

The King's Invitation Matthew 22:1-14

Most of us receive invitations throughout the year requesting our attendance at various functions. Some are decorated wedding invitations from long-time family friends. Others display vivid colors and graphics to invite our attendance at birthday parties or special holiday parties or graduation parties. Still other invitations call upon us to join others for anniversary celebrations or the opening of a new business or even for a special sale. Some are just allurements to see a business presentation and then to be solicited for a response. Our text this morning is about a king's invitation and the consequences of not responding appropriately.

The parable of our text is the third in a series that our Lord gave in the presence of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. The first dealt with the religious leaders' rejection of God's authority over their lives, demonstrated by their rejection of Jesus Christ. The second illustrated the religious leaders' folly in rejecting God's way to righteousness through His Son, the Cornerstone. Now the continued theme of rejecting God's revealed will in the gospel of His Son is found in this present parable.

We are accustomed to a wedding and reception lasting for a few hours but the ancient custom of wedding feasts often lasted for a week. In the case of a royal wedding, the celebration might go on for two or three weeks. To be invited by the king as his guest for the wedding of his son - the anticipated heir to the throne - would have been the opportunity of a lifetime. Such an invitation usually came by a personal envoy of the king. Once invited a citizen felt a deep obligation to attend the wedding feast or face the displeasure of the king. We might say that it was an invitation that you could not refuse! Nor would one desire to refuse an invitation to such a royal bounty in which every provision for the celebration was made by the king.

It is in this sort of familiar setting and language that our Lord addressed His hearers to explain to them an even greater invitation - the invitation to be part of God's kingdom. He begins by explaining the nature of the parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son."

The wedding feast had been prepared. Those who had been previously invited were now summoned to come to the feast for the beginning celebration. "And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast." All seemed in order as the king had

earlier put his guests on notice of the upcoming wedding celebration. It was no ordinary occasion. The king's son would be married and he desired to honor his son with a lavish celebration. To be named as one of the king's guests would have been the greatest honor for anyone living in the kingdom. Surely no one would dare to refuse the king's invitation in a real world setting! But this is a story with a purpose of teaching something about the kingdom of heaven and therefore reality can be exaggerated to some degree.

Yet as the slaves summoned the guests, they found an unexpected response: "and they were unwilling to come." Seemingly, the initial list of guests each had their excuse or reason for not attending. The language is blunt. They did not will to come. It was not that the king had failed to prepare for the feast or that he had failed to notify them of the impending wedding. The invited guests all knew what would take place. But even though the king had invited them, "they were not willing to come."

How do we account for such a strong rejection of the king's invitation? It is obvious that Jesus Christ is illustrating what God had done in preparing Israel for the gospel. Many messengers had come in previous centuries announcing that God would send the Messianic King. John the Baptist boldly announced that the time had arrived; the Messiah was present. The arrival of the Messianic Kingdom had come, a new age for humanity had dawned. God had come among His creatures to redeem a people for Himself for all eternity. And so we find Jesus Christ announcing the advent of the kingdom and calling people to repentance. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel," Jesus preached (Mark 1: 15). Here was the invitation calling upon all to repent and believe the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus had even sent forth the Twelve and later the Seventy as witnesses of Christ the king, inviting all to repent and believe in Him.

"And they were unwilling," Jesus assesses. Though messengers had faithfully invited the masses of Israel to believe in Jesus Christ, for the most part, "they were unwilling." Only a handful, a small remnant out of the thousands in Israel believed. Even the crowds that followed Jesus would show their fickleness when the time came for them to submit to Him as Lord and follow His teaching. They refused to satisfy their spiritual hunger on the bread from heaven (John 6:22-65). "They were unwilling." Such a position demonstrates a heart of selfishness and self-centeredness. Unwilling to partake of the King's offer in the gospel, they

spurn His invitation to partake of His provisions in the gospel.

Yet, the king in our story showed incredible mercy and kindness even toward those that had initially rejected his invitation. "Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'" He did not want them to misunderstand. The king was not asking his guests to prepare the feast. He had prepared it. Nor was he asking them to come to a feast that lacked preparations. This was no bring your own dinner! Everything necessary for them to partake with the king had been set forth. Nothing was neglected or left undone.

"But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, and another to his business." Even though all was prepared and ready, the invited guests were unconcerned, presuming that it really did not matter that they spurned the king. Though we do not live in a monarchy, we can only imagine how foolish such a response would be to an ancient king that ruled his land with absolute authority! It was as though they had trivialized the king's invitation, giving every impression that it did not matter to them.

And so it is with many who have heard the gospel invitation? It may have come through a pulpit or one-on-one or in a Bible study or even in personal reading of the Scriptures. God's invitation to relationship with Him through the gospel of Jesus Christ is made clear. Yet unconcerned for the honor of the Creator or for one's own eternal soul, this person finds other things to occupy his mind. As Jesus tells the story, the guests go about normal responsibilities of life, "one to his farm, and another to his business." What they were doing was not evil at all. They were just living normal lives. But the evil came when they trivialized and neglected the king's invitation to pursue the normal course of life. "Oh, I've heard the gospel. Yes, I think that it is probably true. But I have other things to do. I have a life to live. I have activities to pursue. I have a career to make. I have other interests that are just as important. Maybe later I'll have time to give to the gospel but not now. I'm just far too busy with my own life to think about what God has spoken." And I know that if god is a god of love He understands me and will wait for me to decide when the time is right.

Such unconcern for the soul and for heeding God's invitation to come to Christ through the gospel is far too common. But can that be done with impunity? Will there be no price to pay for such an attitude? Can we put off what Jesus Christ presses upon us to be of utmost concern?

While many take the unconcerned approach to the gospel, others aggressively oppose the gospel. "And the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them." It goes on all the time throughout the world. Tens of thousands of Christian witnesses are mistreated, tortured, and imprisoned every year as people react to the gospel. Tens of thousands are killed annually because of their hatred for the gospel message. Even in our country, though few deaths have been reported for gospel witnesses, it often happens that Christians are mistreated because they offer to sinful people the only way of forgiveness and peace through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Can they do so with impunity?

Jesus shows the response of the king to all those spurning his invitation. "But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire." What we might expect an ancient monarch to do when his honor was trampled upon by unworthy subjects, took place. "He sent his armies" and they went forth destroying those spurning him. What do we expect that God the Creator will do to those spurning Him? Does such folly come with impunity? Does He grimace in heaven and just hope for the best? Is God beside Himself all frustrated that people are so wicked and foolish as to make so little of His invitation to be a kingdom dweller? Obviously this is a false understanding of God. Although He may have desires they do not interfere with His decrees in any way.

Jesus had already told the religious leaders that had spurned Him that tax collectors and prostitutes would get into the kingdom ahead of them. Further, He told them that the kingdom had been taken away from them, and that they would know what it was like for the Cornerstone - the One who is the only way to God's kingdom - to fall upon them in judgment. So He uses the imagery of a king and his sense of justice to remind all that would spurn Him, that the King will answer.

'Well, what does it matter to God if I do not want to follow Jesus Christ? Can He not just leave me to my own decision and life?' I suppose that would be the normal logic; and that might be the case if we were dealing with mere men. But we are dealing with the Creator and Sovereign of the universe. And we are dealing with One who is righteous and just, who in His holiness cannot allow even one sin to taint His creation without due justice. God's honor and dignity as the eternal King and Judge demand that He satisfy every requirement of His law that has been broken repeatedly by every one of us. And how much more so will He require justice to be served to those that spurn the gospel invitation that cost Him the infinite price of the blood of His Son?

But something remarkable has happened in the divine economy. Though the very ones who

ought to have made sense of the gospel and gladly submitted to the righteous Lordship of Jesus Christ did not, the King pursued others. "Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy'."treatment of the king's messengers.

The implications in the parable would have been very clear to those hearing. This is another parable that did not require much God given ability to get the main purpose. The religious leaders considered themselves to be worthy of God's kingdom, yet spurning Christ revealed their unworthiness. The very ones these people thought unworthy of God's mercy –tax collectors, prostitutes, and Gentiles - were made worthy by God's work through His Son. Notice the way that Jesus expressed this in His parable. "Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast." The term used for "main highways" is most likely the forks in the road where all kinds of people would gather while deciding which direction to follow into the city. The picture is one of the slaves going far away, beyond the confines of the palace to find wedding guests. "Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good."

This statement is not difficult when we consider the text and the context.

The self righteous hypocrites had their idea of what was good, and some of those good might be genuine in their religious practice and truly be God lovers, but and only those who are seen as good kinds of people would ever be considered by them as worthy to come to such a banquet. The king is inviting even those who are presumably bad, like prostitutes and tax collectors as well because as previously stated many of those kinds of people will enter the kingdom before the religious unrighteous hypocrites could.

The idea of bad types coming into the kingdom is found in a remarkable passage of Scripture. Paul exhorts the Corinthians and in the process reveals the spiritual autobiographies of this church.

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Look at that list of deviants and criminal and immoral people. Yet that was the church at Corinth. Each was made worthy through Jesus Christ. God does not accept us into His kingdom because we have reached a certain standard of behavior or because we have done a prescribed ritual or because we look a certain way. He accepts us because of His great mercy and love, taking the action to provide salvation through Christ, and taking the initiative

through the Holy Spirit to bring us from deadness into life.

Whether good or bad however, there is an appropriate attire for this wedding feast

Some commentators want to believe that it was a custom to provide guests with the proper attire for such a feast. Nothing really supports that claim. We really know very little about these kinds of gatherings. Others want to enforce the idea that the attire is the righteousness of Christ but again it has no real justification to do so.

The point is the man knew what was required of him and he did not do it.

With great satisfaction, the king looks over the dinner guests. "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes."

Though "the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests," the king quickly spotted the one guest that had entered without the appropriate wedding attire.

One thing was wrong. The king "said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?'" The question was asked without malice; it was reasonable for such a grand occasion. The man had a chance to answer the king and explain himself. "And the man was speechless." He had no excuse.

We cannot speculate on why this happened. First of all it is just a story and in real life most likely no one would be so foolish to do this. But for what Jesus is teaching it has significance.

Without giving further explanation, Jesus ends this parable with a striking statement. It summarizes the primary emphasis in this parable upon the sovereign working of God in salvation. "For many are called, but few are chosen." The invitation is extended to all kinds of people from all kinds of places but "few are chosen."

William Hendriksen capsules the implications. "The gospel call goes forth far and wide. It reaches ever so many. Most of them are like the man in the parable: they hear but do not heed. In comparison with those many that are lost there are but few that are saved, that is, few that are chosen from eternity to inherit life everlasting. Salvation, then, in the final analysis, is not a human accomplishment but the gift of God's sovereign grace" [New Testament Commentary: Matthew, 798, italics added].

Do you hear the Lord's invitation to know Him through the gospel? Then do not make your excuses or pay no attention or attempt to spurn Him. He is the eternal King, and to hear His invitation to come to the wedding feast is to know His mercy. Call upon Him, look to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, trust His merit for you before the justice of God, rely upon Him as your King.

Every church, even with the best effort to avoid it, has those who think they are part of God's kingdom but they have never been truly saved.

The king in this parable commanded the servants concerning this one man without the wedding clothes, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

The man has no business being where he is. He did not have the proper response to the king's invitation. And therefore suffers a horrible fate. So it will be for anyone who is not a genuine disciple of Christ. Playing church and trying to be a Christian without the evidences of true discipleship will have devastating results.

No one who does not belong in the consummated kingdom of Christ will be there.

There is the all providing king and yet there is the responsibility of man to respond properly to the king.

Those who belong in the kingdom will have the proper response because they are the chosen of God.

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