

Copper Creek Church
Aug 14, 2022
The Wedding Banquet

We are almost done with our parable series! It has been a wonderful summer of looking closely at different parables, and next week is our last one. This week, we are looking at two parables that have kind of been squished together into one concept. Matthew 22: 2-14 and Luke 14: 16-24 both talk about an banquet of some sort. In Matthew it is a wedding feast, in Luke it is just explained as a “large dinner, with many people.” I am going to read the Luke passage, because it is shorter and gets to the point a little better, but I am considering both in the whole of the sermon. Matthew just tended to drag on a bit and we do not have that much time! This is the Common English Bible translation-

Luke 14: 16-24

16 Jesus replied, “A certain man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. **17** When it was time for the dinner to begin, he sent his servant to tell the invited guests, ‘Come! The dinner is now ready.’ **18** One by one, they all began to make excuses. The first one told him, ‘I bought a farm and must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ **19** Another said, ‘I bought five teams of oxen, and I’m going to check on them. Please excuse me.’ **20** Another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ **21** When he returned, the servant reported these excuses to his master. The master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go quickly to the city’s streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.’ **22** The servant said, ‘Master, your instructions have been followed and there is still room.’ **23** The master said to the servant, ‘Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled. **24** I tell you, not one of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

So, we have a man (who seems to be from wealth) inviting a bunch of people (who are also fancy) to a dinner. For the sake of ease- let’s consider this to be a wedding. It would have taken that long to plan, there would be social assumptions at play, there would be invitations, and everyone would dress up, it was a fairly big deal. The man sends out his servants to tell everyone to come- but they have better things to do. “I bought a farm...” “I just bought a bunch of oxen...” “Oh! I would but I just got married...” and honestly- we should be hearing these excuses as similar to “I would totally come to the party- but I have to wash my hair.” or “OH! Shoot- the wedding is *this* weekend, I *just* made plans.” Or even “if only I didn’t have to take my goldfish for a walk, I WOULD BE THERE!”

These excuses are just that. Excuses. And everyone knows it. This dinner, a wedding perhaps, but maybe a banquet for a celebration of some sort, has been planned for months. The invites were sent out in advance, the host made sure to get the nicest meat and the best dishes. But no one came. And they didn’t even try to come. They just made excuses that were thinly veiled ways of saying, “No- I don’t want to hang out with you.”

The rejection that comes through in this parable is rough. If you’ve ever been at an event that didn’t go quite as planned, you’ll know this type of anxiety. Because there is definitely a “correct way” for these events to go. For example- my parents hosted my wedding about a year ago. There were so many parties; I think I was home every other week for several months. And

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that doesn't even count the *actual wedding* that was a whole weekend-long event! Mom, Dad, and we were planning for about a year- intense planning for at least 6 months. And the invites were a HUGE DEAL. Who is invited, who isn't invited? Do we *reallyyy* like that friend enough to have them at the wedding? Yeah- it's the stuff that no one talks about considering. The who's invited and who's not means that you're crafting the whole vibe that you want at your event! When this man sent out the invitations to his banquet- it had taken a lot of work.

So, everyone says they can't come. What does the man do? He sends out his servants to find people. ANYBODY who can come. The servants are told to go to every street they can find, even the alleys and highways. The man wants each and every one of the seats filled at this banquet. Now, this is where the different parables differ a bit. This is the end of the Luke passage. A bit of a bitter note on that last sentence: "I tell you, not one of those who were invited will taste my dinner." a strong sense of the man being very clear about who isn't allowed in.

In the Matthew passage- there is a lot more detail about what happens to the people who don't come and to one of the men at the wedding. For clarity- it is definitely a wedding in Matthew and the person hosting is the King. So we know this is a Big Deal. Did anyone else watch the Royal Weddings several years ago? We know that this is a big event. Only the elite are invited, and to even get an invite is a status symbol. Some of the people who were invited to this King-hosted wedding ignored the invite altogether (rude)- but others killed the King's servants that were the messengers, which seems like a drastic measure to get out of a wedding. So- the king actually sends out *different* servants to find people. And once the seats are all filled, the king notices that one of the guests isn't wearing wedding clothes. We already know that the King isn't the most forgiving person- he sent people out to kill the ones who had killed the King's servants. But surely not wearing the right outfit to the wedding isn't Death Worthy, right? Matthew 22: 10-14 says, "**11** Now when the king came in and saw the guests, he spotted a man who wasn't wearing wedding clothes. **12** He said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' But he was speechless. **13** Then the king said to his servants, 'Tie his hands and feet and throw him out into the farthest darkness. People there will be weeping and grinding their teeth.'

14 "Many people are invited, but few people are chosen."

Alright- there is a lot to unpack here. Wearing something that isn't wedding clothes doesn't seem like it should be this big of a deal, right? Maybe only if it is a known social norm... but even then, tying someone up and throwing him into the darkness seems a bit over the top. For example, 2 family members wore dresses that could be considered white to our wedding- and I've just held a classy annoyance toward them for the last year instead of going this intense and effectively condemning them to death. That seems drastic.

But here's the thing- not wearing wedding garments *was* that drastic. In fact, hosts would put out a rack of outfits in the entryway for the sole reason of borrowing if someone didn't have something to wear. To choose not to wear one intentionally- and then to refuse to grab something at the door was immediately disrespectful to any host and to the whole occasion. This isn't just

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wearing white to someone's wedding. This is so much worse. The guest is intentionally ignoring the provision that has been put in place for them.

What does any of this mean for us though? We've established that the rules are different now; no one is getting thrown into the darkness for wearing the wrong thing to a wedding, and we know that making up lame excuses won't actually solve any of the invitation problems. To understand better, we need to look at the host of the banquet or the king. And I will prepare you now, a lot of the time, people focus on the king who orders different people to be killed instead of focusing on the host's generosity. We are mainly going to focus on the generosity piece. Because while the king or the host seems really harsh, it is important to see those reactions as human reactions to outside situations. We believe in a God of grace and love. So- everyone, take a moment to set down the anxiety that I am going to preach hellfire and brimstone at you... that's not my goal.

Looking back into the Luke passage, the one with all the weirdly detailed excuses, and when the servant tells the host that there is more room because people didn't come to the banquet, the master says, "Go quickly to the city's streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame." and then said, "Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled." This isn't just telling the servant to go to different places in town, like, "okay no one in Cherry Hills will come? Okay, go to Kirby! And Prospect! And make sure you get people to come from Urbana!" That's not quite the point. The point is that the people being called are from different runs of life. The poor people are invited, the blind people, the ones who may not have a permanent home, and maybe the ones who don't know all the perfect theological answers. Then more people are able to come, there is still room. So the servants are told to bring in the people who aren't the cleanest, the ones who have to beg for one reason or another, the ones who are looked down upon in society. *They* are the ones who are invited to this party now. Not the perfect ones who actually received invitations. It's not the ones who knew the party was happening and the social norms of participating. Instead, it is the least of society. It is the ones that a rich person wouldn't be seen with. And instead, there is a whole party thrown, and they are the ones attending.

Now, inclusiveness is one of the very clear themes in the gospel of Luke. Maybe that is why it is one of my favorites. The point is that the original people invited would have been the religious leaders, the ones high in society, the ones who were ritually pure and able to hold on to their social status. The ones who ended up attending, however, were unclean; they were the ones who were systematically oppressed. They wouldn't have been able even to enter the temple, much less understand what was happening in worship.

God has asked us – the ones who aren't worthy, who don't understand, who can't fix all the world's problems, God has asked us to join together at the banquet. Like Scott has said many times, if anyone here is perfect- you probably won't like us very much. God isn't interested in having the perfect people around the table; they've given excuse after excuse not to be present.

Looking at Matthew and still ignoring the weirdly violent nature of the king, we find a God of abundance. For a wedding, there were wedding clothes that were fully provided and

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available to anyone who attended. God has provided everything we need! We don't even have to match the color scheme! Which makes it even more heartbreaking that some would walk by the abundance provided and ignore the grace and love that has been offered so freely. But here's the thing- God doesn't leave us to know all of this on our own. Imagine if this parable ended instead with a friend looking at the man who wasn't wearing wedding clothes, and he said, "OH! I see that you don't understand this- I will help you, here put this on, and we will go eat some awesome food." We can absolutely be that person for each other. Because we are not called to be perfect, we are not called to know all the answers or to be able to act exactly right in every situation. We are called to see the Creator's grace, to hear Jesus's love for us, and to use the conversations and interactions with the Spirit to help each other. We serve a God of abundance, of love, of grace. We don't have to be perfect because God already is.

Please pray with me-

God, you are a God of abundance. You are constantly calling us to spend time with you in your word and actively listening for your will. Remind us of this. Remind us that we don't need to be perfect or know the answer every time. Because you already know. You are the one who writes it all into existence. Continue to be present with us, Lord, as we strive to remember. In your son's name, Amen.