

R.S.V.P.

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you, our God, that you have called us together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to offer you our whole heart's worship and to be informed, instructed, disciplined by your word written as we are unable to hear it by your indwelling spirit.

Amen. And the particular passage that we're looking at this morning is Matthew 22, 1 to 9.

And as you were told, it is on page 22 of the New Testament section of your pew Bible. The title of this sermon is RSVP.

You are invited to respond. And it points really to one of the unique things about the Christian Gospel.

The Christian Gospel does not consist in a law that must be obeyed. It consists rather in an invitation that must be answered.

[1 : 2 3] And this parable is the story of how that invitation is answered and is in itself an invitation to you from within the personal circumstances of your life to answer that invitation and to make the whole of your life indeed an answer to that invitation.

The parable, if you were to listen carefully, as you probably did, is a source of confusion for some simply because, as quite reliable commentators point out, it quite readily stands on its own even with the omission of verses 6 and 7.

Those are the verses that describe the city being surrounded and destroyed. And then you can omit the postscript to the parable, which is the story of the man who did not have on a wedding garment.

The destruction of the city speaks of the love-hate relationship our world has with the Lord Jesus Christ.

That unless your life is a response to Christ's invitation, to trust Him and to believe in Him, your life inevitably will be a growing dislike and despising of Jesus Christ.

[3 : 1 6] There's no middle ground between those two. And the wedding garment, a story, points that out. So, I largely want to treat this parable as being complete without those two sections.

Now, you will know in the in the century just gone by that there was enormous efforts to establish a worker's paradise along the lines of the teaching of Karl Marx.

There is right now a worldwide movement to establish a classless society in accordance with the principles of democracy and the economy of capitalism.

The whole of history has been marked by such efforts on grand scales by private communities. Here, I must confess that I found an enormous amount of help in understanding this parable by reading a sermon on this parable by Helmut Thalia.

And Helmut Thalia was in Germany during the war. And he saw his whole nation attempt to build a huge national structure which would dominate the whole of society in his country and ultimately in the world.

[5 : 02] He saw this attempt to build as it were a secular kingdom. And he was one of those who during the course of the war wrote in accordance with Dietrich Bonhoeffer a report on how this nation might survive this attempt to become a national socialist republic.

Well, I just tell you that because he was such a help to me in understanding. The significance of this parable is that it reveals the means and methods by which a transcendent kingdom, that is, the kingdom of heaven, is being established by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the one who originally taught this parable.

So that it's important for each of you to recognize in hearing this parable that it represents a personal invitation to you to respond.

It is not advocating a human revolution to bring in a human paradise. service. We had a funeral service yesterday for a lady who has been a member of this church for many years.

And most people weren't aware of the fact that during the war she spent three years in a prison camp in the Philippines as a prisoner of war she with her children.

[7 : 04] And one of the remarkable insights is that she obviously became aware of a transcendent kingdom which was needed to replace the kingdoms of this world.

world. So God is represented in this parable as a king who issues an invitation to a select group of people that is people who regard themselves as select.

And the difficulty with being a faithful church member is you might tend to think that you are one of the elect and when the banquet is ready you will no doubt be invited but the fact of the matter is that though you think yourself to have a ticket or an invitation in your pocket the circumstances of your life when the banquet is announced may be such that in fact you do not answer.

You do not attend. The whole action of the parable you have to see as the action of the king towards and for his people.

He wants them to be his free guests. He wants to honor his son who at the feast is to enter into a marriage.

[8 : 52] He is prepared to make peace with us as we honor his son. This invitation is something we could never hope for, dream, or imagine.

It's a totally unique thing that goes way beyond all your expectations. You can go daily to your mailbox and pick up the mail and look through it and find that all the letters you're getting you are expecting.

But this is an invitation which you have no right to expect and you never imagined that you would receive. But this parable is just such an invitation.

The banquet to which you are bidden is not to recognize some great human achievement as banquets often are.

It's not to give expression to some fabulous human pretensions which banquets often are. The banquet is to be the occasion when we are confronted by a reality greater than anything we have ever known.

[10 : 22] The confrontation we have longed for without any realization of just what it is we long for. What I mean by that is sometimes when we encounter what seems infinitely beautiful and recently you see a lovely tree that's completely suffused with light from the sun and it seems to be a light itself.

It's so beautiful and yet when you see all its beauty you can't help but wonder what is the source of that beauty.

Where did it come from? And what would it be like to encounter that beauty from which the beauty of our earth is derived?

That's why we sing the benedictory if ever you wonder. Benedictory being bless ye the Lord for all the whole of creation we have to benedictory omnia opera covers the whole of creation which makes it a bit tedious to sing.

But that's what it's doing. The extraordinary perversity of human life is that we replace the capacity to see beyond the beauty of the universe in seeing beyond the beauty of the universe to see the glory of God.

[12 : 02] We see instead the process of the mundane and in the course of our lives God becomes a mere philosophical rationalization.

A banquet becomes a tasteless mass of food. music becomes hammering on the keys. The vast range of color we reduce into a dull brown.

The wonder of marriage becomes an irresolvable tension. Death we come to seek as a necessary anesthetic to life.

Everybody wants in our world to enforce the law. Nobody wants to obey it. And heaven itself is reduced to a necessary fantasy because we have no other answers to what happens beyond death.

things. Well, that's what we do. We reduce our world to those kinds of things. I recognize that I'm an old man, and I may know more about that than you do, but I see that process happening.

[13 : 32] Well, then you are invited to a banquet. And at this banquet, which God has prepared for you and invited you to attend, as you respond to that invitation, and you may find lots of reasons not to, but as you respond, the music will fill your soul, the food will satisfy and restore you, joy will become a constant dimension of your being.

You will begin to see the angelic essence in the people you know. Think about that.

Marriage will become a bondage of perpetual delight. Heaven will become not the ultimate fantasy, but the ultimate reality.

And you will discover the tyranny of divine wisdom, divine love, and rejoice in the tyranny that has set you free from the dreadful tyranny of self.

The fact is, though, that on receiving the invitation to such a banquet and acknowledging that they will probably come, in fact, find themselves with conflicting priorities and come to the conclusion that with regard to God and his banquet, they cannot come.

[15 : 29] They have married a wife, they have bought a cow, they have a field to be seen, a business to be attended to, and so with regard to that banquet, they do not come.

Though they have imagined that since the invitation has been given, they will no doubt be there, or the party won't be worth being at anyway.

The king, when he finds that his expected guests and the danger of attending church faithfully all the time, is that you might consider yourself to be an expected guest, and have not confronted the fact that your life is such that you won't be able to attend for other reasons.

The king then sends his servants into the streets of the city to find those who cannot refuse to come.

The very people who would never expect such an invitation to such a banquet. They are people who discover that God needs them through his love for them.

[16 : 58] He inflames their love for him. The banquet is to be the wedding feast of the king's son.

And the king demands that we attend, or invites us to attend. because it's the wedding feast, there's an interesting tie-in to the fact that in the New Testament we learn that the church is to be the bride of Christ, the bride of the king's son.

So the church we learn from this parable is made up of those who in the recognition of their poverty find that they cannot refuse the invitation to the banquet, which it seems leads to the establishment of a new and eternal covenant between the prince and his people.

Such, you see, is the nature of this banquet that it's the place where the people who have accepted the invitation and have come to the banquet become a people who enter into a marriage like covenant with the son.

the difficulty, I suspect, with the church at the moment, that gets in the headlines in the paper even from time to time, is that the church regards itself as being one of those cooperative religious institutions that is preparing a banquet to which they will invite the God or gods who may desire to come.

[19 : 11] But that's not what we have here. What we have here is the God who invites us, not by reason of our love for him, but by reason of his love for us and our necessity to respond.

He invites us to his banquet. And we as a congregation rehearse that reality as we participate even this morning in the banquet of the Holy Communion in which we decide we will partake of the banquet which we are bidden by our Lord Jesus Christ as through this parable.

Amen.