

October 5, 2008  
Pentecost 21

*"Come to the Feast"*

## **MATTHEW 22:1-14**

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**J**esus spoke to them again in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup> He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. <sup>4</sup> "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' <sup>5</sup> "But they paid no attention and went off-- one to his field, another to his business. <sup>6</sup> The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. <sup>8</sup> "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. <sup>9</sup> Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' <sup>10</sup> So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. <sup>11</sup> "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. <sup>12</sup> 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. <sup>13</sup> "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' <sup>14</sup> "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

I talked to a mother in Costco this past week about the recent wedding of her son. The wedding was held on a ranch, an old walnut ranch, near Davis. The bride was a successful wedding planner and her family owned a popular upscale restaurant. The father of the bride joked about facing reality when the credit card bill came in. The mother of the groom said she brought the wine, excellent pinot noir from reputable Santa Barbara County vintners. I believe there were about 150 guests invited. Think of the effort and money that went into the planning of this wedding. What if the time came for the wedding and none of the invited guests came to the wedding. That would be shocking, unheard of, strange and even worthy of the evening news. "Family plans big wedding! No body shows!"

Jesus often told gripping stories about the kingdom of God to illustrate his love for people and their need to believe in him today not tomorrow. So it was with the story of a king who throws a huge wedding celebration only to see all the invited guests turn up their noses at the king when the feast is ready. It is a powerful picture of how people reject our heavenly Father's invitation to come to the feast of all feasts, the feast of salvation that has been prepared for us freely and fully in Jesus his Son, our Savior.

### **It is all prepared for you**

"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son." Do you want to know what the kingdom of heaven is like? Then think of how God prepared a way for you to be loved by him, similar to the way a king might prepare a wedding banquet

for his son. Pardon me if I make you hungry, but think of meat cooking on the BBQ, not tri tip or even top block, but succulent tenderloin, so tender it melts in your mouth. Look at all the appetizers, the shrimp, not farm raised in Bangladesh, but wild, large and sweet and tasty. Smell the loaves of bread they are brining out from a wood fired oven. There are fresh fruits and vegetables, beans some bland and others fiery hot and spicy. There are the bottles of wine, the cabernets are old and dusty, worth a small fortune, and unlike anything you have ever tasted. It is the feast of all feasts, the wedding feast of the century, the feast the king offers for the wedding of his son.

In the first lesson that we heard this morning from Isaiah 25, the Lord spoke of a feast of all feasts on his holy mountain. "On this mountain the Lord will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines." Then the Lord describes what this feast is. "On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever." The Lord leads people to freely take without cost the rescue from death that Jesus offers. Joyfully they say to each other, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

What is the kingdom of God like? It is like a king preparing a wedding feast for his son. Look at how your God carefully prepared your rescue from sin, death and hell. Listen to these words from Ephesians 1 that tell us, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Way back in eternity the Lord our God planned out every detail necessary to rescue us. God knew that we could offer nothing to him because of the depth of corruption that exists in every human heart. Anything and everything we offer God to rescue ourselves falls short of his glory. That is why he calls us to his holy mountain, the place where Jesus gave his life for us. He invites us to look at how Jesus took our problem of sin upon himself by dying a horrible death, overcoming death and rising again. These days we hear a lot about the government bailing out our failed financial institutions. The kingdom of God, the feast of all feasts, is God himself preparing a way to bail out people like us who have a huge debt of sin with the perfect life and innocent death of his Son.

### **You are invited**

How do you know this feast of salvation is for you? How do you know God wants you on his holy mountain to be part of what Jesus has done for you? Is this bailout for you? Jesus told how the king sent out his servants to tell the people who were invited that all the food was ready and the celebration was about to begin. "But they refused to come." The king sent out more servants with an even more urgent plea. "I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and fattened calves have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." How did they respond to this urgent invitation? "But they paid no attention and went off." The Greek word is a strong word that we could translate, "They did not care a lick about the invitation." In fact they had such a disdain for the king and his banquet that they walked away to their own affairs of farming and business and some even beat up the servants and killed them. In anger the king sent his soldiers to destroy these murders just as our government when after the terrorists who attacked our country on September 11.

When you see these people reject the king's invitation to come to the wedding feast for his son, you are reminded this morning of people you know who have rejected the love that

God has for them in Jesus his Son. In John 3:16 Jesus gave us this gracious invitation. "God so loved the world, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." The late Ruth Graham told how she gave a Bible to a friend, wrote her friend's name over the word "world" and placed a "post it" at John 3:16. Not everyone is excited and happy to hear about God's love for them. Some reject it vociferously, vehemently, and violently. In fact John 3:19 says, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light, because their deeds were evil." It is a heavy burden and cross that we bear for Jesus when we see this rejection in people, even within our own family and circle of friends. We see people within our own congregation walk away from the feast of salvation in Jesus and go off to their farms and business, their recreation and fun, their sinful pride, their stubborn foolishness.

It is easy to see examples of people who reject God's gracious invitation, all around us, but let's look inside of our own hearts this morning and check on whether we are always as eager to come to the feast as we once were. In Ephesians 3 Paul prays this amazing prayer for the Christians in Ephesus. "And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." Why did Paul pray this prayer so fervently? Because he knew that there are times when we become apathetic, and worried, and fearful, and sinful and very ugly inside, so that we do not see the love of Christ, we stop feasting and celebrating. We may even become like the older brother in the story of the lost son who was upset with all the feasting and celebrating when his brother came home. The ugly human heart always wants to go back to the law as the source of salvation, or the material things of this life. "Come to feast! Come celebrate."

The king could not stand to see not guests at the wedding feast for his son, so he sends his servants into the streets to invite anyone they saw to come to the feast. "So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests."

There was a time in history when the Christian churches in England, Germany, and Sweden, were filled with people who enjoyed celebrating Jesus' victory over sin, death and hell. Today the churches are empty, and there are more Muslims in the mosques on Friday than Christians in worship on Sunday. They have turned up their noses to the gospel message just as the people did at Jesus' time and people are doing here in our land. The Lord will fill his church with people who celebrate the feast of victory. He will send his servants into places like China and India and maybe one day the crescent moons on mosques will be replaced with crosses. Jesus said, "The gospel of the kingdom will be preached and then the end will come." "God will all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." Today the Lord speaks to us and says, "Come for all things are ready."

### **You have the right clothes to wear**

The king looks at the people enjoying the wedding feast of his son. He notices one of the guests is not wearing the wedding clothes he provided for the feast. You see, the king not only provided the feast free of charge, he also gave them beautiful wedding clothes to wear, Armani suits and Versace gowns. Nothing is too good for the wedding celebration of his son. The king asks the man without the right wedding clothes why he had come into the wedding without being properly dressed. "Friend, how did you get in here without

wedding clothes?" And the man was speechless. Here was no boorish lout who is totally clueless about wearing the right wedding clothes to a wedding! Here is no wedding crasher who has had too much to drink at the local bar and then on a dare decides to crash the wedding in his street clothes! No, this man was speechless, because he knew that he was caught without wedding clothes that he purposely and willfully refused to wear.

The wedding crashers are all around us even today. When asked the question, "If you were to die tonight, why should the Lord let you into his heaven?" they brazenly respond, "Because I have lived a good life." What fool would think of making wedding clothes from old rags such as these that I am holding in my hand? How can we ever expect to get into the wedding feast of the Lamb of God clothed with the rags of our unrighteousness that the Bible calls "filthy rags?" Dear Christian, come to the feast. Enjoy the blessings you have in Jesus. You are wearing the right clothes. You have been covered with Jesus and his righteousness. As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Blessed are they who are called to marriage feast of the Lamb. Come, everything is ready. Come to the feast.