

## Matthew 22:1-14

Here we are, Jesus is still speaking to the chief priests and elders about authority and the kingdom of God. The first parable he told them was about two disobedient sons. The second was about a man who owned a vineyard. Today's is about a wedding. Weddings are stressful, for the bride, for the bride's mother, for the groom, but especially for most pastors. Most pastors would rather do anything other than a wedding. I am different, I love to officiate at weddings. However I have never officiated at a wedding where the invited guests not only didn't bother to show up, but they killed the servants who were sent out to invite them.

Unlike the first two parables where it could easily be realized God was the father of the two sons, and the owner of the vineyard, this parable doesn't lend itself to that conclusion; after all, a parable is a story, and a story doesn't have to have a strong hidden meaning. Here we have a king who wants to celebrate a wedding feast. He has prepared a huge feast, and he has asked everyone he knows, expecting them to respond positively to his invitation. For some reason no one he knows wants to attend, and they mean business. They kill the slaves who are sent to them with a second invitation. Aren't you glad they aren't your friends?

Since he has all this food prepared, he doesn't want it to go to waste. He could have. He could have just let it sit and rot, or fed it to his animals. But he is a generous man who wants someone to share, not only in his feast, but in his joyous celebration. So he sends his remaining servants out to invite anyone they can find, both the bad and the good people on the street. Now think about it. You've prepared for months to have a huge wedding celebration, expecting all your friends and family to come join in with you. They don't decline, they just don't bother to RSVP. So you call them up and ask them if they are coming, and they hang up on you. You take that as a no. Well, here you are, you have ordered and paid for a huge wedding cake that cost a fortune; you have a banquet hall reserved, and you've scheduled a caterer to whom you've given a non-refundable deposit. Do you cancel and lose all your money, or do you invite people you don't know? The generous king decided to invite the people he didn't know.

However, the king is most likely in a bad mood because he's been rejected by his friends and family. And now, besides the meal and the cake, he has to furnish the proper clothing to be worn at his celebration. He graciously makes the proper attire available to all who come through the door. But one person refuses to accept his generosity and doesn't don a robe, he isn't properly clothed. So, not only do the king's friends and family refuse his generosity, now one of the wedding guests whom he does not know has decided to refuse his generosity of the proper clothing. This is where Jesus' claim "many are called but few are chosen" comes into play. The man has accepted the king's invitation but he chooses not to accept the king's generosity and wear the proper attire, so the king, already in a bad mood, kicks him out of the celebration and has him sent to the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Of course, a human cannot send another human into the outer darkness. Even though this parable is a story, it has a moral: there will be a day of judgement.

Being called is an invitation. If a person does not respond to the generosity of God's grace the invitation doesn't really matter. If you don't live out God's call on your life, God's call doesn't mean a thing. This invitation, this call, puts a responsibility on you. When we are called to be a citizen in the kingdom of God, we are called to a life that lives out that call, we need to embody God's call in our actions. We are called to bear fruit. I'm going to say we are called to bear the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-23. "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control....” But that isn’t the only way we are called. We are called to live our lives in a way that demonstrates the love of Jesus. Again, accepting the call gives you responsibility. It is a challenge when God calls us to do something, when God lays something on our heart that we know we have to follow, that we have to complete. How do we tell if it is something that comes from God? It will be life-giving. God’s call is always a call to life.

Sometimes the life that is being touched is our own. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior our lives are changed. No longer do we want to do the things that hurt others. No longer do we want to lie, steal, or cheat.

The invitation is God's invitation to follow Jesus. It is God saying I want to show you my love, my plan for all people and all creation to live in harmony. I want to show you a different way to wholeness, to health, to meaning and purpose. "Come to me," says Jesus, "and I will give you rest." That rest means rest from a life of toil and struggle that doesn't seem to make a difference. It is a call to the kingdom, the reign of God. It is new and different.

- The world says - domination, accumulation and consumption is the way. Get all you can get.

God says - I invite you to another way.

- The world says - conquer, control, compete.

God says - I invite you to another way.

- The world says - an eye for an eye, get revenge, resist evil with evil.

God says - I invite you to another way.

- The world says - conform, be part of the majority, agree with the masses, go with the flow.

God says - I invite you to another way.

The invitation is an invitation to love and laughter. It means grace and forgiveness. It means partnership and harmony. God wants you to know and experience unconditional acceptance. God wants to put loving arms around you. God wants to forgive you. God wants to free you from bondage and guilt. God wants to give you rest.

If there is bitterness in your heart, God wants to take that bitterness away. If there is no joy in your life, God wants to bring laughter. If there is regret or shame, God wants to wash it away. God will remember your sin no more. If you are living under the power of sin, if you are driven, addicted, captive to another allegiance, bound by another strong attraction that is destroying you, God wants to release you, set you free, give you a fresh start. It is God's will that you experience wholeness. It is beautiful, like a marriage feast.

How do you accept this invitation? Be obedient to the call. Say a decisive Yes. The Holy Spirit will work in your heart, in your conscience, in your inner self. There will be a nudge, a hunger, a desire to be different, a longing for change. Your conscience will give you a reminder that the way you are going is wrong, a dead end. Something is missing. Receive God's unconditional love. Let God love you the way you are. Don't try to be good enough. Don't wait until you are good enough. Don't compare yourself with others, measure your worthiness, or look to see if others are coming with you. Just come to the banquet. Receive God's love. Enjoy grace. It is God's love that will transform you, not your promise to be good. It is God's love that will open your eyes. It is God's love that will empower you to follow. I pray you will accept the generosity of God, and not be pushed into the outer darkness.

All glory be to God.