

MATTHEW 22:1–14

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You Are Invited

1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 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.’ 5 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10 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. 11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. 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.’ 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

A parable is a comparison, a story about the ordinary to illustrate something spiritual. In this parable, Jesus takes us dramatically and quickly through four spiritual truths: **First**: What ever happened to the Israelites and their place in God’s kingdom? **Second**: Most of us here are Gentiles. How did we ever get brought into God’s plan and God’s kingdom? **Third**: How do I, personally, merit being in the kingdom of God? And **fourth**: Why do some people still end up outside the kingdom? Jesus lays this out in a quick ABBA pattern:¹ **Why not them?** Why us? **Why me?** And why not *him*?

A study of ancient Jewish weddings would be interesting and probably helpful, but we don’t have time to go into all the details today. But they took seven days,² and the guests were specially invited just as they are today. Also, in many weddings especially in wealthy families-- like the king’s family in our parable-- the guests had a dress code, but the host was the one who supplied all the outfits. We maybe see an echo of this in the wedding of Samson.

Now, not everything in the story of a parable has a comparison on the spiritual side-- for example, there will be no wedding in heaven-- we can apply the way Jesus explains his early parables to help us understand what means what, here. The King, God the Father, is making a

¹ Bible students calls this pattern a *chiasm*.

² Judges 14:12

celebration for his Son, the Savior Jesus Christ. The first ones to be invited were the people of Israel (and even some of their ancestors). Some, like Cain or wicked King Ahab, went off to their fields. Others had business of one kind or another. Many of them seized the servants with the invitations-- who were the prophets-- and they abused them, imprisoned them, beat them, and even killed them.

The last messenger was John, who baptized so many, but he, too, was killed and rejected. And the city? Wasn't Jerusalem burned and ruined by the Babylonians? Wasn't it about to be destroyed again by the Romans?

Many of the ancient Israelites and their remnant, the Jews, had put their faith in Jesus, but many more turned away. And from the time of John, the people of Jerusalem in Jesus' day, especially the leaders of the people, rejected the Son of God. And that answers the question: **Why not them?** Jesus gives us the answer: They refused the invitation when it was time to celebrate with the King's Son.

The "**Why us?**" question is simple enough to answer. In the parable, servants are sent out to the streets and invite just anybody. And that is how the Gentiles came. When the synagogue of the Jews rejected Paul and Barnabas, they said, "Since you reject the Word of God and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles, for the Lord said, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth'" (Acts 13:46-47).

We don't deserve this. And this is one of the points our Lord makes in the second half of the parable. "**Why me?**" is answered simply by the grace of God. The guests who fill the banquet hall, the people from the streets in the second invitation, are described as "both good and bad." The invitation into the kingdom of God is not based on any merits in us, but entirely on God's desire to have us.

Now, we could apply the law to ourselves here, and judge our own unworthiness against the Ten Commandments, and we would see how we fall short of God's holiness in every corner of our lives. No human achievement bears any glory before God at all. But the parable strikes an even heavier blow.

In the wedding story, someone shows up without wedding clothes. As I said before, in many high-society weddings like the wedding of a king's son, the guests were given outfits to wear so that everybody would look their best, even if they didn't own a "best outfit."

So we can't help but notice that this isn't a parable about a modern music concert or play, where everybody buys a ticket, and someone tries to sneak in without a ticket. No-- that's not the point at all. That's not how the kingdom of heaven works. We don't buy our way in. We are invited, and then we are given the **robe of Christ's righteousness** to wear. We don't belong on account of our own righteousness, but on account of Jesus' blood and righteousness. Heaven isn't a choice we make, or a ticket we buy, but a gift given to us by God.

So in the very last part of the parable, the King sees a man there without wedding clothes. This is the robe of Christ's righteousness, that was handed out to everyone for free. So why not put your beautiful new robe on? This person is an unbeliever, and he refused the robe; he rejected the righteousness of Jesus. He is trying to get into heaven on his own merits, as if faith in Christ means nothing at all.

This isn't just a scene we're watching like a little video clip. I preached for a funeral last week, and one guest commented beforehand how similar she thought all the churches are, that we all teach the same thing. Then at the meal afterward, she said, "You made me remember what I heard in church as a little girl," which is the same as saying, "The churches *don't* all teach the same, and the message here is the one I learned when I was brought to faith." For Paul says, **Deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ is turning to a different gospel-- which is really no gospel at all. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!**" (Galatians 1:6-7,8).

We know that we fall short of God's holiness and righteousness. But we fall so far short, so completely far away and far down, that to appear before God without Christ is the same as asking for eternal damnation; demanding it. And he will be thrown out into the outer darkness, where the weeping in hell and the gnashing of teeth with never end.

But we have been taken in off the street and clothed with Christ, so that God does not see our sinfulness and our wretchedness, but he sees only Christ. We are brought forward on Judgment Day by his own invitation; not as if we're trying to sneak in, not as if we're standing on our own merits and achievements, which of course are worthless, but because Christ bled and died for our sins on the cross. The very act of rejecting the Son of God by some is the action that brought about salvation for all. Put our faith in him; and rely on him. Trust in him, because in Jesus we have forgiveness, and we have a place at the eternal wedding banquet of the Son. Amen.