

The Goodness and Severity of God.

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Date: 07 September 2025

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[0 : 00] Matthew 22. And again, Jesus spoke to me in prayer, saying,!

Tell them to the Lord, my dear, see, I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and bat-cars have been stored, and everything is ready.

Come to the wedding feast. But they paid no attention at the wedding, one to his farm, another to each of us, while the rest seized his servants, treated his family, and killed him.

The king was angry, and he sent his troops, and destroyed those members, and burned his sea.

Then he said to his servants, The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not ready.

Go to the main rose, and invite the wedding feast as a man that he found. And those servants went out into the rose, and gathered all who made a house, both good and bad.

[1 : 31] 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 yard. And he said to him, Friend, how did you get me here without a wedding yard?

And he was sweet. Then the king said to the servants, Binding, hand, and then harvesting into the outer house, in that place there will be weeping and the natching of the teeth.

For many are the poor, but a few are the children. Then in the very sea went and the Lord had a wedding in his law.

Well, good morning, everyone. Thank you. Just before we get into God's word, I just want to draw your attention to something the men's ministry are planning to put on.

After Smokin' Joes, there was some interest from a few friends to explore Christianity further. So we want to put something on for, at the moment, just for the guys.

[2 : 39] We're going to do this four-week series called Taste and See that Rory Schreiner from Perth Gospel Coalition has put together. We're going to put dinner on, barbecue.

Hopefully, if the weather's good, we're going to do the whole fire pit thing again. So please talk to me if you want to know more about the course, what's in it. Please be praying and thinking of friends you can bring along.

Please come along if you invite a friend. Like, we don't want to overwhelm it with Christians there.

But if you invite someone, even if you're not sure if they're going to turn up or not, come. I know that you can't guarantee whether they come or not.

But, yeah, let's be praying for it as a church family and let's give it a good hot go. Why don't we pray as we come to God's Word? Let's pray.

Father, your gospel is the aroma of life to some and the aroma of death to others. Father, I'm feeling insufficient for such things, such weighty things.

[3 : 50] So I pray that your Word might carry that weight for me, for us. Please give us humble ears to hear the words of your Son this morning.

In Jesus' name, amen. Well, I wonder if you like the king in this story, in the parable we've heard.

He sent troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

The man not wearing the right wedding garment, he binds him hand and foot and casts him into the outer darkness. One commentator finds the violence so repulsive they're saying this can't be representing God.

I thought our passage last week was hard. This might be harder. It challenges our understanding of God's goodness, I think.

It exposes in us any degree to which we have a Santa Claus theology of God, rather than the true and living God.

[5 : 06] It urges us to see both the goodness and the severity of God. So what is this story about?

How do we know the meaning of it? Well, we've just had a kids' talk, and if you're ever asking kids a question about the Bible, there's always three answers you can't get wrong.

God, Jesus, the Bible. Okay, let me add a fourth for us older ones. What does any part of Scripture mean?

What does this parable mean? There's an answer you can't get it wrong. It starts with C. Anyone know what the answer is? No, not the one I'm looking for.

There might be multiple here. Context. Context. You can't go wrong. Like, if you're unsure in a Bible study, just say context. Who were those invited, who were this first group invited who were destroyed?

[6 : 16] Context. Who's the good and the bad who were brought in, filling up the wedding hall? The answer is context. Now, who's the man with the wedding garment who's thrown out?

Context. Now, I'm laboring this point because... There are sheep who are going to be hearing God's word to you this morning, and you are his sheep.

But what you're going to be hearing is he's threatening you with hell. You're sure that... You feel like an imposter here.

You're sure that you're too unworthy. You're not chosen. Otherwise, you'd be more confident. You'd be less sinful. I don't feel guilty enough. There's some here...

You're going to be sure that Jesus is saying this to you. But the context, look at who he's speaking to. We are in the temple. He entered the temple in chapter 21, verse 23.

[7 : 20] He doesn't leave until chapter 24. He's talking to the religious leaders who are confident in themselves. They're confident in their pedigree.

They're the chosen descendants of Abraham. They're confident in their purity. They're wearing these... They're probably wearing these very lovely priestly garments. They're confident in their position as being above other Jews.

He is speaking to the confident. He is not speaking to those who lack confidence. Matthew's gospel tells us, Jesus' words, if you lack confidence that God loves you and has saved you, here's his words to you.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. A bruised reed he will not break. And a smouldering wick he will not quench. Yesterday I was trying to light candles outside in the wind. It was impossible to keep them alight.

[8 : 35] The wind just kept blowing it out. And you might feel like your faith is like that. You are so unconfident that you can keep that flame alight.

And Jesus' words to you is, I will not snuff you out. He doesn't get tired of your struggle to trust him. He speaks this parable to the confident. They're confident in themselves. So why the severity in this parable?

Like, it is severe language. Why? There's a Netflix series called Apple Cider Vinegar, and it's based on a true story.

And there's a young woman, Australian woman, called Mila Blake, who has tumours in her arm. And they're so life-threatening, the specialist says, we've got to amputate.

[9 : 42] Now, she's given a week to process that, but only a week because it's very, we've got to do it now. She comes to this meeting, board of medical professionals ready to help her, and she refuses the treatment.

She wants an alternative. She's done her research, and she wants natural therapy. She's come across this mistletoe therapy. And she said, it's my arm.

I want another option. And the head surgeon says, death. That's another option. Do you want to die? This is the reality that we are facing.

It's a really awkward scene. It's a huge escalation in language, in tone, in message, but we all know it's coming from a place of love.

Jesus has already warned those who are confident in themselves, your confidence means nothing if you're rejecting me. It means nothing if you're rejecting me.

[10 : 50] They perceive that his parables are warning them, and yet they don't pause to examine themselves and consider his warning. They want to get rid of this threat to their confidence.

And so this is a final warning. That's why there's an escalation in language, in tone. It's coming from a place of love. We're going to see in this parable two types of self-confidence and one group who have a very different confidence.

We're going to see the destruction of the worthy, feasting for the unworthy, and darkness for the self-assured. So let's look at verses 1 to 7.

Now, weddings are great. They're a great opportunity to offend and cause harm to family members. There's nothing like a wedding to offend someone.

Whether it's like the capacity of the venue and you don't issue invites to extended family or friends, or whether it's the heartbreaking decision of a parent who doesn't come.

[12:11] This invitation is to a royal wedding, to the heir. Now, who the bride is, I don't think matters.

There's other metaphors in Scripture where it matters a great deal, but here it's not the main point. To use the image of a wedding feast is tapping into what every Jew in that day understood the picture of salvation to be, the messianic banquet, looking forward to that time of salvation, of peace and joy forever.

It's like a banquet. And so Jesus is pushing himself, I'm that bridegroom. It's here. It's ready. Come. This ancient banquet, I think we picture a wedding reception where there's one meal. This lasts for days.

The word dinner can mean breakfast, like come. Come for breakfast, and then we see it keeps going into the nighttime. This is a long celebration and eternity, even, for what it represents.

[13:28] They were invited in advance, this first group of people. They had notice. So when the servants come out, they're saying, you're invited, now come. It's ready. That's their message.

It's here. You knew it was coming. It's here. But they would not come. Now, it's offensive.

It's disobedient to the king. This isn't just anyone inviting. It's the king. But look at the patience of the king.

Verse 4, he sends more servants. He could have just wiped his hands of them. He is patient, and he sends more servants. And this time, he tries to entice them, describing the meal.

No expense has been spared. I've killed the ox. It's ready. It's all at my cost. He's appealing to their imagination. It's going to be so good.

[14:34] Feast to your heart's content. Like, we've made the mistake. I had a slip of the tongue the other day where I told Sam what an all-you-can-eat buffet is. I've appealed to his imagination now.

That's what the king's doing. Come. It's a privilege to be invited. So see the goodness of the king, his patience.

When I was at Bible college, at morning tea times, there was something really popular, the Portuguese custard tarts. Yeah, okay, Tim goes to SMBC too. He's nodding.

Now, it left you with a dilemma because you wanted, really you should hear the end of that hour's lecture. But if you didn't get out there, you didn't get it.

Now, if you don't come now to the wedding feast, you can't come next Tuesday when you feel like it. It's ready now.

[15:48] You will miss out if you don't come. But they're indifferent.

Their lives, their farms, their businesses are more important. They seem to even find this insistence of the king a threat.

Probably like what we're seeing at the moment, that sovereign citizen mindset. They kill these messengers who keep insisting they come.

I think it's a threat to their personal sovereignty. So we need to see the severity of this king if his abundant goodness is repeatedly thrown in his face.

He is the king. It's his prerogative to execute justice. And he sends his army and destroys the murderers and burns her city. Now, the immediate application of those listening were the religious leaders.

[17:08] They did have every privilege as the Jewish people. All the promises are theirs. And they were invited well in advance. But they failed to actually come when the sun arrived.

I think we can rely on our privileges today too.

There's some people in the world, they never hear the gospel. They never meet a Christian. There's some who grow up in a church like this and they hear it every single week. But have you come?

Don't confuse privilege for actually coming.

There's others you might be visiting today and you've come to church because you're feeling some sort of spiritual pull on your life.

Can I just say, please be careful not to think you can come to God whenever you feel like it. But this moment is a final warning for these Pharisees who keep rejecting God's invitation.

[18:24] It may not be here next Tuesday. I don't know when the time is. I don't know when the time is, but neither do you is my point. The Portuguese custard tarts are now.

So please act. Whatever spiritual tug you're feeling, act on it. Act on it now. Well, the next group in the story, verses 8 to 10, helps us know if we've come to Jesus or not.

9 and 10. 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. The phrase, both bad and good, I think challenges the basis on which we think God calls us.

The main roads are likely leading into the city, and so it's the junction where everyone comes through those main roads. You get all types.

[19:48] Rich, poor, moral, immoral, employed, beggar, lots of friends, lonely. All types are here, and all are invited.

Whether they are good or bad was not even a criteria. When they issued the invitation, they didn't go, is that a good person?

Is that a bad person? It wasn't even a criteria. It's got nothing, nothing, nothing to do with your goodness, and it's got nothing to do with your badness. It's all got to do with the abundant goodness, the freeness of the king's invitation.

That's who's in the wedding feast. Those who were there based on the king's free invitation.

It's got nothing to do with you. The famous 16th century preacher, I think it was 16th century, I should have looked that up, but Charles Spurgeon, he said you always want beggars at your party.

[20:59] Because those who are entitled and they go to restaurants all the time, they go to parties all the time, when the roast lamb comes out, they go, hmm, yeah, nice, that's good.

But you get a beggar in your party, and the beggar's going, wow, wow, look at that. Look at that.

Look at the canapes or canaps, as some people like to call them, and they're cheering.

This is incredible. Their eyes are darting, going, look at this place. It's beautiful. Wedding hall. And they're so grateful and amazed that they're there.

They're feasting, not just with their mouths, but in their heart. They're just, two hours ago, I was on the street, and here I am. They're celebrating the king's goodness to them through his son.

Are you amazed that the king would invite you? That your name would be written on one of those little place cards in the kingdom of heaven?

[22:07] Are you amazed? Are you amazed? Are you entitled? Of course God would want me. Or are you a beggar going, wow, look at God's goodness to me.

He just keeps pouring goodness and goodness. I can't believe I'm here. Do you look at how you came to faith and go, you know, if it wasn't for God choosing me, I wouldn't have come.

I would have resisted his invitation again and again and again. Those who are in the wedding hall, they're feasting on the king's goodness.

That's how you know if you've come to the gospel invitation. That's where true confidence is in the king's goodness.

We are meant to be confident in his goodness. So destruction for the worthy, feasting for the unworthy. But then we've got this unexpected ending to the story.

[23:22] Verses 11 to 14, Now it feels like the king has double standards.

He said, hey, good and bad, come in. And then he's just so harsh for not wearing proper clothes.

He's tied up, presumably so that there's no way of getting back in.

This is permanent. In the darkness, away from the presence of the king. It is a picture of judgment, of hell.

Now these are tricky verses. These are tricky verses. And the meaning is debated. Many see the wedding garments symbolise what's expected of those who call themselves believers, whether that's faith or repentance or a transformed life, good deeds or even baptism.

Others see symbolism of being clothed in Christ's righteousness because they infer that the guests either couldn't afford garments or didn't have time to get them, so the king provided them.

[24:46] Can I just say maybe? That's where I'm up to in my thinking. Maybe. Let's see what is clear here.

The man is speechless. He has no excuse. He knows he's guilty. The consequence is serious.

It is a strong warning. This isn't optional. Jesus says the lesson from the parable, verse 14, many are called but few are chosen.

Chosen there, I think all these things put the emphasis on it's the king and not the man who decides what the proper response is.

It's the king who decides what the proper response is. I think this man illustrates another way of throwing God's goodness back in his face.

[26 : 05] Now, I'm a fan of the BBC Sherlock Holmes series, Sherlock. Now, there's a scene where Sherlock is needed by the royal family for his detective work and government agents come to collect him.

He's just gone out of the shower and he's urged, you want to put clothes on where you're going. And he's already worked out, because he's Sherlock, that he's going to go to Buckingham Palace. Now, the scene cuts to him sitting on a lounge in Buckingham Palace, still only wearing a towel around him. Now, the scene is funny. Like, it is funny.

But it's only funny, it only works as a joke, because Sherlock is needed by the royal family.

Otherwise, it would just be plain arrogance. Choosing not to wear clothes, knowing full well where he was going, it made a statement.

This is on my terms. Not yours, even though you're royalty. He was trying to make a statement, and that was fine for that setting. I think it's kind of like that.

[27 : 19] This man knows where he is going. He's going to a royal wedding, and the privilege of that, invited by the king. And he seems to be making a statement, I will act on my terms, not yours.

Tim Keller, a pastor, points out, the only person thrown out is the one who is self-assured he's fine. There's a way to treat God's gospel call as cheap grace.

It's that Santa Claus theology of it's God's job to forgive. It doesn't matter how I live, if I please him or not.

It's God's job to be good to me. It doesn't matter. The true mark of someone who's feasting on the privilege that you're invited to the wedding feast, the mark is, as Paul describes, the desire to live a life worthy of our calling.

Now, none of us are living, are yet living that life. We're not. We're not there yet. But we're meant to have the Apostle Paul's posture.

[28 : 53] I want to just read a verse from Philippians 2. Not that I have obtained this already, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. If you're feasting on his goodness, you're not flippant going, oh, just waltz in.

You want to get ready for that day when we're there. You know it's on his terms, not yours. You know it's on his terms, to just treat him on your own terms is to throw his goodness back in his face.

So we need to see the goodness of God in this parable. None of us deserve an invitation. Even when we resist, he pursues, he repeatedly calls, he's trying to persuade, come.

And his call is not based on whether we're good or bad. It's simply out of his freeness, out of his grace. But we also need to see his severity.

[30 : 13] There is nothing left for God to give us if we keep throwing his goodness back in his face. There's only severity. The absence of his light in utter darkness.

Now, maybe you struggle with the doctrine of hell. I do.

I hope you do. It's a terrifying thought. Please get rid of those cartoon notions of torture chamber.

I think, use the picture here, you're just shut out of the goodness of God. There's so much goodness. I know there's lots of hard stuff in life, but we have so much goodness.

Whatever we're going through, it's a terrifying thought of all that goodness being withdrawn. Listen to whose lips these are coming from.

[31 : 21] This is Jesus' own lips, and it's days, days, before he goes to the cross. His strong warning is coming from a place of love, and he's not saying, do better, be better.

He's saying, come to me. All the severity of God is directed at the bridegroom himself. He's done everything.

The feast is ready. Come. Come. But if we're asking, like Miller did, I want another option, death is another option.

The choice is to possess God or be separated from God. If you possess God, you can't be half joyful when you get there. You're going to be feasting.

If you don't possess God, you can't be half miserable. You don't have any of God. It's just... Now, C.S. Lewis, he brings out what we are really asking.

[32 : 33] If you're struggling with the idea of hell, C.S. Lewis helps bring out what we're really asking. He says, in the long run, the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell is itself a question.

What are you asking God to do? To wipe out their past sins and at all costs to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help?

But he has done so on Calvary. To forgive them? They refuse to be forgiven.

To leave them alone? Alas, I'm afraid that is what he does. We're going to share the Lord's Supper this morning.

And I hope you're hearing in the word of God and the opportunity of hearing it. And I hope you hear and see it and taste it in the Lord's Supper.

[33 : 48] The King's invitation is still ringing out today. Come. It's ready. Come. You're invited. Come. Come.

Come. Come. Come. Come. It declares his goodness. But it's not for the worthy. It's for the unworthy.

It's the unworthy who are feasting. It's got nothing to do whether you're good or bad. Now, I think another pastor, Alistair Begg, gets this across by imagining the thief on the cross.

You've got Jesus in the middle, the thief on the cross, who's promised paradise. And Alistair Begg says, I can't wait to find that fellow when he gets to heaven. You've never been to a Bible study.

You've never been baptized. You didn't know a thing about church membership, and yet you made it. How did you make it? And then the angels there must have said the same thing.

[34 : 53] What are you doing here? And the man said, well, I don't know. And the angel says, hold on, I've just got to get my supervising angel.

And the supervising angel comes over. Sir, we just have a few questions. Are you clear on the doctrine of justification by faith? Never heard about it in my life.

And eventually, in frustration, on what basis are you here? And he says, the man on the middle cross said I can come. That's it.

And he says, you can come. If you're feeling terror that you're not one of the chosen, please eat. It's the unworthy who feast. If you have no hope in yourself, you are fit for heaven.

[36 : 02] He wants beggars going, wow. So as we share the Lord's Supper, let's feast and feel the privilege of the upward call, knowing he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion.

Come to the wedding feast. Let's pray. Lord, you are so good. We don't deserve to be invited.

And I know in my life, I did everything I could to resist you, even now, resisting you often. And you pursue us.

You're patient. You convince our hearts. And Lord, that you would choose the unworthy to sing your praises. You are so good.

Lord, I pray that by your word and your spirit, you would convince every heart in this room that you are good. And cause us to come. Not confident in ourselves, but confident in the Lord Jesus and him alone.

[37 : 15] In his name I pray. Amen.