story is making a choice. No one forced those originally invited to ignore or decline the invitation. They made a choice. They exercised their free will. No one forced these other people to accept the invitation and come to the banquet. They were glad to come to the banquet but they still had to make a choice, a decision. They had to accept the offer of the king to put on the wedding clothes! Do you understand what I'm telling you? You have to decide to be clothed in his righteousness. You have to repent of your sins and be born again into a new life in Christ. You have to repent and believe upon Jesus. There are all these different ways of saying the same thing. You must be saved, relying upon Jesus alone for your salvation. Just coming to church isn't enough. Just being at the banquet wasn't enough. You have to be clothed in his righteousness. Your sins have to be forgiven. You have to personally trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord.

The guest in the parable that wasn't dressed in the wedding clothes, the bible says he was speechless. It's interesting that Paul says in Romans 3 that "every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." Romans 3:19. We won't have a defense when we stand before God as to why we ignored his invitation, why we rebelled against him and refused him and fought against him.

The parable ends with this person, whom the king addressed as friend, being bound and cast out into darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, a picture of judgment and regret and sorrow for sure. I know when we read this we raise the question of how God could choose to send anyone to hell? How could the king cast anyone out into the darkness? My answer is simply this: we make the choice...we send ourselves! This was the friend's choice. He chose not to put on the wedding garment like the others. He chose to ignore the instructions.

Again, think about the invitations of the King. Repeatedly they ignored his invitations. How many invitations to surrender your life to Jesus and be saved have you ignored? I remember years ago preaching a sermon about how difficult it is to go to hell. You have to climb over a mountain of truth and testimony. You have to climb over the cautions and prayers of the youth pastor, youth sponsors, parents, friends, you have to climb past the invitations of your Heavenly Father to come to him and be saved, you have to climb past the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, dying in your place. God isn't looking for an excuse to send you to hell. He's doing everything he can to prevent it. You're going to fight to get there, making choice after choice to ignore his offer of salvation, his invitation to come to the banquet.

Jesus ends the parable with these words, **“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”** **Matthew 22:14** It’s about your choice. Everyone is invited, but you have to make the choice. Few accept the invitation. Comparatively few repent of their sins and ask Jesus to save them. Few make the choice to follow Jesus. The invitation is extended. The offer is there. The garment of salvation, of his righteousness is available to all who will repent and believe.

Someday we will stand before the King at that wedding banquet. He might ask what right do we have to be there? And we will say, “I have no right as far as myself and my own righteousness is concerned. But Jesus died on the cross for me and bore my sins. I believe that and I asked him to save me and forgive me and he did. He covered me with his own righteousness and that’s how I can stand before the king - clothed in his righteousness alone. I am here at your invitation and clothed in your garment of salvation.” And he is going to say, “Welcome to the banquet, friend! Enter in!”

There is a choice to be made. If you’ve not made Jesus your Savior, I’ve got great news for you. The invitation is extended to you today to come to the wedding banquet, to put on the robe of his righteousness, his garment of salvation and find new life in Christ. The choice is yours. How about it?

If you’ve already made Jesus the Savior and Lord of your life, rejoice in his grace and mercy. Thank him because he has clothed you in his garment of salvation and deliverance. Praise him because he has given you a “garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Is. 61:3).

What a king and what a kingdom. All are welcome and the wedding garments are available to all who will trust and believe.