

The Joyful God

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[0 : 01] Happy Feast of Pentecost to you. We're reminded of that because of the red banners behind us, and ultimately we're reminded of that because of the Scriptures, knowing that God came first in His Son at Christmas, but God came again also to all of us by His Holy Spirit, and so this day is set aside for that, though not much attention will be drawn to the Spirit throughout this, but know this, and that is that it's by the Holy Spirit that we know that Jesus is the Christ, that He is our Lord and our Savior, and apart from Him, we can't possibly know that as He reveals Himself to us by the Spirit and through the Scriptures.

So we look into these Scriptures again today. We do continue on with the sermon series that we've been on, and you're going to want to turn to page 827 of your Bible as we look at this parable.

Now, today concludes our series that's based on this ministry called Life Explored, and we've run through several titles for this sermon series, including a good, truthful, fulfilling, generous, trustworthy, liberating, and today the title is A Joyful God.

All good titles, but not all suited for the text like today. Well, The Joyful God was better suited for a text that was a few weeks ago based on a parable that was about a lost son that followed a couple of other parables about something that was lost when a joyful celebration erupted when the lost item was found or the sinner repented for that.

While today's title was given A Joyful God, I'm going to rename it A Jealous God. Now, I know we don't think of jealousy being really a good thing, and humanly speaking, that's true because our jealousy is so closely linked to envy, and that is a sin, and according to some in the Christian tradition, a really deadly one.

[2 : 22] But divinely speaking, jealousy is a good attribute, and I hope that you'll see that. Today's reading follows a question that was put to Jesus back in chapter 21. The question being, by what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?

A good question, if sincere, but coming from the chief priests and the elders, a cynical one. More than likely a question coming not just cynically, but sinfully out of jealousy and envy.

After two parables, Jesus ends with this parable and invitation to all, including religious professionals and professing followers of Jesus.

As all invitations are concerned, there is an invitation, an inviter, and the invited. So let's look at those three things this morning. An invitation, an inviter, and the invited.

So, what's the occasion for this invitation? The occasion for the invitation is a wedding banquet, we're told. It doesn't get much better than a wedding banquet.

[3 : 29] Who doesn't like a good wedding? We may think of other occasions, but this is the best. Better than a birthday, an anniversary, and maybe even a coronation.

The occasion, of course, is a wedding banquet, but not just any wedding banquet. It's a royal wedding banquet. And this is not the king's wedding, but we are told that it's the son's wedding.

It's the king's son, and even though a bride isn't mentioned, it's assumed. Now, the Bible is filled with imagery comparing God's relationship with his people, like that of a groom to a bride.

There are a lot of other images, though, too. We know as we read through the Bible, we survey it and realize that this relationship between God and his people is like a covenant people, or a priesthood, or a body, or a temple, or a nation.

Hosea and Paul draw on this groom and bride imagery, and some would add the Song of Songs as well. Husband and wife and union is an image of Christ and his church.

[4 : 31] Royal wedding banquet is a lovely image of the union between God and his people. You'll remember that Jesus' first miracle is the occasion of a wedding banquet in John's Gospel.

John uses this imagery again in the book of Revelation. And the kingdom of God isn't just like any banquet, but particularly a royal one. And according to Jesus' parable in this Gospel of Matthew, that's actually what the invitation is about.

Well, now let me ask you, have you ever received a royal wedding invitation? We're given no description of this invitation here, but a lot goes into a royal wedding invitation, not to mention the month, the day, and the location.

The parable doesn't go into these details. But this is a generous invitation, which seems open-ended. Not everyone is invited, actually, at first.

And like a British royal wedding invitation, few are chosen for the initial invitation list. But the invitation list is expanded from its initial sending.

[5 : 45] And so what's important about this occasion or this event? So we turn now from the invitation to the inviter. Who's extending this invitation? The all-important thing about a royal wedding banquet is the one extending the invitation.

I know that we think that a wedding is the bride's day. And that's largely a modern interpretation of a wedding and a banquet. The king is the one issuing the invitation.

And this is really important as far as this invitation goes and the wedding goes. It's really much, almost all about the king. The thing about a wedding and a marriage is securing succession when it comes to royalty.

When the king's child is married, then the kingdom, we know, should continue. The groom and bride are really excited about this day. But the king is just as much a focus as the wedding and the couple.

In fact, this wedding banquet is all about the king as we read through the parable. The action in the parable begins and ends with the king. The king is, in a word, awesome.

[6 : 53] Look at all of the king does in the parable. Verses 2 and 3, notice the king's action. You can look down, but I'll summarize. He gave, he sent, and then he invited.

But they would not come. Verse 4, he sent, invited, and prepared. But listen to this, they ignored, excused, and then killed the servants.

Verse 9, again the king sent, invited, and now gathered and filled the banquet hall with guests. Though unworthy, good and bad were invited.

And we might as well add, and undesirable. Well, this is our God, King. He is an awesome God, and jealous too. Now the title of this Life Explored message teaching was, A Joyful God.

But it would be better, a jealous God. He is joyful, there's no doubt about this. But this parable reveals what the first commandment tell us, and that is that God is a jealous God.

[7 : 58] And he will not share his greatness, his glory, his goodness with any other God. The jealousy of God is a loving response to the rejection of God, which is kind of like the wrath of God, which is a long-suffering response of the rejection of God.

Well, after the rejection of his invitation, the first two times, God then issues a judgment. He disciplines those who murdered his servants in the second wave of invitations.

He gave those murderers what they had coming to them. The awesome and jealous God gave them not only what they deserved, but actually what they wanted. They would not come.

Life without a king and his son is what they got in the end, which is death. Well, the knowledge and power of our awesome and jealous God is expressed toward a certain guest also in this story.

Not only did the king meet justice upon those who killed his servants, he also met justice upon someone who tried to sneak in as if faith didn't matter.

[9 : 10] A friend, unprepared, came unrepentant. He came thinking the grace of the king required no interest or no intention of change on his part.

And here we see what Paul once said about the jealousy of God in 2 Corinthians chapter 11. Just reach into your Bible and turn to that with me. 2 Corinthians chapter 11, you'll find it on page 969.

Look all the way down to the bottom of the page. This is what Paul says about the jealousy of God. He says, I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness, he calls it.

Do bear with me, for I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin of Christ.

We get a bit of the picture of the jealousy of God, this good divine jealousy that God actually has for his people. God is so awesome that he dares to express his jealousy for the love of his son.

[10 : 21] He wants to present his son with a bride, a spouse perfectly dedicated to the son. And all he wants then is a church, a people, a bride devoted to the son, his son.

Now if you were a king or a queen, isn't that what you'd want in your son's bride? If you were the bride, wouldn't you also want to give that to your groom? Wouldn't you want a groom that invokes that kind of devotion in you?

Our God is jealous and awesome in that respect. That's what he wants for us and for his groom, his son. So that's about the inviter.

What about those who are invited then? What does this parable say about the guests? Who is it that received this invitation? Well, finally, these guests we look at now.

Notice the word guest is used only a few times after the first two invitations were issued. The description is used also, though, which is those who were invited at first, but finally those who are the guests.

[11 : 30] And do you remember earlier when I said this, like a British royal wedding, few are chosen for the invitation list. I know that kind of tweaked anything for you, but actually this isn't like a British royal wedding.

Little to no one would reject a British royal wedding invitation, would they if that were given to you? Think about that. Just about any royal wedding invitation, for that matter, would elicit a positive response.

People would really take that seriously and want to make sure that they showed up for that wedding. The whole idea of an invitation list is actually to invite people that will accept the invitation.

The monarch doesn't traditionally invite his or her enemies. But apparently God didn't get those instructions. Our God and king invites his enemies to the royal wedding banquet.

The king in this parable gets it backwards, it looks like, or upside down. It seems to invite those who will reject the invitation or those who are invited first.

[12 : 32] In fact, actually all of us are his enemies. Some of God's creation will reject him outright and right up into the very end.

Some will go as far as to kill his servants and his messengers, even though many are chosen for this occasion. Jesus makes this comment at the end, many are called, but few are chosen.

We hear the word calling and we think maybe vocation or profession. But Jesus actually has something else in mind here. He has those who respond actually in mind.

Those who respond to the invitation are those in the end are those who are actually chosen. All are called, many are called, but few are chosen. Our first calling is to serve the Lord with all of our life.

It's not just our skills, and our capacities, our professions that we get paid for. But not only are we called, we must be chosen or clothed.

[13 : 43] In the parable, this friend that I go back to of the king arrives apparently in the wrong clothes. What is this all about? Is God into fashion?

And I think again the apostle Paul is actually quite helpful here. So, go back to 2 Corinthians with me again. And turn to chapter 5.

So just go over two pages. Just a little bit of a longer reading though. Beginning in verse 2 at chapter 5. Let's look at what Paul has to say actually about being clothed and the spirit on this feast of Pentecost.

For in this tent, he's actually talking about the body here. We groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. If indeed, by putting it on, we may not be found naked.

For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened. Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

[14 : 46] He who has prepared us for this very thing, who has given us the spirit as a guarantee. I think this is actually helpful in thinking about this friend who shows up with the wrong clothes on.

Must be clothed with the clothing that only comes from God for righteousness and by his spirit. Jesus doesn't explicitly have the spirit in mind here.

He doesn't name the spirit, but implicitly I think it is. Like Paul, Jesus has heavenly matters in mind. We need the clothes and confirmation only given by the Holy Spirit.

He is the seal of the Father and the Son's grace which gives us faith for life. And this faith is the righteousness of Christ. Not by our works, but of the works of Christ right up and to and through the cross.

God is so here we have this invitation, the inviter, this great and awesome and jealous God. Yes, jealous that we would be devoted and absolutely dedicated to his Son and those of us who are invited as well.

[16 : 01] Well, do you remember where we started here? A wedding banquet is a joyous occasion for most. God is jealous for those chosen ones. chosen ones who are called but as many are called, few are chosen.

And I can focus as I end on the question of are you chosen? But I want to end with actually also what does it mean to be called?

Being a chosen one remains responding to the call of God in our life. But notice in this text that Jesus says in the parable that those who were chosen actually were also the ones that were sent out.

They were the ones that were sent out to call others so that they might be chosen too. And this exercise that we've been doing in these sermon series on Life Explored is preparing St. John's to become those ones who are calling so that others might know that they're chosen.

So friends, as we end here with this sermon series today, think about the fall when we're going to kind of launch into this Life Explored series again, not by way of sermon but by way of invitation to those who might come to know Jesus.

[17 : 21] That we might be those called and chosen ones that are sent actually in to the world to invite people to the wedding banquet of the King.

And do that and always by the power and the boldness of the Holy Spirit. I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.