

Matthew 22:1–14

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 January 2024

Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 0 0] verses 1 through 14. Matthew 22, 1 through 14. And again Jesus spoke to them in parables saying, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.

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.

But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, the wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you can find. 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.

But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Then the king said to the attendants, bind him hand and foot and cast him out into the utter darkness. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

[1 : 5 3] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Amen. It's great to see the children so enthusiastic. I don't know if they're enthusiastic to get out of here or to go down there. But let us pray and then we'll make our way through these 14 verses.

Father, your word is living and active. It is alive and it transforms people. And so our prayer is as we sit under your word that we would feel its living activity in our lives.

That we would become a people that honor you and are commissioned and sent by you to serve your world. Help us to that end, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Well, imagine with me, you are in a large outdoor courtyard. There is much activity going on around you.

We're standing in the temple grounds among the religious leadership in Jerusalem. Around the outer courts of the temple, there were various places where lectures took place.

[3 : 2 8] Prominent teachers, religious instruction, various schools of thought would gather and teach in the open air. And there you would pick your flavor and sit and stand and listen.

Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. listen. Listen. listen.!! listen. listen.! probably like me, you would have picked Jesus and would have drawn yourself toward him. I would think he drew the largest crowd.

But this crowd he was drawing was not only those who were passing by or eager to learn, but it was an antagonistic crowd as we have found in the last couple of weeks made up of chief priests and elders, the religious leaders from other groups of Judaism.

His legitimacy, his credibility, his authority have all been called into question. And it will continue until the 24th chapter where Jesus leaves the temple.

But what we find here is a Jesus who is being confronted, but he will not back down. He will not bend. He certainly will not break. These confrontations will only intensify and we know ultimately send him to the cross.

[4 : 56] We're in a sequence here in Matthew's gospel, a sequence of three parables, stories told by Jesus that are to incisively cut into the heart of the listener.

And they convey spiritual truth and reality. It's the third of three that Matthew tells in this section. Jesus is being rejected by the religious community and their refusal to receive him will be met by his own rejection or his rejection of them.

And I want us to catch really this single truth about this parable this morning. And it goes like this. Refusing grace results in judgment.

Refusing grace results in judgment. If you refuse to respond to God's grace, you will be met by his judgment. Rejecting grace results in condemnation.

I wrote it down like six different ways. Refusing God's grace will result in catastrophe. Rejecting God's kingdom invitation leads to tragedy.

[6 : 09] Refusing grace results in judgment. And our text can be viewed in two parts. And they're governed by two parallel images.

And what I'm going to do over the course of the next 29 minutes is I want to provide the explanation. Or I want to revisit the text.

Explain a few pieces. And then hand out the application. What is the parable about firstly? And what am I supposed to do with it? And I'm going to slice it in half.

Verses 1 to 8. And then verses 9 to 14. And in each of these two parts, you're going to observe a cycle repeat itself. And it goes like this.

An invitation followed by indignation. There's a gracious invitation. A grand invitation. A generous invitation.

[7 : 05] And it's followed surprisingly and shockingly by divine indignation. We'll see it at work twice in our text.

This morning. Verses 1 to 8. We see a gracious invitation. The son of the king. The king over the whole land. Is about to get married.

It's an occasion for the whole kingdom. It was the greatest event of one's lifetime. It's certainly joy filled. It's a wedding. It's not a funeral. To be invited was an honor and a privilege.

To be invited was a sign of the king's favor. Or indicative of one's position in the kingdom. It was the wedding of the century. And you had been invited.

It's a gracious invitation. That the parable begins with. And we're to see that here in this parable. The figure of the king is God himself.

[8 : 07] And God himself has a pattern of hosting banquets or feasts. You see this. You see this in the Old Testament. Where Israel is led out into the wilderness.

And there God every morning would lay a spread of manna. A feast of abundance for his people. And whether it be in the desert of Sinai. Or the coasts of Galilee.

Where he feeds five. Jesus feeds five thousand. And shortly afterwards four thousand. God seems to be always laying out a banquet for his people. And here it is.

He's laying out another banquet or a feast. In particular a wedding feast for his people. In those days there were no postal services. There was no email of course.

And so the king sends out messengers or couriers. Servants announcing the occasion. And the initial announcement would resemble what we receive as a save the date today.

[9 : 06] I have three of them. Scattered, hidden somewhere in my room or desk. But they're in my electronic calendar. They're dates that I'm supposed to set aside.

To celebrate a particular occasion. Namely that of marriage. Of friends and loved ones. So the servants go out.

And announce an impending wedding. And it's not necessarily in Bible times a particular date. But it was a public broadcast of upcoming wedding festivities.

And an invitation to participate when everything was ready. Shockingly, the Bible tells us in verse three. Those who were invited.

They were invited. But they would not come. The invitation is spurned. They simply would not come. Well, the king would not take no for an answer.

[10 : 05] So he persists. And again, the king dispatches. This time, different messengers. To come to the wedding feast. Now, the wedding, the meal is prepared.

It's ready. Its extravagance is alluded to. The oxen. The fat calves have all been slaughtered. And everything is ready.

But again, the invitation is rejected. The king is persistent. But the guests are stubborn.

Instead, the invited guests. One heads off to their farm. Another to attend to his business. And others seize the servants, treat them shamefully, and kill them.

The refusal to attend intensifies. Originally, it seems to be met with indifference. But now it's met with these excuses. These duties.

[11 : 12] These distractions. These apparent responsibilities. One to his farm and another to his business. And yet there are others who act with extreme wickedness.

Mistreating the messengers and even killing them. It's almost unbelievable. Why would someone treat others so harshly to the point of even committing murder? How can someone hate the king this much?

It's an act of mutiny. Of blatant rejection. And rebellion against the king's dominion and rule. And perhaps that's the point.

At least up to this point. The atrocity of the act illustrates how much these people spurn or hate the king's invitation.

God's hospitality up to this point, verses 1 to 8, is rejected by all who are invited. See, the mindset is there.

[12 : 17] I have no time for a banquet. A wedding banquet. I have no time to celebrate the king's generous, gracious invitation.

There is no time to honor or express gratitude toward this king's goodness. And you get a hint of this excuse in these verses.

Because there's some people who are preoccupied with the tending of their fields and the advancing of their business. That somehow, for some reason, there is no priority to attend God's banquet.

You see, it's ready now. But they've decided. They're going to come on their own time.

They're going to receive the invitation on their own terms. It's ready now. It's ready now. But my life's schedule.

[13 : 21] My life's plan. It doesn't fit. The banquet is ready now. But oh, bang. I have crops.

I have to harvest. I have a business. I must develop. I have a home. I need to acquire. I have this. I need to attend to.

And you begin to see it. The excuses mount up to refuse the king's invitation.

It is as to say, there's more going on in my life. More value in my life. There's greater urgency in what I'm doing.

And it's all more important than this invitation that I receive. It's not an unfamiliar attitude. I'll deal with matters of faith when my life is all sorted out.

[14 : 20] I have adult responsibilities. And these are good. But in the case of this parable, you will find that these good, distracting preoccupations lead to their demise.

Well, a gracious invitation is followed by shocking indignation. The king's invitation is spurned. His servants slaughtered and his people defiant toward not only his rule but his hospitality.

They slight the king whose invitation is both an honor and arguably a command. The marriage of whose son is a time for special joy.

And we see the king's response. It's startling. It's shocking. It's unbelievable. The text tells us the king was angry.

So he sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. The military is brought in and the misdeeds of those who mistreated and murdered the king's servants are destroyed.

[15 : 33] The city is leveled. And as a reader, you're supposed to feel this way. Jarred. This is excessive. This is heavy-handed.

This is ruthless. And well, we'll resolve it later in the sermon. But the conclusion is reached in verse 8.

He tells his servants again, the wedding feast is ready, but those who were invited are not worthy. They're not worthy. And taking the language from Matthew chapter 10, not worthy is they weren't receptive.

And so, in chapter 9, or in verse 9, the pattern repeats. The invitation is now repeated. Go, therefore, to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.

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. A new set of invitations goes out.

[16 : 35] But what's different about this set of invitations is it doesn't come from a guest list. These invitations are indiscriminate. Whoever you find, whatever you find, bad or good, on the main road, on the side road, off the road, whomever you find, invite them.

The objective is to invite as many people as possible. And so the servants go out, and whomever they encounter, they are to invite and bring in.

As many as they find, they gather all whom they found. And regardless of their moral standing, their social standing, their religious standing, they all come in.

The wedding hall is packed, filled with guests. Interestingly, this wedding feast is so grand, so large, so adequate or excessive that there is no guest limit.

You know, the king has not withheld any resource in the celebration of his son. All wedding receptions, you know, if you go and, if you go and plan one, you're plagued with this question.

[17 : 53] How many does the venue sit? How much will it cost me to invite these people? And who am I leaving off the list? But it's not the case of this wedding.

None of these questions arise, which implies the venue has no limitation. Cost is not a factor. The attendee is not even considered.

All can come and celebrate the wedding feast, wedding celebration of the son. The invitation, the second invitation that goes out is wide and extended to all, indiscriminate.

And what we find is now the king, as the wedding celebration has ensued, the king arrives and in the venue full of guests, his attention settles upon one lone individual who is misdressed for the occasion.

There was a dress code, but apparently this individual disregarded it. Is it because he was unaware? Unlikely, because his response to the king's question really indicts him of his guilt.

[19 : 10] The king asks him, friend, how did you get in without a wedding garment? He's speechless. Demonstrates that he knowingly, even deliberately came without the required dress.

And now, for the second time, shockingly, the king's indignation shows up. The king now instructs his attendants to bind the man hand and foot and cast him in the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing or the grinding or the clenching of teeth.

The lack of wedding clothes offended the king to the point that a severe punishment fell upon the guest who came unprepared and misdressed. The text closes in verse 14, many are called, but few are chosen.

The lack of a wedding garment is a huge topic among commentaries. What was the guest wearing or not wearing that would cause such a great offense and lead to such a great punishment?

Historically, it was claimed that perhaps wedding guests were provided their wedding clothes. And this guy decided not to wear what was provided and it was an insult and snub against the host, though this has found little historical support.

[20 : 33] Some people will say, well, it's referring to the spiritual garment, this parable, it's referring to the spiritual garment that Isaiah refers to in 61 verse 10.

He writes, I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exalt in my God. He has clothed me with garments of salvation. He has covered me with a robe of righteousness.

Other interpreters will tether it to images from other parts of the New Testament. For example, Paul speaks of the Christian life as putting off and putting on.

Taking off the old self and putting on the new self. Putting on old works of unrighteousness and putting on new works of righteousness.

Stop practicing evil and now practice good. There's a lot of discussion. But whatever it is, the intruding guest is aware.

[21 : 37] The guest is not ignorant to the fact that he came unprepared and arrived without proper adornment. And as a result, he is cast out of the wedding festivities. And so in this parable, you've seen this cycle.

We observe this cycle. Invitation followed by indignation. A re-invitation followed by a re-indignation.

And now what does it mean? And what does it have to do with us? Well, we need to get our bearings because the parable primarily seems to address the chief priests and the scribes who have come up to battle Jesus.

Though I will apply it to us momentarily. The first half of the parable is likely a condemnation of the failure of the religious community to find their way into the kingdom of God.

Instead of responding to God, they rejected his rule and requirements. This is speaking to the chief priests and elders and Pharisees. Israel as a nation was plagued with idolatry, injustice, and legalism.

[22 : 49] And though they were sent prophets, prophets to summon them back to repentance and turn from their wicked living, they refused. I don't want to do that. The prophets were ignored and some even killed and we saw that in the life of John the Baptist.

The man and the message was refused. They responded in unbelief and though he walked, John walked in the way of righteousness, his head ended up on a platter, incidentally, at another banquet.

In the first half, what we find is Jesus condemns, as one writer puts it, the contempt with which Israel treated God's grace.

Jesus condemns the contempt with which Israel as a whole treated God's grace. And as a result, God would send a military, not his own, but the Roman military, and that military would lay siege on the city of Jerusalem in the year 70.

The temple would fall, and large portions of the city would be left in ruins. The judgment of God would fall on the people of God for their failure to serve and follow God faithfully.

[24 : 05] God's people, the nation of Israel, they were supposed to be a kingdom of priests, representatives, holy, upright, just, and righteous, a demonstration of God's character to the world.

They were God's special possession. possession. And instead of living out that identity, they wanted nothing to do with his rule, and as a result, receive his judgment.

And because they rejected God, God rejected them. In the language of chapter 10, verse 43, and since your Bibles are open, therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to another people, producing fruit.

And now, another invitation we find in verse 9 is given. It's indiscriminate to the world regardless of race, ethnicity, education, social status, gender, and the kingdom of God would now expand in a new way.

The invitations are going out. It's a dawn of a new age, and God would establish his kingdom not through an ethnic nation, the people of Israel, but through his son.

[25 : 25] Chronologically, we're located in this second invitation, you and I, Christ Church Chicago. The call is to come to a wedding feast. We came off the main roads, side roads, off roads, under the road.

I don't know where you came from, but the invitation found us. We're comprised of the good and the bad. Whether it's referring morally or it's just referring to, the invitation goes out to the good and the bad.

As the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous, the evil and the good, the invitation goes out to the whole world. And in this parable, we live in a time when the invitation is universal.

for you and I, in our mailbox or inbox, there is an invitation. We call it the great marriage supper of the Lamb, Revelation 19.

It is the wedding feast of God's Son. And you and I are to save the date. Now, I don't know the exact date, but you are to prioritize that occasion, that moment over every other part of life.

[26 : 56] And that save the date requires a response, an RSVP, so to say. It's an invitation that we cannot ignore. We cannot be indifferent towards it.

When exactly is it? We're not sure, but we're going to find in upcoming weeks. When the wedding feast is ready, it is imperative that we're ready. There will come a time when the invitation is no longer valid.

When is a wedding invitation no longer valid? Well, when the wedding has passed. The last wedding I was invited to and attended was on the 67th floor of the Willis Tower, formerly Sears.

Should be Sears. Should be Sears, formerly Willis, maybe one day. I don't know. On October 21st, 2023, there's a beautiful reception afterwards.

Now imagine this, today. After our luncheon, I jump in my minivan and I drive up to the Willis Tower. I drive up to the venue, I approach the security desk because this one was fancy.

[28 : 09] There was a security desk. And I tell them there's a wedding I'm supposed to attend. I need entry and I need access to that elevator that takes me up to the 67th floor.

The security guard would look at me and say, well, show me the invitation. And I would pull out the invitation, October the 21st, 2023, and he would look at me and say, sir, that was from over three months ago.

I would respond, well, hey, that's okay. I know him pretty well. And actually, on October 21st, 2023, I was really busy. There was business I had to attend to.

I had a harvest I had to reap. There was this I had to prioritize. There was this that was more pressing and urgent.

And you know what happens. Well, I've shown up on this day, on Sunday, the 28th of January, well over three months to attend this wedding because now my books are in order.

[29 : 23] Everything is in order. The security guard would look at me and say, you missed it. It passed. The celebration is over.

The whole occasion. I fear that when that day comes, when the trump resounds and the Lord descends.

Some of us will miss it. The day will pass and you will arrive with an invitation that is no longer valid. How tragic, how sad, how horrific.

of all the invitations you receive in this life, you must prioritize this one. There is none more distinguished. There is none more generous.

There is none more gracious. There is none more glorious. There is none more privileged than this one. To join the wedding feast of the sun.

[30 : 37] It is the most important event you can attend. And what we find here for you and I is our attendance actually requires some preparation.

We don't just grab the invitation, put it in our back pocket, sit on it, lean on it, sleep on it. It actually requires a response, a preparation.

We need to make sense of the figure that attended the festivities without a wedding garment. it goes something like this.

Usually when two questions arise when you receive a wedding invitation, what's the first one? Can I go? Or maybe the first one is do I like these people? The first one is usually can I go?

Is that date available? Is there something not more urgent or pressing? We've already established there is nothing more pressing than this. And what's the second question? What am I going to wear?

[31 : 37] What am I going to wear? And in your mind you begin to think, is it an indoor wedding? Is it an outdoor wedding?

Is this on the beachfront? Is it in this fancy hotel? And you begin to plan accordingly. In other words, the nature of the wedding creates expectations and even provides a standard that we that we must meet.

That's the nature of a wedding. And the lesson is this. Entry to God's kingdom is free for all, but not without expectations. The invitation is for all, but not without stipulations.

God's grace is for all, but it's not a cheap grace. It's a grace that's dispensed freely, but it's received responsibly. It's a generous grace, but when you receive it, you recognize it asks something of you.

It comes at the great cost of heaven's son, but it's received after I've counted the cost. It's not out of line with the preceding parables.

[32 : 53] Remember that one with the two sons. obedience, what's required? Obedience. Obedience is required. You're my son, but it requires obedience.

What about the tenants? Fruitfulness is required of the tenants. I'll let you use my land, I'll let you profit off of it, but be fruitful.

And here, proper preparation and dress are required of all wedding guests. And so when we come into the kingdom, we ask the question, what should I wear?

What do I wear? We can't wear whatever we want. There is a duty that emerges from genuine saving faith.

The clothes of the parable is sobering. All are invited, many attend, some are dismissed. Not all who respond initially will endure finally.

[34 : 06] Many are called, few are chosen, all are invited, but only some remain guests. And it's certainly referring to the final judgment where there will be a separation. It's not unusual language for those of us who have been in Matthew for quite some time.

A clear place in the gospel that speaks of this great separation and share some language. You can look it up, Matthew 13, 47 to 50. But it compares the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and fish are gathered of every kind.

When it's full, men drew it ashore and they sat down and they sorted it. One into good containers and they threw away the bad.

And Matthew 13 tells us this, it will be like this at the end of the age. The angels will come out. I think those are the attendants in verse 13. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.

And again, in that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew, more than any of the other gospels, sheds light on the final judgment.

[35 : 23] The horrors of being rejected by God. The devastation that will fall upon the wicked. You see, this parable is a warning from the heart of God.

It is a warning. Because even love warns. Love has to warn. Love is truly love when it warns a fourth coming danger.

What kind of friend would I be if I didn't warn you of dangers ahead? What kind of father would I be if I failed to warn my child of the treacherous nature of a road they were taking?

And of course, God warns here. And the warning is given so we don't act presumptuously. I got the invitation. I'm good.

I'm good. That's all I need. The invitation. Well, it is this presumption that having been invited, you somehow think you're right with God.

[36 : 35] It is actually this presumption that insults the king. It is this presumption that will dismiss you from the wedding feast. It is this presumption that will condemn you for eternity.

How have you responded to grace? Have you refused it or received it?

I've already argued refusing grace results in judgment. But receiving grace results in wedding preparations. I'll close with this.

What this parable doesn't tell you is that this day, the day the son gets married, is actually your wedding day.

It's your wedding day. It is the marriage supper of the lamb. It is the wedding of God's beloved son with his bride, God's beloved people.

[37 : 40] Now imagine you're invited to your wedding. A wedding. Your wedding. Kind of busy that day. I have duties.

I have responsibilities. I have business. I have a farm. And you might miss the most glorious day of your life because you are preoccupied by things that matter far less than your wedding.

wedding. The final image the Bible gives of this wedding is a bride who has made herself ready. That's the language.

Beautifully clothed, adorned with righteous deeds. It's an occasion you better save the date for. It's a wedding you better RSVP for through faith.

It's a celebration you better get dressed up for. Let's pray, Father, we give you thanks for even the heavy warnings in the Bible.

[38 : 55] That you warn us out of love. And I pray for all of us in this room that as we have received the invitation from God to belong to receive the forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ.

That we're able to anticipate a day that we are conjoined to your son that we will celebrate and enter into eternal joy.

Lord, I pray that we would take that invitation, we would frame it, we would sort our life around it, we would organize, arrange our entire life around it because it is the one occasion we cannot miss.

And so, Lord, help us to prioritize preparing for the wedding. Enable us to do so.

We ask these things in Jesus' name.