

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

Invites, Ingrates, & Open Gates

Written By

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You have in your hand a special invitation. What is it for you might ask? It is a personal invitation to attend the banquet of the Lord that He will serve to all of those who enter His glorious Kingdom by placing their faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior.

The table set before us is only a crude example of the one waiting for all the saints in the Lord's Kingdom. Chairs are quietly being taken by people from all walks of life. As you look at the table you see that the chairs are occupied by people you have seen before: a nine year old boy, a banker, a college basketball player, a young mother, a bag lady, a soldier, a teacher, and a king. They sit quietly waiting for all of the chairs to be filled, filled by those who accept the King's personal invitation.

What will you do with your invitation today? Will you turn it into the Lord's servant so that you can get in on this kingdom banquet? Or will you stuff your invitation in your purse or your suit pocket and just forget about it? What will you do with the invitation the Lord has presented to you?



As we look today at *The Parable of the Wedding Feast*, we come face to face with people who have held this unique invitation before. Perhaps as we study their reaction the Lord will move on your soul, and you will be counted as one of those who will have a chair waiting for you at the Lord's banquet table in eternity.

Will You Be At The Wedding Feast of All Feasts? (Matthew 22:1-14)

To help us answer this question, we must first acquaint ourselves with the immediate context. This particular thought-provoking and judgmental parable stands at the end of a parabolic trilogy delivered in the Temple precincts by Jesus to the religious leaders of his day (Matthew 21:23). It is a Tuesday, just three days before His crucifixion, and thousands of people sat motionless as He used three parables to point out the rebellious hearts of Israel's spiritual elite.

In the first parable, viz., *The Parable of the Two Sons* (Matthew 21:28-32), Jesus uncovered the rebellious nature of these leaders charlatans. They, in parabolic fashion, represented the son who said he would do the father's work, but in the final analysis, had no intention of ever working in behalf of the father (God) in His choice, fertile vineyard (Israel, Isaiah 5).

In the second parable, viz., *The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers* (Matthew 21:33-46), Jesus not only discussed the perpetual and historical rebellion of the leaders in more explicit terms, He vividly warned of their coming judgment for concocting a plan to kill the chosen Son of the Vineyard owner (God). The stone (Jesus) they would reject as unfitting for the spiritual needs of the people would, in fact, become the chief strategic stone in the spiritual temple, ultimately composed of Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:13-22). Here's an appropriate personal question before we move on: What have you done with this Stone? Do you trip over it (Him)? If so, it is time to get up off the ground and realize your need to embrace this Stone, this Savior in faith so you, too, can be part of His eternal, magnificent temple.

In each of these parables, Jesus painted His story in the language and interest of the day. He spoke first about a father and his son, then he spoke about a landowner and his testy tenants, and now he turns to talk about a King who desired to throw a wedding banquet for his beloved son. Listen attentively as we look at this parable for it has a message for every one of you who have not R.S.V.P'd to the Lord's Kingdom invitation.

In order to facilitate our understanding of this particular parable, let's break it down into its three logical rhetorical movements. And as we do this, we might as well make our points practical because so much is at stake, spiritually speaking.

You Have An Invitation (Matthew 22:1-3)

Invite Number One. [Note some have erroneously confused this parable with a similar one delivered in Luke 14:15-24. The premise of these parables is the same, i.e., a man invites people to a banquet; however, upon closer investigation one can see that the two parables are entirely dissimilar. Consider the chart in your study notes to see the contrasts.]

In this first scene, we get a peek at wedding banquet of all banquets, one where a wealthy king pulled out all the stops for his son, the would-be groom. Notice Jesus metaphorically relates the messianic kingdom/heaven directly to the story in question. Nobody should have missed the pedagogical correlation:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son” (Matthew 22: 2).

In chapter 21 verse 43 Jesus had ominously warned:

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”

Here in this first instructional moment He begins to explain in parabolic form just how and why He was forced to temporarily remove the kingdom promises of Israel and give them to another people, viz., the disciples, who would, in turn, become the foundation for His new work called the Church. Paul develops this point years later in his letter to the Ephesians:

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ ¹ For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, ¹⁵ abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person ¹ in place of the two, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, ¹⁸ for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. ¹ ²¹ Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord ... (Ephesians 2).

The Church, a mystery to Old Testament saints, would be God's new people; however, they would not ultimately replace Israel and the promises God gave to her. Again, Paul presents this point better than anyone in Romans 9 through 11. His words at the beginning of chapter 11 are most fitting:

¹ I ask, then, has God rejected his people? Of course not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew (Romans 11).

Down in verse 25, he makes the temporary nature of God's judgment against His chosen people even more readily apparent:

²⁵ ¹ I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers, so that you will not become wise (in) your own estimation: a hardening has come upon Israel in part, until the full number of the Gentiles comes in, ²⁶ and thus all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come out of Zion, he will turn away godlessness from Jacob; ²⁷ and this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

He quoted directly from God's promises to Israel as detailed in the prophets (Isaiah 59:20, 21; Jeremiah 31:33-34). They would be His people, again; however, their rejection of Him during His earthly mission would not be without consequences, as the parable before us demonstrates.

Now before we get ourselves too deeply in this parable, we must first understand that the ancient Israelite wedding was nothing like ours today. Their weddings were combined with wedding feasts which *preceded* the wedding. Generally, the festivities lasted for one week, and the guests were put up in the home of the groom's parents. In the case of a royal wedding, as we encounter here, the guests would have certainly been more numerous and the expense more outlandish. And to attend a royal wedding would have been the experience of a lifetime, because no financial holds were barred!

In any event, as with any wedding banquet, invitations had been sent out to assure that numerous guests would be present for momentous occasion. But, based on what the first three verses state, no one had responded to the first invitation; therefore, the king sent servants to their homes to see if anyone was, in fact, planning on attending. What grace. What patience. What class.

How were the king's servants received? You will be shocked by the collective response:

³ He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come.

Is your jaw on the proverbial floor? What person in their right mind would miss a personal invitation to attend the no-holds-barred celebration of the wedding of a king's only son? In Greek their reply isn't just a simple, "I'm busy," or "I'm sorry be we just can't make it." No, by placing the negative at the beginning of the clause it is a definitive, emphatic, "No, we are not willing to attend." What was their problem?

Invite Number Two (Matthew 22:4-5). The King responded, again, in a gracious, patient, classy manner by sending His servants back to the same homes to let the subjects know this would be a wedding celebration to end all celebrations.

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" (Matthew 22:4).

Again the faithful servants delivered their king's message. I'm sure they couldn't believe what they heard earlier and that they were going out again. I'm sure they thought that anybody in their right mind wouldn't miss this wedding banquet for the world! But they dutifully went out with the gracious message.

Shockingly, once again they were met with cold hearted, callous reluctance, but this time it was more insidious because it was mixed with apathy and indifference and outright, unfounded and brazen hatred for the King.

⁵ Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. ⁶ The rest laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them.

Again, I ask you, “Is your jaw firmly on the floor?” Their responses, ranging from cold indifference to bold brutality, are completely uncalled for, aren’t they?

Come with me as we put this in D.C. terms.

One of our parishoners is the communications director at the White House for President Obama. Some time ago he told me if I ever wanted a private tour of the West Wing to let me him know. Nice, thoughtful, special invitation, wouldn’t you agree? I will be taking him up on the invite tonight at 7:00 p.m., along with my wife and some friends visiting from California.

Who wouldn’t jump at an invite like this? In many respects, it is the chance of a lifetime, and it is not even an invite to a major White House event. Clear thinking people accept wonderful invitations like this.

If any normal citizen of the United States would seize upon this private tour opportunity, can you possibly imagine, or cognitively fathom, turning down multiple invites to an actual White House *event to end all events*? Can you imagine what we would think about folks who were either completely indifferent toward the Presidential invitation, or who murdered his emissaries who simply made sure they knew they were invited to his pull-out-all-the-stops celebration.

Predictably, the rude and crude responses to the king eventually enrage Him and move Him to take punitive action against the ingrates/

⁷ The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city (Matthew 22).

At this day and time, it was normal for kings who had been wronged to harshly, and quickly judge those who opposed or offended them. The fact that this particular king sent emissaries a second time shows he was, in fact, a gracious, good king. Yet like the kings of his day, there was a limit to what he would put up with from his subjects. So, when the king heard about how his servants were treated by the potential guests, he immediately dispatched his soldiers with orders to kill the rebellious people and burn their city to the ground.

And don’t think you wouldn’t be enraged. Back in the 90s, one of my well-to-do parishoners threw an extravagant party for this wife’s 40th birthday. Liz and I showed up, but almost nobody else did. Tables of fine, costly cuisine were everywhere, the place was decorated in a beautiful fashion, but the sound of crickets could have easily overtaken the voices of so few attendees. Believe me, the businessman was not pleased with all those who said they’d attend and then didn’t show up. No, he didn’t burn their homes to the ground; but he was justifiably upset.

Based on this argument from the lesser to the greater, you can, hopefully, well imagine how a king would feel toward antagonistic, hateful subjects

Invite Number Three (Matthew 22:8-14). With the king’s orders fulfilled to the letter, he still faced the hard reality he had a wedding banquet which needed guests. So he took practical action:

⁸ Then he said to his servants, ‘The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come. ⁹ Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to

the feast whomever you find.' ¹⁰ The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, ^{and} the hall was filled with guests. ¹¹

The king commanded his servants to find guests out in the streets. The Greek word for streets (διεξόδους) describes ones which cut through the heart of the town, not outlying roads. Hence the servants were to go to where the most people could be located. Within short order the wedding hall was filled with guests whom the Scriptures call bad and good.

The custom of this day regarding weddings and grand feasts was qualitatively different from ours. When you attended a royal celebration in ancient times, you came as you were and you received a costly robe at the door. Thus everyone was dressed the same. Please keep this in mind for it will help you understand what happened next in the story.

Strolling into the crowded hall, the gracious king noticed immediately that one gentleman wasn't wearing the proper attire. So he came over to him and asked kindly:

Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes (Matthew 22:12)?

The man remained speechless. Why? Because he had willfully disobeyed the custom of the day by arrogantly walking into the feast in his own dress. He was, in fact, making a bold statement to the effect, "I can do what I want because of who I am. And anyway, I'm sure the king will be glad I'm here!"

The king wasn't glad the rebellious man was in attendance. Instead of dismissing his disobedient subject, however, the king called for servants to come and bind the man and cast him out of the festive hall into the darkness of the night (v. 13).

Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Once the servants carried out this definitive order, the Lord then tacked on these ominous words:

For many are invited, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14).

What does *that* mean? Why did Jesus end in this manner? What was he saying in this unusual parable? And, every Greek speaker listening to this concluding point grasped that the emphasis fell upon the adjective "many" because He purposefully altered the proper word order by placing it first. The invitation went out far and wide, to countless, numerous subjects; however, only a small fraction are actually the king's chosen subjects. Cryptic, isn't it? What does this all mean? Let's dissect it and seek to extract its all-important, pragmatic meaning, but before we do, allow me to offer this one practical insight: At this point I think it is becoming clear God is probably giving you an invitation to a wedding feast to beat all wedding feasts. Keep that thought on the front burner of your mind as we move to the second concept:

You Have An Interpretation

To understand the theological implication of this strategic story, we must first get acquainted with what I'll call ...

The Prophetic Basis of the Parable. Stated differently, by isolating and understanding the prophetic bedrock upon which this parable is built, a bedrock reaching back into the Old Testament, our interpretation is honed to a finer point.

As I have taught before (but it's worth remembering since the average person loses about 9,000 brain cells per day¹), from Genesis 3:15 the Lord God promised to one day send a deliverer who would defeat Satan and erect His glorious and eternal kingdom. In Genesis 12:1-3 this coming deliverer was narrowed down to a people, in Genesis 49:10 it was narrowed down to the tribe of Judah, and in 2 Samuel 7 it was narrowed down even further to the house of David. God's promise was sure: *One day the deliverer would come and defeat Satan and erect God's literal kingdom over Israel and Jerusalem would be His mighty, glorious capital.*

Reading through the prophets you catch glimpses, here and there, of what they were looking for in this coming kingdom. But one thing that's extremely interesting is that the prophets prophesied the Davidic/divine kingdom would be introduced by a wedding banquet. For instance, in Isaiah 25 where the prophet talks about the triumphs of the kingdom age, we hear from the lips of Isaiah in verse 6:

On this mountain [i.e., the holy mount in Jerusalem] the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all people, a banquet of aged wine--the best of meats and the finest of wines.

The prophets also talked about this feast being associated with a wedding. Regarding this we read in Isaiah 51:10:

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

Sound familiar? The Jews sitting at Jesus's feet that day in the Temple were well aware of the prophecies concerning the coming kingdom of the Lord that the Messiah would erect. They knew it would be introduced with a great wedding feast. With these prophetic thoughts in mind, then, let us next look at ...

The Proper Identification of the Parabolic Parts. Jesus wasn't just telling a story to be telling a story, but, as usual, He delivered a pointed, practical message to the religious and common Jews of His day. This message, of course, is best understood as we get a grip on the identity of the parabolic parts.

- No doubt, the king who determined to throw the wedding feast for his son is none other than God himself.
- The son must be God's only Son Jesus.
- The servants equal the prophets of the Lord who had for hundreds of years called wicked Israel to repentance. (Jeremiah 15:19; Ezekiel 14:6; Hosea 11:6; Zechariah 1:4).

¹ <http://medicmagic.net/how-many-brain-cells-die-each-day.html>.

- The initial guests are the indifferent and rebellious Israelites, who in less than a week would be instrumental in having their Messiah crucified.
- The second group of guests who received a wedding feast invitation are anybody and everybody who would listen to and accept the chance of a lifetime invitation from the king. From the ministry of Christ, this would naturally denote all the outcasts and sinners He purposefully reached out to (Matthew 9:10-11; 11:19), coupled with the Gentiles He would turn to as His people pulled away from Him.
- The inappropriately dressed man at the wedding is most likely a self-righteous Pharisee who erroneously thought that he--if anybody--would be accepted at the Lord's feast introducing the new, messianic kingdom (Matthew 12:18, 21).
- The attendants at the end of the parable are quite possibly the angels, who will be responsible for placing all those who fail to come to the Messiah on his terms in the fires of hell.

Through this graphic and stern parable, the Lord demonstrated how God had graciously sent His servants to invite His chosen people to be a part of His kingdom. Look closely here for you will see in the responses of the Jewish people four different responses that will keep people out of the kingdom of heaven.

- *The Indifferent* (v. 3). As I stated earlier, these people had been invited previously. There was no reason why they shouldn't have replied, and they certainly didn't need a personal invitation. They were simply indifferent to the spiritual call of the Lord. Imagine, prophet after prophet came to Israel and the majority of the people yawned at his message. Imagine how God must have felt. Imagine how saddened He was. Imagine how sad He is today when sinners respond in the same way. Repeatedly they hear the Gospel message to repent of their sin, trust Christ, and thereby enter the Lord's spiritual kingdom ... and they just yawn. "Oh go on" they say. "I'm too busy for that religious stuff right now. Maybe later."

The Preoccupied (vv. 4-5). These people also had ample opportunity to respond to the personal invitation of the Lord to be a part of the wedding celebration. But look at how they responded. The first two people stand for those who are preoccupied with their jobs. Guest number one went back to his field and to take care of his crop and guest number two went back to his business. The Greek word here for business is "emporion" from which we get the word emporium, which refers to marketplace. What Jesus was saying is that these parabolic people represent the people of Israel and how they responded to His repeated and gracious call to enter the kingdom. Prophets had invited them and the Messiah had invited them, and these types of people were more concerned about their jobs, making money, and turning a profit than being in the kingdom.

It is a sad state when the Lord continually holds His invitation to eternal life and the coming kingdom to people at they continually turn the invitation

down because they are too busy with making money to think about spiritual things. I've seen many people like that, haven't you? They work hard to get the nice home, the boat in the driveway, sound investments, new furniture in the living room, a hideaway home in the Outer Banks, and all the stuff of life. They work and work and all the time the Lord is calling their name, but they don't listen. They won't even think about the invitation.

- *The Hostile* (v. 6). The third group illustrates people who aren't just indifferent toward God and caught up with life ... they outright hate Him. They look for the opportunity to rebel against Him and live wickedly. And they can't stand to be near a righteous person, so when they are they openly oppose them.

These certainly represent all those from Israel's history to the present who have openly opposed God and His servants. And they certainly represented the wicked and self-righteous Pharisees who stood before the Lord that day. Externally they looked righteous, but internally they were looking for a way to kill the king's son, Jesus.

- *The Self-righteous* (vv. 11-13). This final figure represents the morally, self-righteous Pharisee who arrogantly thought that he could come to God's wedding celebration on his own terms. He thought that God would be pleased to have him. He was, as we would say, a legend in his own spiritual mind. This man, however, thought wrong. Dead wrong.

Unfortunately, our world is full of folks just like this where Jesus and Christianity are concerned. A spiritual story of this nature should make you stop and ask yourself: "God, am I any one of these types, and if so which one?" After He shows you, I hope you have the courage to seek His forgiveness and the willingness to ask to join Him at the wedding feast of all feasts. All of this is a natural segue into the third and final point about the wedding invitation you have in your hand.

You Have An Instruction

Two practical truths are readily identifiable and should be immediately acted upon:

God's call to enter His kingdom has always been a gracious invitation. That's the way it was with Israel, and that's the way it will be with you. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus lovingly extends the wedding feast in the new kingdom to you when He says:

Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

How many times has Jesus called your name and invited you to take up a chair at the table in His new kingdom. How many times have you behaved just like the people of the parable? How many times have you put Him off?

You know, there is much to learn from the man who came to the wedding feast in his own dress. That man just might be you: You who think that the Lord will allow you into

heaven as you are spiritually right now; You who think your own moral goodness will be acceptable to the Lord; You are self-deceived and smug believing that your genetic linkage to the chosen people automatically makes you a kingdom member. A change of clothing is definitely in order if you desire to sit at the Messiah's beautifully adorned table in the kingdom.

What do you need to do? You need to be like the last group of people. Take note that Jesus called His servants to call the good and the bad unto his feast. That doesn't mean that evil people will be in heaven. What Jesus is saying is this: The spiritual kingdom is open now to anyone, whether you are morally good or evil, who is desirous of putting on His robe of righteousness. These people came to Jesus just as they were, and it was He who gave them what they needed so that they could stay in the banquet. The same is true for you and me. Some of us may be morally good and some morally bad, but according to Romans 3:23 none of us are good enough to please Christ. That is why when we come to Him in faith, He gives us His robe of righteousness, or as Paul says He imputes his righteousness to us (Romans 4:13-25).

Jesus wants you to have a place at His feast table, but you must come to Him on His terms. You must also come to Him just as you are. When you do that in faith, He will make you the holy person you need to be to live before him.

Beyond this we see in the parable a second crucial principle ...

God's patience with calling the sinner to repentance always has a built in breaking point. As you look at this parable, you will see there are two distinct judgments.

First, Christ prophetically spoke about the coming destruction of Jerusalem under Caesar Titus in 70 A. D. We see this veiled prophecy in the action the parabolic king took in using his army to destroy the city of the murderers. The city is, no doubt, Jerusalem, and the soldiers were under the command of Titus. They were also ultimately under that command of the King of Kings as many foreign armies had been in Israel's past (e.g. Isa. 10:5).

Those Israelites, who rejected the Lord's invitation to enter the Kingdom and enjoy the wedding celebration, were dealt with harshly. Titus began the siege of Jerusalem in April of 70 A. D. The Jewish defenders managed to hold out for five long famine filled months, but by the close of August the Temple area was taken by the Romans and the Temple proper was razed. In that siege Josephus tells us that some 1,337,490 Jews died (*Wars of the Jews*, Chapter 9: footnote). The Lord did, indeed, level His physical wrath against those who turned their noses up at him. And by doing this He decisively demonstrated there is a time when His invitation to the wedding banquet can be withdrawn from spiritually obstinate people.

How can this not cause you to take a long, hard, honest look at your spiritual life? God will not always bear with your brash, rude, crude opposition to Him and His gospel of forgiveness and life. The invitation is in your hand to the messianic wedding, to the event which will usher in His future kingdom. The table is set today for you, really for anyone, who would like to make a reservation. The Lord is calling you, "Come, come to the wedding banquet!"