

The Royal Wedding

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to Matthew's Gospel and chapter 22. And we may read again at the beginning of the chapter. 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.

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. Verse 45 of chapter 21 indicates for us part of the purpose that Jesus spoke in parables at this time. These parables were initially aimed at the chief priests and Pharisees. The parables were hitting home.

The old adage, the truth hurts, is very true in the context that we read. Because what was spoken in the parables was finding its target.

[1 : 26] The parables were in some ways adding fuel to an already inflamed situation. Because as Matthew tells us, these groupings, scribes and Pharisees, obviously understood that they were being targeted.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. Though they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds. Because they held him, that is, the crowds held him, to be a prophet. So, this grouping amongst the Jewish religious leadership were very anxious to ensnare and trap Jesus. They were plotting to kill him. But they were not yet sure that they had the support of the people. More importantly, there was the fact that Jesus' hour had not yet come. And so, they could not do what they were plotting because a sovereign God would not permit them to do what they were plotting until the hour had come.

[2 : 49] And so, they were being held back. In my view, it would be a grave error on our part to think that these parables are exclusively addressed to the chief priests and the Pharisees.

They are speaking to me and you too. And we would do well to pay attention to what they have to say because they have a much wider audience than the grouping of the chief priests and the Pharisees.

Why does he speak in parables? The disciples asked him that very question. You could answer from this gospel that it is a sovereign decision on the part of Jesus.

To you, it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, says Jesus, in response to his disciples when they ask him that very question.

But to them, that is, to those who are non-believers, it has not been given. Parables are graphic and vivid.

[4 : 00] And so, they are memorable. They are realistic yet strange. So, they provoke thought. They engage the mind.

And again, Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast and so on.

The kingdom of heaven is that over which God reigns. The parable tells us of a king who is to host a wedding banquet for a son.

Weddings are still very often elaborate affairs. But royal weddings are even more elaborate than most.

And the custom was to send out invitations, telling people of the event, so that they could attend. No. We are speaking here of a pre-post era, messengers, couriers.

[5 : 03] They would be sent out to the various intended guests to invite them to this formal state occasion. Today, it is so easy to issue invitations.

But not so long ago, even when I got married myself, we didn't send out written invitations. My brother and I went round my wedding guest list, and my future wife, as she was then, went round

her wedding guest list with a friend.

And we invited people to the wedding. And somehow, it seemed to me that that was more cordial in many ways.

Because you were meeting your relatives face to face, and you were telling them, and you were expecting them to give an answer on the spot.

And in those days, many of the cousins that I was asked to put on my side of the list were my parents' cousins, which some of them I hardly knew.

[6 : 14] But that was just the practice. And so, for those guests who were in Lewis, and there was more, almost 200 guests, we went round them all.

Any who were on the mainland, we sent a postal invitation. So, that was a practice that was done. Well, with these few remarks, by way of introduction, let us examine this parable a little more closely, under four headings.

First, the refusal of the royal marriage invitation. Secondly, the royal reaction. Thirdly, the redirection of the invitation.

And fourthly, the removal of the inappropriately dressed person. So, the refusal of the royal marriage invitation, the royal reaction, the redirection of the invitation, the removal of the inappropriately dressed person.

The refusal of the royal marriage invitation. We're not told when this wedding was to take place. You know how most wedding invitations today come with a specific date, time of the wedding service, followed by reception at a particular venue.

[7 : 33] It is all there in detail. But in this story, these details are left out. They're not really important. We are merely told, a king sent to servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast.

To call those who were invited to the wedding feast. Now, that to me suggests or implies that an earlier invitation had already been given.

And that the servants were now in person calling upon those who were invited and who were on the list. Does that mean that they were being reminded of their invitation?

Lest they had forgotten, I cannot say. But what is stated is their outright refusal to accept. But they would not come.

It was not perhaps the kind of response that you might expect to be given to an invitation from such an influential person. Rejecting an invitation from the king.

[8 : 44] And so we are told of a further opportunity to attend this wedding reception. Now that the preparations are well advanced, with the slaughtering of the various animals to provide meat for the reception, all things are now ready.

And we are told again, the kings and 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. So was there a failure on the part of the first and second group of messengers that there required to be a third invitation sent out?

I don't believe that there was. The invitation was plainly and clearly given. But what I think is evident from this third invitation is the persistence of the king in giving the guests another opportunity. He is giving them every opportunity to attend. He refuses to take no for an answer. He is giving them time to reflect on the invitation.

[10 : 02] And this time the messengers confirm that the preparations were now ready. There was a lavish feast. There was no shortage of food. The king had gone to great lengths to prepare for the guests.

And what we are told is absolutely astounding. Some were totally indifferent to the invitation and from whom it came.

We are told they paid no attention. Went off one to his farm, another to his business. There is a kind of cavalier attitude to the authoritative invitation that comes from the king.

There is no indication that their places of work urgently require them to be in attendance. The significant phrase here for me is this.

They paid no attention. They displayed an alarming lack of indifference to this wedding invitation.

The fact that the invitation of huge importance, that it came from the king, that it was ill-mannered to refuse.

[11 : 15] None of these things seem to lie heavily on their minds. It does not appear to cause them any loss of sleep to this group of people. They paid no attention.

In other words, they were totally indifferent to what had taken place. There is a strange apathy abroad to the triple invitation that is issued by the king.

Total lack of interest, a detachment, a coolness, even boredom with the whole thing. Wedding. What wedding?

Seems to be the attitude of this group. They were taken up with daily life issues. Now, can I suggest that that is still sadly true today with regard to the gospel proclamation.

Many are so preoccupied with the daily matters of life that they are totally unconcerned about the challenging message of the gospel.

[12 : 23] Totally unconcerned about its relevance to their life or its application to their life. So, before I go any further, friend, let me ask you, is that true of you in this service this evening?

Is it true of you that you pay absolutely no attention to the gospel message apart from a kind of lip service? but that there is no commitment in your life in responding to the invitation of the gospel?

Is there an apathy and indifference that characterizes your attitude to the gospel? They paid no attention. Others went a step further.

There was active hostility to the messengers. There was a reaction that was expressed in violence. There was anger that resulted not just in violence but in death while the rest seized as servants, treated them shamefully and killed them.

So, what is highlighted is the willful rejection of those who were invited. Not just that they would not accept but that it's not just that they could not accept but that they would not accept.

[13 : 59] And in this second grouping I'm going to suggest that it includes the first grouping. Those who are indifferent. Those who had an apathy to the message that was given.

because it seems to me that when you push those who are indifferent and those who demonstrate an apathy to the invitation of the gospel if you push them hard enough you will discover that the hostility is under the surface and it is there.

And that is what happened here. It comes across. What comes across is this. if those who received the invitation so hostile to the servants of the king does it not speak about the virulent hostility to the king himself.

They despised the king. They were rejecting the authoritative rule of the king. And like others in another parable they were stating by their very actions we do not want this man to reign over us. That was a feature of Jewish history. And Stephen in his address recorded for us in the book of Acts remember how he goes how he develops this theme which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute and they killed those who announced before and the coming of the righteous one whom you have now betrayed and murdered you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.

[15 : 47] That's the charge that he laid before the Jewish nation at the time of his great defense before he was stoned. Now at least in this country to my knowledge no one has gone out deliberately to kill the messenger of the gospel at least not in the physical sense although they may have sought to do it in other ways at least not lately.

Yes in the time of the covenanters that happened and perhaps subsequently but would you not agree that the same spirit is still very much alive in the heart of man seeking to dispose of God's messengers by ridicule or neglect.

Spurgeon made the observation and I thought it was a very solemn observation when I read it. He made this observation and it's a long time since Spurgeon passed out of this life and this is what he had to say today and I'm quoting Spurgeon this same class he says and listen carefully to what he says this same class will be found among the children of godly parents among the children of godly parents notice Spurgeon's observation dedicated from their birth prayed for by loving piety listening to the gospel from their childhood and yet unsaved we look he says for these to come to Jesus we naturally hope that they will feast on the provisions of grace and like their parents will rejoice in Jesus Christ but alas he says how often it is the case they will not come no that is a sore and trying providence for any

Christian parent it is a matter of deep sorrow that those for whom they have been responsible for nurturing and parenting in life if they do not come despite the teaching that they have received and Spurgeon's observation was that some of these he doesn't say all of these but that some of these

who reject the gospel who are willing to kill the messenger of the gospel whatever way that takes shape or form come from that kind of unexpected source well let me ask are you in that category tonight my friend are you guilty of refusing the offer of the gospel that sets the marriage feast of Christ before you take care where your refusal is going to lead you the story is told of a ship owner who was once visited by a

Christian and in the course of conversation I take it was a business conversation the Christian asked the ship owner what is the state of your soul to which he replied my soul I have no time he said to take care of my soul I have enough to do just taking care of my ships in other words I am so taken up with my business I have no time to pay attention to my soul but you know what he wasn't too busy to die the following week he died suddenly and unexpectedly and Jesus poses the question for what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul for what can a man give in return for his soul the refusal of the royal marriage invitation let's pass on to our second point the royal reaction you know actions have consequences don't they and in this parable it is no different the consequences of refusal are twofold flimsy excuses and downright hostility expressed in their rejection and we read the king was angry and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city you see these people were saying in effect the king has nothing to do with me just as people say

[20 : 57] God has nothing to do with me he has no right to interfere in my life he has no relationship with me and I with him and I have no interest in him oh my friends we may think along these lines and believe all of that but the bible teaches otherwise you know whether we like it or not God is our rightful sovereign king and one day you and I will have to appear before this sovereign king king we will have to render an account to the sovereign king we will have to render an account to the one who is appointed by God as lord of lords and king of kings you see no matter the power or authority of earthly rulers they are all in subjection to the supreme ruler of the universe the king of kings kings of the earth set themselves says the psalmist and the rulers take counsel together against the lord and against his anointed say let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us and the lord and his anointed are terrified they cower in abject fear at the prospect of such rebellion oh no my friend that's not what the bible teaches but the king of kings regards such rebellion as derisory here is weak frail puny created man on the very mountain of arrogance waving his arms at the great creator god he who sits in the heavens laughs the lord holds them in derision then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury oh how dangerous for you or I or anyone else to rise up in mutinous defiance of almighty god and so we are told the king dispatches his army with instructions to destroy those who acted so defiantly and murdered the messengers note that it's not just themselves who were destroyed but their very city their very habitation is that not a frightening prospect are you saying surely there's no no call for such for such a display of divine power and wrath could they not be given another opportunity three times they had received the invitation three times they refused in defiance of the invitation oh my friend how many times do you think that you have received the invitation yes

God is long suffering but he is not all suffering patient but even as patience comes to an end do you remember what is written of the days of Noah because of the level of wickedness prior to the flood and we are told in the book of Genesis my spirit says God shall not contend with man forever these are solemn words my spirit shall not contend with man forever is that not a frightening thought to be given over by God and I referred to this this morning Paul teaching in his letter to the Romans God gave them up God gave them up it's a repeated refrain in that in the early chapter of that letter abundant by God and abandonment by God inevitably means destruction that's the exactly the picture that is portrayed for us in the parable there are devastating consequences to refusing the invitation we may think of it as something of no consequence something to be treated lightly something that we dismiss with a contemptuous wave of the hand

I can attend to that some other time but you can't my friend because you may not have the invitation another time and Jesus in this parable and in other parables demonstrates that the consequence of refusal are died he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city and you may be saying but God doesn't have an army oh let's assume for the moment that your assumption is correct then when you get home tonight read the book of lamentations which sets before us in poetry the awful pictures of destruction and Judah lamentations you know is not the original name of the book of lamentations lamentations was the name given to it by the

Greek translators who came after the exile when they didn't know Hebrew well anymore the original Hebrew title of the book is taken from the very first word in chapters 1 2 and 4 it's the word how h-o-w in Hebrew how in the world can this ever have happened how could God allow this to take place and you see as you read the poetry in that book it's meant to shock you and as you read through these poems you hear something of the circumstances that surrounded the destruction of Jerusalem thousands of people who died brutally savaged women mothers who were reduced to eating their children yes in Jerusalem prior to 586 BC when they were besieged and surrounded and they were starving they were reduced to cannibalism the cream of Judah citizens were taken into captivity and they couldn't worship God anymore because the temple was destroyed and it's not just the Babylonian forces who did this not just

Nebuchadnezzar who did this or at least his armies remember these armies were used by the sovereign king of kings is it nothing to you all you who pass by look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which was brought upon me which the Lord inflicted on the day of his future anger not the Babylonian forces but the Lord inflicted on the day of his future anger God did it and so you see Jesus could point back to history to examples that took place in the past history of the nation because of the of the rejection of God and he could point to the royal reaction in response to the rejection the royal reaction anger and destruction the refusal of the royal marriage invitation and thirdly the redirection of the invitation and you know the plans of the king didn't change why do [29 : 38] I say that because the wedding feast still went ahead yes with different guests but the wedding feast went ahead 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 find and those servants went out into the roads gathered all who were found both bad and good so the wedding hall was filled with guests and so we're given a picture of a filled wedding hall and in my mind it's suggestive perhaps more than suggestive of the ingathering of the Gentiles you remember Matthew's gospel focuses to the Jew first and then to the Gentile and so here you have the Jew was approached they were given ample opportunity and now the

Gentiles are being brought in and Matthew is concerned from the beginning to show us that the message of salvation as Paul expressed it as I have said is to the Jew first and also to the Greek that's the message of the gospel of the kingdom of heaven it's not just something for ethnic Israel yes it's to the Jews to whom the covenant promises were originally given in the days of Abraham but it's also for the Gentiles and here we have in this in this part of the parable in verses 8 to 10 he shows us how the Gentiles are brought in and he also reminds us of something very important and it is this that God's offer of the gospel is free it's a free offer of the gospel and the inducements to our accepting that free offer of the gospel are great and there's irony here too in verse 8 because you note then he said to his servants the wedding feast is ready but those invited were not worthy and seems to me that's a deliberate understatement not only were they not worthy they were murderers and so so Jesus uses this irony to understate and at the same time draw attention to the wickedness of those who had rejected the invitation and so when the king sends his servants out into the highways and byways out into the roads to gather anybody who happens to be standing there and to draw them in we sense the justice of it the rightness of it but we also see what an inducement they have to come to this dinner these were people not of rank not people you would expect to be at a royal wedding not people of importance and the king is now coming to them and giving them an invitation to come to the wedding feast that he has prepared for his son the homeless the hungry the needy they're all there and Paul teaches and writing to the Corinthians consider your calling brothers not many of you were wise according to worldly standards not not many were powerful not many were of noble birth and note it does not say not any were wise or powerful of noble birth but not many in other words there was a few in these categories and God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise he chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong he chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are why so that no human being might boast in the presence of God and isn't there a hint of this in the father's determination to or in the king's determination to honor his son it's not why he's so determined in his missionary effort there is to be a banquet and the banquet table is to be filled for a son the nations screaming into that banquet into that banquet hall to honor his son because he loves his son and the impression you get is there were no empty places no empty places the father is determined to have the son honored and he wants the son to be honored by people's being turned to him and so you see all of these are brought in and it's as if

it's as if in this in that part of the parable that we hear an echo from the book of Ezekiel where in the book of Ezekiel God says turn turn why will you die and it seems to me that I can paraphrase that here and the invitation is come come the feast is now ready redirection of the invitation the royal reaction the refusal of the royal marriage invitation and finally the removal of the inappropriately dressed the king came in to look at the guest you would expect that he was the one who had sent out the messengers so he came to see all those who had responded to the invitation and his eye focused upon one man and the reason that if we are told that he focused on this one man he had no wedding garment and so he speaks to him friend how did you get in here without a wedding garment and we're told he had no answer he was speechless remember all who were there were outsiders and yet this man stood out amongst all the outsiders how did he stand out amongst all the outsiders if it was all outsiders who were there and the answer that we get is this he had no wedding garment among all among all the outsiders you couldn't fail to miss this guy he had no wedding garment and the implication is that every other outsider guest who had come to the wedding banquet was wearing a special garment the wedding garment garment and the implication that you get from the parable is that the wedding garment has been provided by the king so what does this tell us about this man well maybe it tells us that he wanted to be a guest but he wanted to be a guest on his terms and not on the king's terms and you know my friend there are many people in the world like that yes they want salvation but it's on their own terms not on God's terms and you know what you cannot get salvation except on God's terms alone how did he get in some would suggest that he that he entered by some other way like the thieves and robbers that are spoken of in John's gospel I would not dismiss that out of hand why should I however that is not stated what I will say is this in my view there is a certain arrogance about this individual in effect he is saying I will dress as I choose and not as the king requires what it seems to me is saying in the old testament we are told of those whom the lord blesses what was true of them [39:08] I will greatly rejoice in the lord my soul shall exult in my god why for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation he has covered me with the robe of righteousness and garments and robe I understand to refer to the wedding garment in this parable so whether we regard this person as being a pseudo Christian or a self deceived person through ignorance resting on a false hope could be all of these things representative of pseudo Christianity or a representative of those who through ignorance are resting on a false hope but when questioned by the king there is a deafening silence the silence of guilt remember those who are described as coming are good and bad but they all required the same garment in other words there is but one way of salvation and that necessitates wearing the garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness in other words there is no way to the heavenly banquet except by trusting in Christ alone by faith in Christ alone there is no other way people say there are many ways to God but

Jesus says very definitely and very categorically I am the way I am the way there is no other way there is no other path I am the way says Jesus and so we read how the king got rid of this person how he removed this inappropriately dressed person who had got this far and you may have been congratulating himself that he had got this far and the king said to the attendants by demanded food cast him into the outer darkness in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth and I think everybody knows what that refers to it refers to the place of the last it refers to our lost eternity now I don't know if people still read Bunyan's Pilgrim's

Progress anymore but if you do do you remember after Christian arrived in the celestial city that he speaks of one called ignorance and he came across the river through the offices of the ferryman vain hope you know how graphic Bunyan describes all of these things and how meaningful the terms are and he came to the gates of the celestial city he was asked about his qualifications his certificate of entry and he had none he was silent and Bunyan states then I saw he says there was a way to hell from the gates of heaven as well as from the city of destruction and it is very possible that

Bunyan is basing that upon the words and the teaching of this parable and so Jesus says many are called but few are chosen that is many hear the outward call and may appear to respond but only those whose life is in accord with their profession can be sure of being chosen I'm going to conclude with this it's something I read a minister was speaking to a congregation on one time and he said to the congregation you know if God asked you what right do you have to enter his heaven and he was using the answers that some might give some answered like this I try to be good a good neighbor a good parent a good citizen

I did my best and I'm no worse than my fellow citizens and better than many a second group were asked and they were speechless the silence of the embarrassed the flustered and the guilty who know that they have nothing to say in their defense before the piercing judgmental look of a holy God and the third group responded in this way we have no right to enter heaven we can offer nothing by way of merit or commendation but we believe in Jesus Christ we trust in him alone for salvation and seek him for daily direction only the third group will qualify to enter how my friends in which group do you find yourself tonight you know it's a serious issue it is so serious that you cannot afford to dismiss it or cavalierly pretend that it doesn't affect you because it does it affects every one of us the refusal of the royal marriage invitation the royal reaction it's terrifying and then there is the redirection of the invitation aren't you glad there was a redirection of the invitation so that poor gentile sinners like you and me might hear the gospel and might avail ourselves of the opportunity to come to Christ and fourthly there is this solemn part of the parable the removal of the inappropriately dressed the man who arrogantly states

[46 : 46] I don't need the wedding garment and my friend what the Bible says is every one of us need it and without it we are naked in our shame before God and who can stand before God if he would mark an equity nobody let us pray us for to just to throw across an khi