

“The Wedding Feast”

Psalm 146; Matthew 22:1-14

July 31, 2022

One of the great blessings of being a pastor is the number of weddings you end up being involved with. Weddings are, for the most part, such joyous occasions. To begin with, you tend to only invite to weddings the people that you love the most, family, friends, those kinds of people are the ones that typically get invited to weddings. They are celebratory times in which love between a couple is celebrated as being given through the Lord. Of course, I can't help but remember my own wedding day as the topic of weddings come up. Ours was a simple, joyful affair filled with friends and family and just enough drama to let you know we're a real family. One funny thing happened. You see, my sister's 5-year-old boy was drafted to be the ring bearer. But, at the time, Alex, my nephew, was a bouncy, trouncy little boy. So, my sister, not wanting for her son to lose our rings, really tied those rings onto the pillow. Sadly, somehow, they got really knotted on their such that we couldn't get them off the pillow. Now, you can imagine. There we are, in front of all our guests ready to put rings on one another but, no, wait, they're stuck. They aren't coming off!! Thankfully, the pastor who was marrying us was a bit of a boy scout. Next thing you know, the pastor is reaching up under his robes to remove, ta da, a pocket knife. He very deftly cut those rings off the pillow and got us back underway. It's a humorous moment looking back on it now but, at the time it was quite hair-raising. But it was a minor hiccup on an otherwise flawless wedding day.

Chances are you have some fond memories of your own wedding day, don't you?

Well, today's parable is about a wedding. I will confess up front, this one isn't quite as popular as some of the other ones we've already looked at for good reason. Hear now the parable of the wedding feast from **Matthew 22:1-14**: *“And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son,³ and sent his servants^[a] to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, ‘See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.’” ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”*

As I said, this parable isn't as popular as some of the others we've already looked at for good reason, I think. We tend to favor depictions of God which cast him more as a benevolent grandfather type who just loves and loves and loves and is never involved with a cross word. This parable, with its emphasis on judgment, casts God in a fairly different light than we're typically accustomed from hearing from our pulpits.

But that's jumping the gun. The first thing we need to get a handle on is the context of this parable. Jesus at this point is in the city of Jerusalem where he will soon be arrested. Already by this point, people are grumbling about Jesus, he is upsetting the status quo at a time that's already filled with tensions and the energy of the anticipated Passover. This is the third parable Jesus teaches at the time. The first parable, the parable of the two sons deals with making choices. Two sons are approached by a father, calling each out to work in the vineyard. The first says he will unto go but ultimately does. The second son says he was going to go but doesn't. The second parable of the tenants where a landowner puts tenants in charge of his fields only to have them refuse his wishes and kill his son. These two parable point in a negative light towards the very priests and Pharisees that Jesus was teaching to at the time.

Then comes the parable of the wedding feast. In order to understand this parable a little more clearly, it helps to know things about weddings in the first century. It was the case at the time that, prior to a wedding, two invitations were sent out. The first one ONLY listed the names of the people involved. There wasn't a date

placed on the wedding invitation for the following reasons. It took time to prepare a house. Once you got engaged, it was the case that a man needed a place to raise a family. It was only after he'd gotten engaged that he'd begin building a home, or an addition to the family home for the man and his bride to be.

As the man prepared the house, of course, updates would filter out. People would know that the date of the wedding was coming. Then, of course, the food would start being prepared for the feast or the wedding clothes would start to be made and people would know that the wedding was coming closer and closer.

Finally, the second invitation would arrive and that would contain the date. But, you see, you RSVP'd after the first invitation. That is you'd tell the person, "of course, we'll be there." And, with a royal invitation, the expectation would've been that everyone who accepted the first invite would, of course, be there in person on the actual event of the nuptials.

Only, in our parable, that's not what happened. What happens in the parable is that a group of people are invited with the first invitation and seem prepared and excited to come. Only as the vent gets closer, they begin to bail. And notice the reasons why the people aren't coming. They're for some very mundane reasons. One went off to his farm, the other to his business. Some, so offended by the second summons, seize the servants and kill them. Now, this part of the parable is directly talking to the Jewish people. You see, Jesus was the Jewish messiah, the one who came to restore Israel back into full fellowship with the Father. And yet, the very people to whom He was sent for, rejected him. But, prior to rejecting Jesus, the Jewish people rejected the prophets who prophesied about His coming. You see, for years prior to Jesus' arrival, prophets spoke of the Messiah, the seed of Jesse who would save the people of God. Yet these prophets were often mistreated by the very people they were sent to encourage. This is what Jesus is speaking of in the parable, the rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jewish people. The Jews, after all, were the ones who should've been the first to embrace the Lord yet, as the Scriptures show, a great number of them rejected him.

But to make this entirely about ancient Jews misses some of the meaning of this particular parable. We too should find ourselves questioning our own response to Jesus Christ. I read one author this week who likened some people to having found Jesus on a retreat or at a camp where a special prayer was said but then, from that point forward, paying only lip service to the demands of Jesus Christ. So, it begs the question – are we guilty of having gratefully received the first invitation only to refuse to come to the banquet when the time is ready? This could be the case for any number of us today. After all, some times our faith ebbs and flows like the tides. Maybe right now we're at low spiritual tide. This parable calls us back into a full state of readiness, I trust as we think of being on the cusp of attending the wedding feast only to pull back at the last moment from actually going. After the first people invited reject the second invitation to actually come to the feast, notice what happens next. Invitations are prepared for everyone. *"Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find."*¹⁰ *And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So, the wedding hall was filled with guests."* Did you get that? Everyone is invited! The good and the bad!!!

That's a hard word sometimes for churches to hear. That everyone is invited, the good and the bad. You see, sometimes we get to thinking of church as being the place where the naturally good people hang out. You want good people, go to church, that's what a lot of people think. But that isn't it. The church is where the sin-sick meet. This isn't a place good people go to get better, this is a place where sick people go to get well, don't get that twisted, as they say. But what Jesus's invitation means is that all are invited to the wedding feast. That necessarily means that there isn't a person alive that shouldn't be extended the invitation to come and serve the Lord with Joy and gratitude.

As I mentioned in my newsletter article this past week, I am blessed to be involved with a ministry known as Kairos. A lot of you participate with Kairos. My understanding is that, prior to the pandemic, this church often baked cookies for Kairos. Kairos is a prison ministry unlike any other that I am aware of. At Kairos, we do a four-day spiritual retreat with inmates incarcerated in prison. We start out on Thursday afternoon and go through Sunday evening with a program of music and speakers and a whole lot of cookies and juice. We mainly sit around and fellowship in the name of the Lord with the guys. What I find is that I oftentimes have more meaningful spiritual discussions with inmates than I do with congregants. Somehow being in prison, removes for a person any desire to justify themselves. After all, they're in prison, they've done something wrong and it is known to society. That means there is a whole lot less pretense.

One time, I met a guy named Crandall. Crandall was a good ole boy if there ever was one. In fact, when I first met him his greatest objective in life was to get out of prison and figure out if you can eat a buzzard. That's right, the guy's greatest aim was in figuring out whether or not he could eat a buzzard. But something happened to Crandall. He got the invitation, I guess to come to the wedding feast, and, man did he accept. Crandall one day when from wanting to eat buzzard to talking about the Scriptures and looking forward to being untied with his family. Crandall is out now, a happily married guy who is a full father to his kids. He got the invitation and he went to the feast. Crandall is now involved with Kairos on the other side, going into prisons to be with the guys when we get back to doing that.

And I can't help but think – Crandall wasn't the guy that message was originally intended for. After all, he didn't get the original invitation, maybe, but he sure responded with spots came available, didn't he? That's the overarching message of Jesus Christ. ALL are invited. It doesn't matter what you're doing or what you've done, the joyful summons to the wedding feast has been issued. You are invited to come. And notice what the King's servants are doing? Please don't miss this. The King's servants are issuing the invitation.

This morning we had an event that we'll do again in the future. We're going to have events where we make it easier for you to invite people in your life to come to church. By serving donuts and coffee, we're hopeful that you'll feel empowered to do the very thing Jesus servants are supposed to be involved with – sharing the joyful invitation to come to the wedding feast of the Messiah to His people. That attends to two of the three major parts of this parable. But there is a final piece to the story, isn't there? What about the man found without his wedding garments? You know, the one is thrown into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth? That's kind of harrowing, isn't it?

Well, again, it helps to know a little something about ancient wedding practices. You see, at a wedding, and particularly at a royal wedding, garments were produced for all the guests to wear. It was a way of symbolically being part of the wedding family. Everyone who wore a vest was, by definition, a member of the family and valued guest. So, this man who isn't wearing one is crashing the party in a way that isn't acceptable.

Now, what might the parable be talking about here. Isaiah 61:10 gives us a clue. It reads, *"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation; He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."* Here what's being talked about is being clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. What enables us to be at the wedding feast, to be seated as a full member of the wedding party, family, that is, is to be found in the righteous garments of Jesus Christ. We are so clothed through our baptisms and by our ongoing faith, which is itself entirely a wedding gift of the Lord to us. So, the man attending the wedding feast without wearing proper garments is akin to someone being in church, claiming to be saved by grace alone yet who deep down in their hearts believes that they have earned the right to be here, to so speak.

The parable of the wedding feast gives us reason to rejoice. Good or bad, we've been invited. Good or bad, we've been properly clothed with Christ's righteousness. We do not stand on our merit but rather on the completed work of our Lord Jesus Christ. And to that end, we look forward to the eternal wedding banquet in which all the righteous will rejoice with the bridegroom forever and ever.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.