

The Joyful God

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[0 : 00] Okay, so we are looking at Matthew 22. This is a parable of Jesus. And parables are just stories that Jesus told.

And in these stories, what you'll find is that strange things often happen in these parables. And the point of the story is often in the plot twists.

And this week we have a super twisty story. So I'm going to talk about this in three sections. First, the invitation. Second, the human response.

And third, God's response. So first, the invitation. Second, the human response. And third, God's response. So first, the invitation. Two, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

So the story goes, there's going to be a royal wedding. So this is huge, right? This is a monarchy. This is a huge deal. And it's the king's son that's getting married.

[1 : 05] So it's going to be a lavish feast. You're not going to get a bigger event than this. Incredible food. Incredible wines. Dancing. So, so joyful.

So, so special. I went to a wedding about eight or nine years ago in Florida of a guy I met while studying in Switzerland.

And he was a really nice guy. Very clever. Harvard and Oxford educated. So there was, you know, money and taste. And so I, you know, they don't always go together.

In this case, they did. So I was in part of the wedding party. I was preaching at his wedding. And after the ceremony, it was quite a long trip to the reception venue.

So it's massive, like kind of limo, super fancy limo bus thing. And somebody said, would you like a drink? I said, sure, that's fine. Opens up a case.

[2 : 03] And the case was filled with Dom Perignon. Like it was a case of Dom Perignon. They go for a couple of hundred dollars a bottle. And there's a whole case. And from what I understood, from what I saw, this was just for the limo ride.

This was just for the limo ride. And I remember thinking, this is going to be a different kind of wedding that I'm going to today. The same guy is getting married. No, is getting, sorry, turning 40 in two weeks' time.

And his wife called me up or emailed me a couple of weeks ago and said, listen, I want to fly you down for two days. He lives in the States. I want to fly you down for a couple of days for his 40th birthday.

His wife said, and he lives quite far away from the nearest airport. And he goes, it's okay, there'll be a driver waiting for you at the airport. And she goes, it's going to be quite nice. There's about 10 people. They're flying in a chef from Chicago.

It's going to be completely ridiculous, this event. Every now and then in life, a party comes along or an event comes along that you simply, you don't want to miss this thing.

[3 : 10] It's going to be huge. Back to the text. What the king was planning, this was one of those things.

The event of a lifetime. And now the twist. The first twist in the story, verse 3. And he sent his servants to call them who had been invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.

Servants call those who were invited to the wedding feast and they would not come. So back in the days, ancient Near East weddings worked like this.

They were kind of a two-part affair. The invitation was a two-part affair. So you got invited, but because timing was pretty fluid back in those days, so they couldn't say like Tuesday, 2 o'clock, June 22nd.

Timing was pretty fluid back in those days. So first they sent out this invite and said, you're invited. It's going to be generally around this time. And when everything was in place, then you send out your servants and say, right, it's on.

[4 : 15] Right now it's happening. It's time to come. So that's what the servants did. And they didn't want to come. And it was a huge honor to be invited. But they didn't want to go to the best party.

They didn't want to go to the thing which would be the best party they've ever been to in their entire lives. Verse 4. Again, he sent other servants saying, tell those who were invited.

See, I've prepared the dinner. I've got the oxen and the calves. And it's all ready. Come to the wedding feast. So perhaps the king thinks, well, maybe they just misunderstood the invitation. Maybe there's been a mistake. So the king sends out more servants to the same people with more details. Like, you don't want to miss this. The food's on the table.

It's super fresh. You really, really want to come to this thing. It's amazing. It's just this incredibly generous offer from a very gracious king who sends the second invitation out.

[5 : 14] And he is saying, I have done all the work. I've done all the work. Just come. Just come. So that's the first point.

That's the amazing invitation. And the kingdom of God is like this, Jesus said. Okay. Let's look at the human response, part two.

So there's a couple of responses here, aren't there?

And they're quite ruthlessly honest. You know, the first response is just indifference. They paid no attention. They just went back to their lives. Farm business, family, farm, whatever.

They just went back to their lives. There's nothing wrong with farming or business. It's just a question of priorities, though. The response was open hostility. They murdered the servants.

[6 : 09] They killed the messenger. Now, as servants of Christ now, as sometimes we express our faith, we can expect some people to be curious about Jesus and excited to know more about Jesus.

Others might be indifferent and others might be openly hostile. But who was Jesus saying these words to back in the days? Who was he talking to? Who was he talking about?

He was talking to the religious leaders. That's the context. We'll get back to that in a moment. The Pharisees, the religious elite back in the days, were the first invited guests to be part of the kingdom of God.

They, in fact, themselves had been talking about the coming Messiah. They had been talking about the coming kingdom. To use the, you know, to use the language of the parable here.

For centuries, these guys had had the invitation on the mantelpiece. For centuries. And this was the day. This was the big day. Jesus was here. And what do they do with him?

[7 : 12] They mostly reject him. And actually, they want to kill him. So we have this invitation, this incredibly generous invitation from a patient God.

We have the human response. Indifference. Hostility. Astounding indifference. Astounding hostility. And now what's God's response? Verse 8.

The king was angry. And he sent troops and destroyed those murderers and burnt their cities. Oof. That's an extreme response. I'm going to come back to it.

I actually will honestly come back to it. Verse 8. Verse 8 and forwards. We get a whole nother round of invitation, humor, and response.

And God's response. We get a whole nother loop of it. Verse 8. Then he said to the servants, The wedding feast is ready, and those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you can find.

[8 : 17] And those servants went out onto the roads and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad. It's a great story, isn't it? The elite aren't interested. So let's just invite the proletariat. Let's just invite all the people in the streets.

Anyone we can find, just go out and invite them in. It's a wonderful picture of the kingdom, isn't it? It was a great story. I love the story. I read it a few months ago.

It happened in January this year. A guy called Will Novak. Does that ring a bell with anyone? Anyone know the story of Will Novak? All right. So there's a guy called Angela who's getting married.

So this is a true story. Angelo's getting married, and he emails a really old good friend of his called Will Novak, who lives in New York, to come to his stag do, which is going to be an 80s-themed stag do.

I think it's a true story. But Angelo miswrites Will Novak's email address. Just leaves out the middle name, I think.

[9 : 16] And so it goes to another Will Novak. But this Will Novak lives in Arizona. So he gets this email inviting him to this random stag do.

Will Novak from Arizona replies, I don't know who you are, but I'm totally in. I'm 100% in. I'm coming.

I'm coming. And so the groom, Angelo, is like, wow. Okay. Great. So Will Novak. It's a true story. Will Novak goes to GoFundMe, sets up a GoFundMe account to raise \$700 for the airfare, ends up raising \$5,000, goes there, rents Maseratis, and then gives all the extra money to the bride and groom, has a fantastic time.

That's the story. I love it. Surprise invitation. A surprise invitation that is accepted with gusto. I love this.

This is what we have here. All right. We are the recipients of this surprise invitation from God. Come and be part of the family of God.

[10 : 27] Come to the banquet. Which is why we should... The parable, in some ways, it's saying we weren't on the first tier. We don't deserve this.

Right? Which is why being part of the family of God should always be a great surprise to us and it should be a great source of gratefulness for us. We should be thinking, me, a Christian?

That's incredible. I look at my life. That's incredible that I am a Christian. That's amazing. Thank you, God, for this invitation.

I didn't deserve it. So we have the invite, this incredibly generous invitation. And what's the human response? The second loop of human response? Verse 10. The wedding hall was filled with guests. It's brilliant. It's a great story, isn't it? This is the heart of God, this full room. The banquet hall is full. God has a passionate longing to share his love with men and women and boys and girls.

[11 : 33] The wedding hall is full. And this is where we want the parable to end. Right here. If this was a movie, the camera would pan across the banquet hall, across the really diverse crowd, everyone smiling, these cute little kids, little bow ties, running between the tables, you know.

Under the tables, playing games, and the camera freezes on the happy couple. Music plays, credits roll, it's perfect, let's go home.

That's how we want the story to finish. But it doesn't. It's this crazy twist right at the end. Verse 11. And then the king came to look at the guests, and he saw there was a man who had no wedding garment.

And he said to him, how'd you get in here with no wedding garment? And he was speechless. And then the king said to their tenants, bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. That's the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For many are called, but few are chosen. Come on, what? It was such a great story. Seems so unfair, doesn't it? Seems very unfair. Because you could read this and you could say, well, of course the guy didn't have nice clothes on.

[12 : 43] You just pulled him off the street. Or, seems really unfair, perhaps he was really poor. Perhaps he didn't have any nice clothes. What do we do with this?

In verse 12, we can't say, well, he didn't have time. We can't actually say, well, no, the reason was he was actually really poor.

Because the king said to him, how come you're not wearing the proper clothes? And he was speechless. See, that's the time when he says, well, what you've got to understand is X, Y, Z. But he was silent. He didn't actually have an excuse for looking grubby at this very special occasion. And what the clothes represent here is his attitude towards this event.

It's like, you know, you go to a funeral and somebody's sitting there with flip-flops and board shorts and a tank top. It shows an inner contempt for what's going on. They're just, or perhaps they're just oblivious to the significance of the invitation.

[13 : 53] So the guy in the parable, I think, is the person who sort of wants to know God, is kind of interested in God. It's like, God's cool. Jesus is cool. Yeah, I love that the stories are cool.

Yeah, totally. You know, I'm cool. It's cool. It's cool. Cool, cool, cool, cool, cool, cool, cool. Right? But they just go on living exactly as they did before.

There's no change in their life. Folks, it is a free and incredibly gracious invitation to be part of the family of God, the wedding banquet, using the words of the parable.

But we don't take the invitation lightly. The invitation should change us. The invitation should change us. The garments that it talks about, these wedding garments, these are like, these represent, it's a way of life that shows you genuinely want to be there.

It's a life of repentance. It's a life of Holy Spirit living. Okay, so there's this second invite.

[14:58] There's this second human response. And now, God's response. Judgment. And it's really full on. How are we to think about this? It's destruction. It's darkness.

And it's God's doing. So I went to a park last weekend with my kids. And my daughter, Bea, who loves being up here, wandered off and quite far away from me into a sand pit where there's three other kids playing, digging in the sand.

She sat down with them and just started digging. I didn't know these kids. Neither did she. Sat down digging in the sand. I was a ways off. And I noticed, I looked over and I noticed that the other, actually it was four kids.

The other four kids all were holding up their hands like this. And I thought, oh no. I think I know what's going on here. So I raced over there and I said to the other kids, so what's going on? What's going on, kids?

And they said, we just took a vote. And we decided that this little girl has to go away.

[16:12] We don't want her with us. And I was so angry. And I was so sad. And I took Bea away after saying some words to the children.

And I said to one of the kids, where's your parents? I said, where's your parents? And they wouldn't tell me. So I went up to these, I saw some adults 50 feet away.

I went up to these first group of adults that I saw. And I said, are those your children over there?

And there was a group of adults talking. And they said, yes. And I said, they just voted that my daughter should leave.

And I said, perhaps this is a teachable moment for you and your kids. And they said, yes, yes.

Thank you very much. Thank you, thank you. Yeah, thanks for telling us. And I walked away quickly.

I was getting a bit weepy. I desperately want to protect my children from the selfishness of the world. I desperately want to do that, to protect them from the pain of the world.

[17:11] And I am just a very average father. God, who is infinitely perfect and infinitely pure in heart, wants to infinitely do that more.

And how is God going to do this? This is how. He won't let evil exist forever. And he does not want sin to continue to hurt his children.

Like, I don't want sin to hurt my children. I don't want selfishness to hurt my children. He doesn't want sin and selfishness to hurt his children. So one day, judgment will come. And he will do away with evil in the world.

And one of the ways he does that, this parable tells us, is that he will reject those who have rejected Jesus. He will reject those who have rejected Jesus. Whether these are people who refuse the invitation because they're hostile, they're sort of indifferent, or because they're kind of not really in, would like to be not really that, not really part of it.

God will reject those who reject Jesus. This is God's plan to renew his world. God will reject those who have rejected Jesus. God will reject those who have rejected Jesus.

[18:24] God will reject those who have rejected Jesus. Let me finish up. In the previous chapter, Matthew 21, it says that the chief priests were really irritated with Jesus.

Because he was so popular with people. Particularly the people on the lower sort of strung of the social ladder. He was really, really popular with people.

And so Matthew 21, if you read it, you'll see Jesus is preaching, preaching, preaching. And all of a sudden, they jump in and just interrupt him. And they say in verse 32 of 20, they say, By whose authority are you here?

Those are their words. In other words, who do you think you are saying all this stuff? And Jesus' response is, he says a couple of parables. And then in verse 43, he summarizes it. It's very succinct.

This is what he says to the religious elites. He says, The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to people producing its fruits. And then to drive it home, he tells the parable before us.

[19 : 30] There's your context right at the end there. Folks, the kingdom of God has been given to us. We are recipients of an unexpected and undeserving and incredible and beautiful invitation.

And the invitation didn't become because we're super cool or clever or extra humble even. God just, he flew the doors open. And he said, Come in.

Be part of my family. And he calls it. He said, It's like a banquet. It's like a feast. It's this huge gospel adventure that he invites us into. And it's a place where we find life and joy.

And it's an invitation. And it's a place that should change us. I want us to just end with a little bit of space to think about these words of Jesus.

And to pray about these words of Jesus. So Emma's going to come and play something for us for a couple of minutes. How could you pray? Well, it's Pentecost Sunday. You could pray that the Holy Spirit would just alive in your hearts to the incredible privilege it is to be part of God's family, to be invited to his banquet.

[20 : 53] You could pray for the Holy Spirit to continue to do that work with this invitation, this presence in this party. Being in this place just changes you. Perhaps you're not a Christian or just on the edges.

Folks, the invitation is sitting there. Sitting on the mantle. Jesus invites you. He says, I want to have a relationship with you. The doors are wide open.

I've done all the work. You just have to come on in. Perhaps you pray in these few minutes. You could just invite. Just accept that invitation.

Say, yes, Jesus. I want to be in a relationship with you. And folks, if you do that, you don't have to have the right words in your heart and mind. Whatever words are in your brain, you just say those to Jesus.

He'll hear it. If you pray, and if you actually do do that, would you tell somebody? You could also pray if you like, with people around you if you'd like as well. So, Emma, thank you, just for a couple of minutes.

[21 : 59] And then Sean's going to come up and pray for us. ■■ hip-eels are in the peaceExpress. That's it. Yes. energies of God, he feels arada.

In \$27 million. Yes. As you can pray for us, I may not be afraid.