

## **Week 11 – The Wedding Feast – Matthew 22:1-14**

### **Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:17-24**

#### **Introduction**

Last Saturday our nation was rocked by the violent murders of everyday people who were just peaceably going about their business when they were killed

When the news came out virtually everyone was united in recognizing the wrongness of the killings suggesting that we instinctively know that there is a universal standard of right and wrong

However, back in late 2001, the Barna Research group conducted a survey of adults and one of teenagers – who, by the way, are now in their mid to late thirties – concerning the issue of whether there is such a thing as universal truth

Remember, this survey was taken right after the near universal outrage and coming together to condemn the attacks that had just occurred on September 11, 2001

Somewhat surprisingly in light of the united condemnation of the 9/11 attacks the number of adults saying that truth is relative to each individual was 3-1 against those who say there is such a thing as universal truth

And it was even worse among the teens where 83% said truth is relative compared to only 6% who said moral truth is absolute

You might think those who self-identified as born-again Christians wouldn't have this view but, sadly, only 32% of adults and 9% of teens who claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ said they believed there was such a thing as absolute truth

And when asked about how they went about making everyday decisions only 12% of all those surveyed who identified as born-again Christians said they relied on the guidance provided by the Bible

While almost half said they made their decisions based upon “whatever feels right or comfortable in a particular situation” or “whatever would produce the most positive outcome for them personally”

That report – especially the statistics of those who claim to be Christians – naturally leads to the questions, “How many of those who think they are saved are actually saved?” and “What is the basis of their salvation?”

Is Christianity just a social construct like many are trying to say concerning gender where everyone can simply declare for themselves what they are?

Or is the kingdom of heaven like Burger King where each individual can “Have it [their] way”?

A former high school classmate of mine was of that opinion

At his church the pastor preached on God's covenant with Abraham and my friend grabbed hold of the idea of having his own, personal covenant with God

However, it was a covenant of his making and he declared that God had agreed to his terms so he was free to live his life as he was living it and God was cool with it – even though some aspects of his life violated the clear teaching of Scripture

Once more, **Ecclesiastes 1:9** proves to be accurate - *What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.*

People have wanted to go their own way and have expected God to be satisfied with it forever because they have failed to accept that God has very specific requirements for reconciliation and very specific expectations of behavior

In fact, God's requirements and expectations are absolute

Please join me in Matthew 22 where we find the parable of the wedding feast

#### **I have to tell you right at the start that this is a challenging parable**

The story Jesus uses in it is admittedly kind of bizarre and the situation seems a bit unrealistic

It contains the account of a royal invitation spurned, not once but twice, murder, retaliation, further invitation, and the discovery of an unworthy guest who is cast out of the gathering

And it concludes with Jesus' cryptic explanation in **verse 14** “*For many are called but few are chosen.*”

If you are taking notes we will begin by looking at the **details** of the parable

Then we will take some time to look at a **difficulty** we need to face when interpreting the parable

And then we will consider the **decision** that everyone must make

Follow along as I read the parable in its entirety –

*1And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 4Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ 5But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ 10And 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.*

*11“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. 13Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14For many are called, but few are chosen.”*

## **I. The Details of the Parable**

As we begin to look at the details of the parable we need to remember that Jesus was telling this parable to the Jewish religious leaders who were questioning his authority

In fact, this is the third of a three-parable series that Jesus taught by way of answer to their challenge

And that perspective helps us to identify the various elements in the parable

Clearly, the king represents God the Father and the king’s son is Jesus

And looking at the flow of the parable and Jewish history I think we would be safe to identify the servants as God’s prophets and evangelists through the years

It could be argued that a person’s wedding is the most significant social event of their lives and to invite someone to your wedding means you value them and consider them to be important

**And what we have here is no normal wedding but a royal wedding**

Now, I’m no anglophile and I get kind of a chuckle out of all the attention some people pay to any wedding that takes place among Britain’s royal family

But when you consider that only 600 people were invited to be present to witness the vows of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle and another 2,000 were invited to be their guests at the castle afterwards – I suppose getting an invitation would be a big deal that few would consider rejecting

But in our parable we see that the king sends his servants to call people to the wedding feast and they simply refused to come

In Jesus’ day a typical Jewish marriage was arranged by the parents of the couple and the two who were getting married might well have not met each other before the deal was struck

The couple was considered married as soon as the agreement was made but they continued to live separately until the ceremony which would come some time later – sometimes a long time later

When all the preparations were in order the groom would come for his bride without notice and the wedding ceremony would take place and be followed by a wedding banquet which could last for up to a week

Needless to say, a wedding was a big deal for all involved

But in our parable we see that once all the arrangements have been made and the invitations given those who were invited refused to come

That would have been a serious breach of etiquette for a normal wedding but exponentially so for a royal wedding

**And the illogic of their indifference serves to illustrate just how absurd it is to refuse God's invitation to reconciliation**

Then we see in **verse 4** that the king upped the ante, so to speak, as he sent other servants in an attempt to entice those he was inviting by telling them of all the delicacies that awaited them

But the invitees persisted in their apathy toward the king's invitation and continued about their business

In other words, they gave more weight to their own interests than they did to the king's invitation to join him and his son

And then we see things really get weird as some of the invitees actually killed the king's servants and the king retaliates by sending his troops to kill the killers and destroy their city

Again, it helps to understand that what Jesus is doing here is telling a story that illustrates the history of salvation and to this point in the parable he has shown the flow of history as it pertained to the Jewish nation

And in the destruction of the city Jesus appears to be forecasting the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans that would occur in 70 A.D.

Still, the king was determined to have a full hall at the wedding feast so he sent his servants out once again and had them extend an invitation to any and all that they found

So the servants went out and invited everyone they encountered whether they were good or bad and so filled the wedding hall with honored guests

Of course, in our analogy of salvation history this section of the parable refers to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's redemptive plan but it also serves to indicate that salvation is by grace and not given according to merit

Both those who were considered good and bad according to man's standard were included so that no one could boast

Then during the feast we see the king mingling among the people when he finds an attendee who is not properly attired so he challenged him asking how it came to be that he was there without the proper garment

When the guest was unable to give an answer the king had him cast out – not just out of the banquet hall but out into a place of suffering

And Jesus closed the parable with the explanation in **verse 14** – *“For many are called, but few are chosen.”*

### ***The message of the parable***

So what we see Jesus reveal in this parable is what we know to be true

That the gospel was first presented to the Jews who by and large rejected it so God then sent his disciples to the Gentiles

And we see that the gates of the kingdom are opened wide to any who will accept and enter in but we also see that they must enter through the gate – in other words,

**God has specific requirements that must be met and no one can enter the kingdom without coming in via God's way**

Last week, when we looked at the parable of the two sons, we saw how the religious leaders thought they could merely pay lip service to God and his commands without actually being obedient

No one would have suspected that those religious leaders were actually far from pleasing God

After all, they were the elite and experts regarding the law who told others how to live

But Jesus was trying to strip them of their sense of self-righteousness and the pride they had because of their position by showing them just how far removed from God they truly were

They were on the path to being excluded from God's kingdom even as they flaunted their authority over God's people  
And when they issued the challenge to Jesus that we saw in **Matthew 21:23** – *“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?”* they were clearly rejecting God's invitation as issued by Jesus  
And like the people in the parable, their preference was to simply continue on with the status quo  
They believed their way was good enough  
But as **Proverbs 14:12** tells us – *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*

## **II. The Difficulty in the Parable**

The main point of the parable is easy to understand when we recognize how it reveals the history of salvation

But there is a **difficulty** that we have seen before that we need to address once again

And that has to do with the guest who was inappropriately attired and who the king cast out

We need to try to discern who that man represents and what is meant by the *“outer darkness”* where there will be *“weeping and gnashing of teeth”*

Many are convinced that the outer darkness refers to the place of eternal separation from God – that is to say, hell

So they determine that the man lacked the clothing of imputed righteousness gained by accepting Christ

And I have to admit that their argument sounds plausible because we know that Jesus said in **John 14:6** –

*“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

**Obviously, any attempt to come into the kingdom of heaven in any other way will only lead to being refused entry**

I don't think frightening is a strong enough word to describe that prospect

In fact, I think I'm pretty good with words and I can't think of a word that clearly describes the horror and all-consuming dread that the prospect of being removed from God's presence should instill

And that fear has driven many a person to accept God's terms for avoiding that fate

**But we seldom seem to have that same attitude when we consider the possibility of God's displeasure with us once we are saved**

We have focused so pointedly on the fact that God loves us that we have neglected the reality that God has expectations of us and that our failure to live up to his expectations has consequences

At some point along the line we became convinced that everyone will be rewarded in heaven

And it's true that God's Word tells us of rewards or “crowns” that will be distributed in heaven

But we need to understand that those crowns are earned by each believer by what they do during their earthly life

And as we saw when we looked at the parable of the talents the casting out might instead refer to the **Bema Seat judgment** of each believer

The evidence informs us that the believer who fails to do well in this life will suffer a loss of reward and it is only expected that there will be an accompanying feeling of regret that follows

And in the parable of the talents we saw that it appeared that the servant who buried his talent was excluded from entering fully into the joy of his master that the other two received

**Either interpretation seems to be possible so we are left to decide which we believe is the most likely**

There is a key verse in the second parable that Jesus told to the religious leaders that we skipped over that may well lend some light that helps us understand this parable

Look with me at **Matthew 21:43** where we see Jesus tell these same religious leaders:

*“Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.”*

This verse is also reminiscent of the parable of the talents in that it shows God's expectation of fruitful living

The apostle Paul refers to putting on certain characteristics as one would clothe themselves with a garment

We need only look at passages like **Colossians 3:9-10** which says –

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with all its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*

Also, just a few verses further down we see **Colossians 3:12-14** which says –

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

And in **Romans 13:14** Paul writes –

*...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

We have a tendency to think that once we are saved we have done all we need to do but here we see that God has expectations of believers as well

**Still, we know all too well that there are those who want to be saved – they definitely want to avoid hell – but they also want to live as they want to live**

They don't want to put on the garment of holiness that God requires and they expect to show up at the wedding feast of the Son dressed in the spiritual clothing of their choosing

But as our parable makes plain, having that mindset is an insult to the king that will bring negative consequences for anyone so bold

***Both options are to be avoided***

Again, I see that either interpretation is possible and the parable could be about the danger of missing out on salvation or it could be about missing out on reward

It's hard to say whether Jesus means to say that there is only one way to be accepted into heaven and anyone who tries to come in by another way will be cast out

Or whether he's saying that it's possible to be in heaven and still be prevented from experiencing certain aspects of it

**What we do know is that both scenarios are true because we find both plainly taught in other parts of Scripture**

I think we would all agree that wisdom would indicate that it would be best to avoid both options

And everyone must **decide** for themselves whether or not they are willing to yield to God's requirements

### **III. The Decision Everyone Must Make**

God's kingdom is open to all and he has extended the invitation of the gospel to everyone without exception or distinction

**John 1:12** tells us that any who would receive Christ and put their trust in his name are able to become a child of God

And that's what Jesus meant when he said "*many are called*"

God's invitation is wide open and made to all but the means of acceptance is narrow – "*few are chosen*"

Look with me at Acts 4 where we read about the defense Peter and John made when they were hauled before the high priest and other religious leaders

In **Acts 4:11-12** we read - *...Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

Like those first-century religious leaders many today are **apathetic** to the gospel

We are surrounded by people who haven't rejected Jesus because the possibility of accepting him has never even crossed their minds

A Jewish wedding like we find in our parable might have been set up a long time before the actual wedding took place  
And people could have been told that they were invited but no one knew exactly when the event would be  
I think that may well be the case of the first invitation that went out in our parable

**And people today may well have some inkling that there is a need to please God because of a future judgment but it isn't something they believe they need to worry about today so it isn't a "front-burner" issue**

I recently heard the analogy of how the unchurch haven't rejected going to church any more than they rejected eating a bowl of ketchup for breakfast

Sure, eating ketchup *was* an option but it's not one they rejected because it never even occurred to them

I think the same analogy is applicable for many people when it comes to the gospel – it simply doesn't rise to a level that has gotten their attention enough to cause them to feel the need to make a decision concerning it

But others, like the invitees who received the second, more pressing invitation in our parable, have determined to reject the invitation of the gospel

They've moved beyond apathy to the point where many of them are decidedly **antagonistic** toward Jesus and want nothing to do with him

They have made the conscious decision that they would rather live their life in their way regardless of what God thinks about it

They are like the citizens in Luke 19 who decided they don't want God to rule over them and steadfastly refused to yield  
And as we see in **Luke 19:27** that way leads to death

But I believe there are also those who have accepted Christ as their Savior but who continue to resist doing what he would have them do

**We've been conditioned to believe that we can have things the way we want them**

That all opinions are valid, that there are many paths to heaven, that God loves us just the way we are and would never ask us to change, and to tell anyone they are wrong is the height of arrogance

But actually it's the people who demand to have their own way who are **arrogant**

They actually think they are in charge and that they know better than God

That they can live as they want to live and that, in the end, God will still reward them in heaven

**The apostle Paul loved to use sports analogies to teach spiritual truths and he does so in 1Corinthians 9**

Why don't you join me there in your Bibles and take a look with me at **1Corinthians 9:24-27** where Paul describes how rewards are attained in heaven

He writes –

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified*

And a few pages back in **1Corinthians 3:13-15** he writes about how what we do in this life will be tested –

He writes that –

*...each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*

Just like many of us today, some of the believers in Corinth wanted Christ –

That is, they wanted salvation, but they also wanted to live according to their own desires and dictates –

They wanted to live their way with heaven's rewards at the end

And Paul was making clear to them that, while living that way was certainly an option, because we all have the ability to choose our path, to do so would result in humiliating loss of reward

I remember a time when my siblings and I were just kids and we were visiting for a time at our cousin's family's home

Our aunt and uncle took all of us swimming one afternoon and they brought along a pool float that my brother declared he was going to use in the pool

Our uncle told him that he would need to ask politely or he couldn't use the float and my brother repeated that he was going to use it

I think that kind of amused my uncle at first and he held his ground only to have my brother dig his heels in also

Eventually, our uncle told him he not only couldn't use the float but that he would sit by the pool and not swim until his attitude changed

Believe it or not, but my brother didn't swim at all that day simply because he refused to say, "Please"

And he stubbornly sat by the edge of the pool and resisted all encouragement to yield until it was time to go home

Of course, that's a minor, rather silly example that had only minor consequence for my brother but there are those who are living with just that kind of stubbornness before God

As a result, some will find themselves permanently separated from God for all eternity and others will suffer loss when their earthly lives as believers are judged

## **Conclusion**

Jesus told this parable to the religious leaders of his day because he was trying to show them the error of their ways

And we too should look at our lives through its lens and evaluate our spiritual condition

**First of all, we should ascertain whether we have actually accepted the invitation of the gospel at all**

Each person must make certain that they have made this most important of all decisions and that they are indeed trusting in nothing but the atoning blood of Christ to get them entrance to the kingdom of heaven

But that isn't the end of the matter

**We all must also make certain that we have truly yielded to the lordship of Christ**

We need to make certain that we are striving to live as God expects us to live and not living however we wish while expecting God to make allowances

God's invitation is wide open but the way of acceptance is narrow

The crowns available in heaven are wonderful but will be distributed according to God's righteous judgment on the basis of our faithfulness in the here and now

*... many are called but few are chosen*

We all need to make sure that we are properly attired for the wedding feast and that we are found wearing the cloak of imputed righteousness that comes from Jesus which gains us heaven along with the garment of obedience that brings ample reward

Let's pray