

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

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[0 : 00] Thanks, Don. Good morning, friends. It's good to be with you this morning. I didn't know I was coming into town during the mile of music, but I have experienced some of the wonderful art and noise late into the night. So it's been very nice.

And thank you all for your warm welcome. It's been an honor to get to know you and to be welcomed into this space and to be a part of your community for a weekend.

So as we turn to the word this morning, our text comes from Matthew 22, verses 1 through 14.

The parable of the wedding banquet. Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying 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 more servants and said, tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner.

[1 : 10] 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 the servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was then 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 streets, the corners and invite, to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you can find.

So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both the good and the bad.

And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there that was not wearing wedding clothes. Friends, he asked, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?

[2 : 15] The man was speechless, and 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.

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Will you join me in a brief word of prayer? Father, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God, as we gather this morning, we gather longing to meet you in this place. In a word of grace or peace. So God, as we do, may your word be our guide, your spirit, our teacher, in the glory of Christ, our only concern.

Amen. So I have a friend, Seth, who's a good friend of mine. And he and I lived in the same community, the Friendship House community, it's called.

It's a community where I live of people with and without disabilities who live together in intentional Christian community. And we explore together things of prayer and the things of we have like a weekly meal and we read scripture together.

[3 : 39] And Seth lives with Down syndrome, which forms his perspective on his life. And he and I spend a good deal of time together, hang out, go shopping, eat food, that kind of thing, and have conversations about what it means to be alive today and to follow Jesus in this world.

And Seth will tell you this story if you ask him. And he told me I could share it. Of when he made profession of faith in his community, where he stood in front of his church and publicly declared that he affirms the promises made to him in his baptism, that he wants to follow Jesus in this world and that that is true of him.

And so in those moments before he stood in front of his church, he was asked, Seth, how do you know that God loves you? After thinking about it for a bit, Seth said, you know, I know that God loves me.

Because all of you love me. And in that one sentence, Seth, who some in this world don't assume has the capacity for spiritual conversation, he articulated a profound truth that it takes some of the best scholars, hundreds of pages to articulate that God does not just show his love, but God's love is shown through his people.

They do not just show his love, but they are his love. That when someone feels the love of the church in this world, they are not just seeing what God is like in an abstract way, but they are actually experiencing the very love of God for them.

[5 : 26] That's always been the case. And Seth just put it into words. And in many ways, that's what this parable from Jesus is about.

Today we're looking at this parable from Jesus, who is a masterful teacher and uses parables, which are shortened narratives, to communicate ideas or embody a message more fully into a way that it kind of transcends time, right?

So that even we can receive a story and feel the message of Jesus' words across time and space. They're simple stories with profound meaning, simply profound, if you will.

And today we find ourselves at this parable of the great wedding banquet, which is an odd parable, I know, but I think it's a beautiful one as well.

It's kind of confusing. And so just to give you some context, the telling of this parable comes at the last week of Jesus' life. And it's the last in the string of three parables that he tells.

[6 : 35] And they all have this tone of judgment. Yikes. But hidden in the judgment for Jesus is always a grace. These three parables that he's been telling is what the scholar Dale Bruner calls the people of God parables.

Because they all paint a picture for us of God's people and how they relate to God in their time. All of them are a call to a certain urgency to their faith, but not just any kind of faith.

But it's the kind of faith that the gospel writer Matthew continues to draw out through Matthew's gospel, which is a faith that is at work through love.

I want to invite you to just hear this parable one more time, but this time in a slightly more poetic way from the author Eugene Peterson, who does his own translation of this saying, he translates it in his own words this way, saying that Jesus responded to them by telling more stories.

God's kingdom, he said, is like a king who threw a wedding banquet for his son, and he sent out servants to call in all the invited guests, and they wouldn't come. He sent out another round of servants instructing them to tell the guests, look, everything is on the table.

[7 : 53] The prime rib is ready for carving. Come to the feast. And they only shrugged their shoulders and went off, one to weed his garden, another to his workshop. The rest, with nothing better to do, beat up on the messengers and killed them.

The king was then outraged and sent his soldiers to destroy those thugs and level their city. Then he told the servants, we have a wedding banquet all prepared, but no guests.

The ones I invited weren't up for it. Go into the busiest intersections in town and invite anyone you can find to the banquet.

The servants went out on the streets and rounded up everyone they laid eyes on, the good and the bad, regardless. And so the banquet was on. Everyone, every place was filled.

And when the king entered, he looked over the scene. He spotted a man who wasn't properly dressed. He said to them, friend, how dare you come into here looking like that? The man was speechless.

[8 : 54] And so the king told the servants, get him out of here fast. Tie him up and ship him out and make sure he doesn't get back in. That is what I mean when I say. Many get invited, but only a few make it.

That is Peterson's summary of this parable. And I find it poetically beautiful. In a way, it captures something for us. But what might Jesus' story mean for you and I today?

Let's work through it together. I want to give us this parable in four short scenes. Scene one, a wedding. Scene two, a guest list. Scene three, excuses.

And scene four, the attire. First, we have the wedding or really this question. What is the kingdom? Right?

Matthew 22, verse two says, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a banquet for his son. So Jesus is talking about this thing, the kingdom of heaven.

[9 : 59] And often when we hear those words, the kingdom of heaven, we think of this distant, far off place. With clouds and harps and angels floating around that we go to someday when we pass.

But I think it's very important that we understand that when Jesus said the kingdom of heaven, he wasn't talking about a place that we just go off to and float away someday to.

But he was talking about something here and now. And when we see this, it begins to change how this parable, how it speaks into our lives.

The kingdom of heaven is a place that Jesus so often talks about. But it's less of a place. And it's more of a reality, more of a way of living, a posture of life.

It's a reality that we all exist in here and now, right now, when we live in alignment with the will of God. Jesus said this in Luke 17, that the kingdom of heaven is not something that can be observed.

[11 : 08] Nor will people say, here it is or there it is because the kingdom of God is in your midst. It's all around us insofar as we live into it.

It's a posture of living. And one day it will come in full. But for now, it's right here as long as we live into it.

It says in Matthew 4, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. If the way of the world or the kingdom of the world is violence and anger, then the kingdom of heaven is peace and patience.

It's right here in our midst. If the way of the world is self-autonomy, then the way of the kingdom is community. Do you see this?

It's a posture of living. If the way of the world is power and authority, then the way of the kingdom is humility and self-sacrifice. It's right there.

[12 : 15] In short, it is God's will being done on earth right now if we choose to live with it. It happens here and now in our midst.

And it is fully coming one day in the future. But for now, it is right here. And Jesus is talking about that kingdom. And he says, it's like a wedding. Huh? Like Jesus has plenty of experiences with weddings.

In fact, he crashed one earlier to turn water into wine. And to the people of old and still to us today, a wedding is this great celebration of union.

Of two becoming one. Union with Christ. That's the big idea here. Let's walk through that idea through the scriptures so that we can see this kind of grand arc coming through the scriptures.

In the first book of the Bible in the Old Testament, Genesis talks about this in its design, saying that when a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, they become one.

[13 : 20] And that's what's taking place here. A wedding is two becoming one. Jesus talks about that in Matthew 19, saying that the two are no longer or there are no longer two, but they are one.

Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate. And then Jesus talks about weddings again in this text, saying that the kingdom of heaven is like a wedding banquet.

Now, the king, we presume here, is the father and his son that he's preparing the banquet for is Christ or Jesus.

Elsewhere, Jesus compares this spiritual life to the whole of the spiritual life to waiting for a groom to come, himself being the groom.

The apostle Paul talks about weddings in this way, saying it is for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and you'll be united to his wife and the two will become one.

[14 : 18] And then he says this is a profound mystery. But I am talking about Christ and the church. In other words, the great wedding that is the kingdom of heaven is like the union of Christ and Christ's church.

The two becoming one. Even the Bible ends in Revelation 19, saying, let us rejoice and be glad for the wedding of the lamb has come and the bride has made herself ready.

It is this great image of God's salvation in this world is that God is joining God's self to God's people in the church. The union of the church in Jesus is the kingdom.

What God has joined together, let no one separate. That is the kingdom of heaven. It is the joining of Christ and the church becoming one in this world.

And so the journey of the spiritual life is the joining of Christ with the church until there is no discernible gap between the two.

[15 : 29] It is union with Christ. That's why there's so much language in the church of the church being the very body of Christ, which is another image to say the same thing for the church.

And Christ has become one. And so it is the people of the church that make up the very body of Christ. When we live in Christ and we make up the body to use the metaphor.

Paul says, now you are the very body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. Paul points this out seemingly every time he puts pen to papyrus and perhaps one of the most poignant lines comes when he says in Ephesians one saying God placed all things under his feet.

That's Jesus and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body. The fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Is that how we think about the church very often? Hey, man, happy Monday. How was your weekend? That was pretty good. I went to church.

[16 : 36] Oh, church. I've heard of that. The fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Right. Yeah, you got it. Friends, this is a beautiful mystery.

And it's our reality today that the kingdom is the union of us. With Jesus being enwrapped in his love for us and and ours for him.

The church is the bride becomes one with Jesus and shows then the world. Who Jesus is. You see, to become one with Christ means that what is said of him is said of us and what he does, he does through us.

And what's said of Jesus is this beloved. You are my beloved. Those are the words that the father speaks over the son at his baptism before the start of his ministry, before he has done anything.

Beloved. Is what is said over Jesus. And so beloved. Is what is said over you and me. Beloved.

[17 : 55] Because the great gift of unity with Christ is that when the father looks at you, when the father looks at us, he sees Christ.

Jesus. His beloved. Before you have done anything or anything that you have done or have not done. He calls you before that beloved.

And the great responsibility of union with Christ is that when the father looks at us or when the world looks at us, they also see Jesus.

So how we show love and mercy and peace and grace. That's how people see Jesus in this world, because we are becoming one with Christ.

It's that reality that Seth picked up on that Jesus acts through this world, through God's people. So that when he stood up there and said, I know that God loves me because all of you love me.

[19 : 05] Okay, we're just seeing two. We are two scene two. The guest list. Or really the question, who makes the cut?

Who makes the cut for this beautiful kingdom reality, this wedding banquet? In the words of Jesus, anyone. Anyone you can find, he says.

This section of the parable is this literary way of Jesus kind of summarizing Israel transformed into a global church, right? It's this redemptive plan of God to invite one family, one people, the nation of Israel, to call them into relationship.

And then to have that invitation expand out to the whole world, to all people. And it's been this way since God made a promise to Abraham in the first book of the Bible in Genesis 12, saying that all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you.

And this is the fulfillment of that promise. So who's invited? Anyone. All people, in the words of the parable, the good and the bad.

[20 : 18] The good news of the gospel is that the forgiveness of Jesus and the reality of the kingdom is for all people. For the righteous Pharisee and for the Roman soldier.

To the prostitute or to the tax collector of Jesus' day. To the CEO of the high-end business in town. Or to the barista that makes your coffee. To the lifelong churchgoer.

To the one who's never stepped foot in the building. Or to the doctor or to the man born with a disability. To the orphan in Ukraine. To the soldier that took their parents. The invitation is for them to be enwrapped in the love that Christ offers for all.

Anyone you can find. The good and the bad. In the words of Jesus. All are welcome in the kingdom to union with Christ.

To be called the beloved of God. But that brings us to scene three. The excuses. Why I can't make it.

[21 : 24] So the middle part of this parable is. It points out that we can fail to live in the kingdom. Not merely out of malicious intent.

But out of distraction. Or so it seems. It's this line from Jesus. But they paid no attention and went off. One to his field and another to his business.

Some people reject the invitation. Not because they hate the king. Not all. But because they just don't see it as that important.

Or at least. Excuse me. Less important. Than the things that they were doing. They fail to prioritize the wedding banquet. They're distracted.

Not even by bad things. Good things. Good work. But a misalignment of priorities. Their attention is grabbed by other things in the world.

[22 : 21] That they are called to do. But they don't place the priority. On the wedding feast. Or the kingdom of heaven. It's right in our midst.

Right? And I think this is all the more true. It's always true. But it feels all the more true. In our digital age. It rings up for us.

That we don't show up to the kingdom life. The kingdom reality. Right in our midst. Not because we hate the king. But because we're distracted.

Preoccupied. How often do we miss the invitation to a kingdom life. To the union with Christ moments of our days. Because I'm too busy at work.

And I just can't think about anything else. Or I'm caught up in the political coverage of the day. That I miss the actual people right around me. Or I couldn't get myself to wake up in the morning to pray.

[23 : 20] Because the last night the Netflix cube just went three, two, one. We can miss the kingdom in our midst.

Not because we hate the king. But because we get distracted. Again in the words of Jesus. The kingdom of God is in your midst.

So long as we can pay attention to it. And accept the invitation. Which brings us to scene four. The attire.

We're really accepting the invitation. To transformation. This parable. It ends in this kind of haunting way. With this man being kicked out of the banquet.

For not having on the wedding clothes. What? If the invitation is for everyone. And this guy showed up. Then why would he be kicked out? It's a literary way for Jesus to say.

[24 : 21] He refuses to put on the clothes. To actually show up. To the wedding. You know my friend just got married. Not too long ago. And he told me that about 40 minutes.

Before the ceremony was supposed to start. He looks out the window. Of the room they're getting ready in. And sees his best man. Running to his car. Getting in his car. And driving away.

To find out that he had forgotten his pants. And I'm not going to lie to you. In case you want to try it. You have to wear pants to a wedding. I'm not trying to say that this parable.

Is talking about that. But there is a point here. That when we go to a wedding. And receive the invitation. Then we get ready for that. We want to be a part of the event.

Because it's valuable to us. And if the wedding is the kingdom of God in our midst. The joining of Christ in the church. And as it's happening among us. Then the kingdom requires accepting that invitation.

[25 : 26] And putting on the wedding clothes. Is to say yes to living in the way of Jesus. Right in our midst. To receiving his forgiveness. And putting on the life.

Of love and peace. And mercy. And self-sacrifice. We receive an invitation. And then we are transformed.

We do not receive an invitation. And expects nothing of us. In short.

If the kingdom is a posture. Of our life. Unless we live in that posture. We will not experience it. If I choose. To live in a way of violence.

And anger. And revenge. I don't want to put on the wedding clothes. Of the kingdom. I will not experience. The gift of the kingdom.

[26 : 24] That way. You know. God will not force you. To be at the banquet. But the invitation. Is to put on some wedding clothes. To say yes. To living in the way of Jesus.

And to experience the kingdom. This union of Christ. And his people. And to become. The very beloved. Of God. There is no truer life. Than that.

It seems to be. That's what Jesus is saying. Here in this story. Henry Nowen. Is a writer. And an author. Who puts it. Beautifully. This way. Saying. That.

Being a believer. Means being clothed. In Christ. Paul says. Every one of you. That has been baptized. Has been clothed. In Christ.

Christ. And this being clothed. In Christ. Is much more than. Wearing a cloak. That just covers. Our misery. It refers to the. Total. Transformation. That allows you.

[27 : 23] To say. With Paul. That I have been. Crucified. With Christ. Yet. I am alive. And it is no longer. I who live. But it is Christ. Living. In me. Thus. We are the living.

Christ. In the world. Jesus. Who is. God. Made. Flesh. Continues. To reveal. Himself. In our own. Flesh. Indeed. True.

Salvation. Is becoming. One. With Christ. Those are. Nowans. Words. I think. They're beautiful. Which brings us.

To our invitation. For this morning. Our final invitation. Which is. To become. Love. Love. Like we said before. Union with Christ. Means.

That's what's said. Of him. Is said. Of us. And what he does. He does. Through. Us. And so. If we are. Actually. The body. Of Christ.

[28 : 17] To be one. With him. What does that look like? It looks like. Becoming. Love. In this world. Because the scriptures. Tell us the most. At the most. Fundamental.

Level. God. Is. Love. In first. John three. He says. Dear friends. Let us. Love one another. For love. Comes from God. Everyone. Who has been. Born of God.

And knows God. Everyone. Who loves. Has been. Born of God. And knows God. Whoever. Does not love. Does not know God. Because God. Is. Love. So.

If God. Is love. And we are. Becoming. One. With Christ. In this world. Then the invitation. Is to become. Love. How do we do that? Tyler.

Is a pastor. In Portland. Oregon. He says. This about God. Being love. He says that it means something. Profound. For the aim. Of our lives.

[29 : 12] Because. If God. Is first and foremost. Power. Then authority. And influence. Over others. Is how we become. Godly. Or if God.

Is first and foremost. Knowledge. And omniscience. Then. To gain knowledge. And wisdom. Is to become. Like God. Or if God. Is first and foremost.

Untouchable. Or invulnerable. Then. To withdraw. And grow. And penetrable. Is this. Recipe. For godliness. But if God. Is first and foremost. Love. Then compassion.

Is the pathway. To know. And become. Like. God. That's the word. Satan uses. Compassion. So to become. Like love.

We have to make. The shift. From our culture. To compassion. Or really. The shift. From sentiment. To compassion. Because if we're going to talk.

[30 : 10] About love. Then we have to name the fact. That to the biblical authors. Love was active. The word that they use. Is most. Translated to. Compassion.

Or a compassionate. Love. Or an active. Love. But we live in a culture. That has replaced. Compassion. And active. Love. With sentiment.

Which is. Passive. Love. Or a love. That's never acted. Upon. Now sentiment. It doesn't start. Bad. It is actually. The seed. Of compassion. That could grow.

Into something. But that never does. Sentiment. Is weeping. At the conditions. Of hurting children. During the credits. Of a moving documentary. But then never doing.

Anything about it. Sentiment. Is the news report. That wakes you up. To the victims of poverty. But then turning that. Into dinner conversation. With people. That are as well off.

[31 : 04] As you. It's a social media post. About injustice. Which. Without. Never actually building. A relationship. With somebody. Who is different. Than you. We live in a sentimental.

Culture. Inwardly moved. But outwardly. Stagnant. We feel. Love. Often. We become. Love. Less. Often. Rather. Jesus. Lived with. No gap. Between the. Inward movement. Of his spirit. And the. Outward movement.

Of his hands. And feet. Every. Single time. That the gospels. Say that Jesus. Was. Deeply moved. In spirit. They then go. On to say. Or to describe.

The active. Expression. Of that deep. Movement. First. John. Goes on to this. That if anyone. Has material possessions. And sees a brother. Or sister. In need. But has no pity.

[32 : 02] On them. How can the love. Of God. Be in that person. Dear children. Let us not. Love with words. Or speech. But with. Actions. And in truth.

Compassion. The active. Expression. Of love. In the fourth. Century. Roman Empire. The followers. Of Jesus. Determined. That there.

Needed. To be. Public. Spaces. For the sick. And the. Wounded. To be. Cared for. Because. Jesus. Cared. About the sick. And the wounded. So they came up.

With this idea. A hospital. And what's now. A building block. Today. In our. Western societies. Is a direct. Result.

Of followers. Of Jesus. Becoming. Love. Actively. The active. Expression. Of Christ. In. This world.

[32 : 56] The same. Is true. Of orphanages. And hotels. And. And. Care facilities. And the list. Goes on. And on. In some ways. You could say. That Jesus. Created.

Hospitals. In this world. Through God's people. Because they had become. One with Christ. And acted as Christ. In this world.

Peterson. Sums it all up. In this way. Saying that the story. Of Jesus. Is the story. Of the beloved. Who became a lover. Now you do it. Love your brother.

Love your sister. Love your neighbor. Can you imagine. A world. Where there is. No gap. Between the spirit.

Of Christ. And the church. That he calls. His bride. That's what this parable. Is about. The union. Of Christ. In the church. As long as we.

[33 : 52] Prioritize it. Enough. To join. And humble. Enough. To put on. The wedding clothes. That invitation. Is for everyone. And how we put that.

Into practice. Might look different. Depending on where we are. But. It might look like. Talking to the stranger. Who lives without a home. It might look like. Having people over. For dinner.

Just to get to know them. It might. Mean. Finding an injustice. And responding. To it. But there are moments. In our life. And there are moments.

In the life. Of the church. When we act. That way. Where it will become. Abundantly clear. Where we can say. I know. Or someone.

Who experiences. The church. Can say. I know. That God. Loves me. Because all. Of you. Love me. In the name.

[34 : 48] Of the father. The son. And the holy spirit. Will you pray with me. God. It is a good. And right thing. To gather.

To gather. As your people. To gather. As your church. And to be reminded. That. When you see us. You see.

Your son. Your beloved. God. That we are brought. Into. That love.

And that we. Are called. To become. That love. So God. As we go. From this place. Be present. To us. And within us. And continue.

To transform. Us. Into people. With grace. And mercy. And peace. That's in the. Our name. We pray. All of these things. Amen.

[35 : 44] Thank you.