

Matthew 22:1-14, 2017

Once more Jesus spoke to the Chief Priests and Pharisees saying the Kingdom of Heaven may be like God giving a messianic banquet for his Son Jesus. He sent his ancient prophets of Israel to call the people of Israel, but they would not come.

Again he sent his messengers, the Christian missionaries of the early church saying, tell them I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fatted calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the messianic banquet.

But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm another to his business while the rest seized his missionaries, mistreated them, and killed them.

God was enraged, he sent troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

Then he said to his missionaries, the salvation banquet is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore, into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the salvation banquet.

Those missionaries went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the banquet hall was filled with guests.

But when God came in to see the guests he notice a man there who was not wearing a baptismal robe and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a baptismal robe? And the man was speechless. Then God said to the attendants,

‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

For many are called but few are chosen.

Matthew 22:1-14, 2017

Jesus is unrelenting in his attempts to help the Chief Priests and the elders of the Jerusalem temple understand his message.

It is important when reading this parable that we remember the audience, the Chief Priests, elders of the temple, and Pharisees. They all still stand under judgment and Jesus intends to “put the fear of God” into them.

This matter is a matter of life and death for them.

Matthew paints a picture of Jesus interrupting his teaching in the temple to address the original question, “By what authority do you do these things...?”

He does this with a series of parables.

He is now in his 3rd and 4th parables to them, continuing to poke them in the eye as He did with the first two.

You remember last week it was the parable about the tenants in the vineyard who would not give the produce of the vineyard to the owner.

They killed the owner’s slaves and even his son.

These parables will certainly put Jesus at odds with the priests and elders, and in fact does ensure his crucifixion within the next few days of his life.

This parable is about more than a king giving a wedding banquet for his son, or God throwing the messianic banquet for Jesus.

This parable recounts the story of salvation history in which God sent prophets and Christian evangelists with Good News, which some rejected and some accepted.

It is a story intended to help us to understand the differences between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven,

the messianic banquet God provides and that we will enjoy with Christ in the kingdom of heaven.

This story tells us that it is God who sends out the invitation, who initiates the relationship, and that relationship depends on what God has done for you in his Son, Jesus Christ.

The preparations for this banquet will be expensive as just a few days after this conversation with the church leadership Jesus will be crucified.

God will have to give him up to the sin of all humanity that will drag him into the grave.

Just as one who would prepare a wedding banquet in this day and time, the host expects the invitees to show up,

to give the bride and groom the honor of their consideration, their time and efforts to be there in their celebration.

These people in the parable who reject the invitation are not necessarily bad people.

They are distracted by the routine of everyday life.

This story is a story of God coming into people's lives, the king's invitation coming in the middle of everyday life;

when life is good, when business is good, when life is fun or the opposite of all these things.

God's invitation comes when His priorities, when his commands are going to be at odds with yours.

God's invitation is going to come when you think you have the world by the tail and it is all because of your own hard work, wit, intelligence, and luck.

God is never going to take the path of least resistance.

Whether you are at your lowest or your highest God sends the invitation to come, be with him.

And so the question is raised,

By what am I distracted, what temptation comes clothed in wholesome desire, but is not the robe for the banquet?—

is it work, running errands, taking care of the kids, cleaning house, paying the bills, yard work, needing to rest or go play?

Maybe I can salvage a few minutes at the end of the day, or put God on the to-do list, or just wait until there is plenty of time.

The truth is we make time for those things that are important. God wants to be at the top of the list.

And God continues to call you to the banquet, perhaps the one served right here.

It occurred to me this week that we sometimes get so caught up in counting the trees that we lose sight of the forest.

You can do that with this parable.

You could dig into this parable as an allegory and try to figure out who or what each character represents, and what it all means,

and end up seeing yourself as the good guy.

But I believe the point to remember is that the king is throwing a party and you, being good or bad, are the ones invited.

What are you going to do now?

This banquet is the one Isaiah describes in our old testament lesson this week.

On this mountain the Lord will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

He will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth for the Lord has spoken.

This is the Lord for whom we have waited.

This parable speaks of judgment and speaks to the end times when all will be invited to that wedding banquet; the one Isaiah describes.

This is an end of time message but one that has now time implications.

This parable is about the relationship between God and God's people as it is lived out in the relationship between Christ and His church.

One of the images used in the Christian church for that relationship is the wedding; the church as the bride of Christ.

God invites you to come to this banquet and at the same time expects you to be dressed properly when you arrive,

in your baptism, your baptismal robe.

In his letter to Colossae Paul writes,

“God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Bear with one another... forgive each other...Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony”

And to the Galatians he said,

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ,
have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

Jesus suggests that your response can indeed be put on like a wedding robe—or a baptismal garment—

so that the outward effects of gospel on your life will finally settle in the heart.

It has to do with how you have lived in relationship with God throughout your life.

This invitation is for you for all times, there is no question about that.

It is how you respond to the grace of the invitation that matters, and it is grace.

I want to suggest for today's purposes I am talking about a response that honors God as host of the banquet.

Conrad Bergendoff writes in *I believe in the Church*

“I hold that the most important work of the church today is the enthroning of Christ in the unity of the parish church. Here is the justification for all the energy and patience required to make the church school a real school for the kingdom of God.”

His point is that the only purpose in anything you do here in this church is the enthronement of Christ, the elevation of Christ,

letting Christ be your king, and the king of this holy place.

I believe this all really gets to the character of your life, the way you love, the spirit with which you go about your life even right here in the church.

What you receive here is a mini banquet, a sign of the feast to come, the wedding banquet,

The messianic or what I called the salvation banquet

that celebrates the final perfect union of Christ and His church for all eternity.

And you come here to this banquet,

You arrive with a sense of humility.

You show up with a sense of humble repentance, a changed life because this invitation from the king you have received is so magnificent that it is truly life changing!

You come to the banquet ready to confess.

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew we have heard over and over the message to confess and repent.

It began with the arrival of John the Baptist;

confess and repent; be washed clean, put on the garments of the righteousness of Christ.

Come and celebrate, this is a wedding banquet, and the salvation banquet, the marriage of the church to Jesus the resurrected Christ!

The joining of God's people to God's Son!

This is why we have the order of service we do for when we gather at the banquet table.

We give thanks and praise,

We humble ourselves.

We confess our sins.

We are forgiven and cleansed.

We put on the righteousness, the goodness of Christ for we have none of our own.

We are fed.

We are given bread and wine; the rich food of life and well aged wine,

the body and blood of our living Lord Jesus Christ who is here in our midst at this very moment.

How does that change who you are?

How does that change your relationship with the host of the banquet?

If not to change those things, if not to strengthen and nurture your life with God,

if not to be able to live as one of God's chosen and called,
for what purpose do you come?

This is the banquet of our living Lord, given for you,

This is the feast of victory for our God, Alleluia!