A ROYAL INVITATION

Matthew 22:1-14

Last week and this week we’re looking at a trilogy of parables in Matthew Chapters 21 and 22. All 3 of these parables point out that God’s judgment will be against those who reject Jesus. Jesus is teaching in the temple. He’s addressing the Jewish religious leaders and the nation of Israel. In just a few short days Jesus will go to the cross. That’s the setting. The basic message of all 3 of these parables is the same – “You’ve rejected Me for 3+ years, now God is rejecting you!” I look at these last chapters as indicative of God’s grace. Jesus presents God’s truth, His message for His people, one last time to those who have rejected Him. He looks eye to eye at these men and gives them one last chance to accept Him as their Messiah. [note: as leaders go so go the people] But we know that they will not accept Him. These same religious leaders that Jesus is talking to, the Pharisees, the chief priest and the elders of the people are even now plotting to seize Jesus. They have already determined that He must die. It says at the end of Chapter 21 that they were seeking to arrest Him but they feared the people. The timing isn’t quite right. So Jesus continues His verbal rebuke of the Jewish religious leadership in the third of the three parables, Matthew Chapter 22, the Parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son. Let’s look at it this morning…

READ Matthew 22:1-2 [*a parable is a story using common things to represent deeper spiritual truths*]

The king in this parable represents God. The king’s son would be Jesus Christ, the bridegroom. John the Baptist used this same analogy of the bridegroom when he spoke about Jesus in John 3:29 – “The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.”

The wedding feast represents the kingdom of God or as Matthew calls it, “the kingdom of heaven.” This kingdom of God includes the whole spiritual commonwealth of God’s children, those who accept God’s invitation to come follow Him. Those in the kingdom have been redeemed by God’s amazing grace. It is a place of divine blessing. Is it a physical or spiritual kingdom?

The king’s son is getting married. It’s a happy occasion which calls for great celebration. Of course in the Jewish tradition of Jesus’ day weddings were a big deal because they included a wedding feast. And that normally was a week-long event. And a royal wedding feast! Why that would even be a bigger deal! So the kingdom of heaven is like a royal wedding feast – a large group of people sharing a joyful time of fellowship and celebration with the king.

READ Matthew 22:3

The king sends out invitations to a group of people whom he has chosen to come and be a part of this great and happy royal celebration. Imagine yourself, just a common ordinary citizen getting an invitation to a royal wedding. That would be quite an honor! The invitation represents the call of God to come to Christ. The servants represent God’s preachers, His messengers. The king’s initial invitations are sent out to a select few. These special individuals represent God’s chosen people, His covenant nation, the Jews. But what do they do? They reject the king’s invitation. They are unwilling to come to the feast – just as the Jews who were chosen by God, way back beginning with Abraham, by and large rejected their own Messiah.

However, the king doesn’t stop there. He’s so gracious! He gives these same people who he originally invited and who ignored his invitation yet another opportunity to respond…

READ Matthew 22:4

The king lays out in vivid detail just how fantastic the wedding celebration is going to be. He lets the people he’s inviting know about all that they will be able to enjoy. Imagine all the wonderful sights, sounds and smells associated with a royal wedding feast, all that great food, and it’s all free. The king says, “Just come and enjoy it with us!” So, how can anyone refuse such a wonderfully gracious invitation? This is a once in a lifetime opportunity! Well, look at their response…

READ Matthew 22:5-6

Whoa!! Some respond with indifference – they just go about their daily business ignoring the king’s invitation. “Who cares!” is their attitude. By the way, that’s the reaction of most secular people when given the opportunity to come to Christ, isn’t it? Others, inexplicably, resort to violence. They mistreat and even kill the messengers sent by the king. These would be those who propagate false religion. False religion (it doesn’t matter how you cloak it) always reacts violently when it encounters the truth of a holy and righteous God. Those who have been invited to be a part of God’s kingdom killed many of God’s prophets in the Old Testament. They even killed John the Baptist who announced the coming of their Messiah. Those invited in Jesus’ day reacted violently against Him and then later against God’s preachers and evangelists. It’s still happening around the world today. God offers people His wonderful free gift of salvation, to come and enjoy sweet fellowship with Him in a beautiful perfect place, and the reaction to the love He shows is an intense hatred and rejection – a rejection of God – a rejection of His Son, Jesus.

So here we see both kinds of rejection to God – one of apathy and one of violent opposition.

READ Matthew 22:7

Because of the way his messengers have been mistreated, the king is outraged and he pronounces his judgment on those who rejected his invitation. Many scholars believe that this verse is a prophecy by Jesus thru this parable about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D at the hands of the Roman Emperor Titus. One point one million Jews killed and the city of Jerusalem burned and destroyed by the Roman army. The great temple that King Herod had built up, the pride of the Jewish people, the center of their religious worship was destroyed. The whole Jewish sacrificial system that went back to the time of Moses stopped. And it has never been resumed.

The king does not give up, however. His son is getting married and he wants to share the celebration with others. So if the original people who were invited aren’t interested in being a part of it, he’ll find other people who are.

READ Matthew 22:8-10

The king sends his messengers out to the highways and beyond. To the crossroads, to where people from all over the world are. This represents the Gospel being preached to the Gentiles. This is indicative of the great missionary efforts by Paul, Silas, Barnabas and many of the original disciples during the early days of Christianity. The result of the king’s new strategy is that many people come to the king’s wedding feast and the banquet hall is filled with eager recipients of the king’s invitation. As the old hymn declares, “Send the proclamation over vale and hill…Whosoever will may come.”

Why were those who were originally invited now considered by the king to be unworthy? One reason – because they did not accept the king’s invitation. It had nothing to do with their own morality. In fact, you can argue that the Jews of Jesus’ day were very moral people. They tried very hard to keep the Law of God. They were religious, gave alms, prayed, went to the temple regularly. They were what we might consider “good” people. Their worthiness had everything to do with whether they accepted or rejected the king’s invitation. Notice that the king’s servants gathered whoever would come, both bad and good (v 10). With this new group, it isn’t about their morality either. Some were considered to be “good” people and some “bad” people in a generic, general sense. It didn’t matter. The guests weren’t told to clean up their act, become good moral citizens and then come to the wedding feast. They were told to come. Bottom line, they gained entrance into the wedding feast simply because they said, “Yes” to the king’s invitation. They responded. They came. But this parable doesn’t end there. There is another point to be made.

READ Matthew 22:11-13

To understand the significance of this passage you need to understand the practice at a typical Jewish wedding in Jesus’ day. Once you arrived at the wedding feast you, as the guest, were required to wear the proper wedding clothes. It’s very likely, though Jesus doesn’t say in the parable, that these clothes would have been furnished by the king. Whatever the case we know that the king expected his guests to wear certain attire.

The wedding clothes represent the righteousness of God – the robe of God’s imputed righteousness, which only God can provide. We can’t provide it ourselves. That would be self-righteousness. “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” (Isaiah 64:6) The KJV says “all our righteousness are as filthy rags.” Instead we are to clothe ourselves with Christ. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” Galatians says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3:27) It’s a beautiful picture. In Job 29:14 Job declares, “I put on righteousness and it clothed me.” Isaiah 61:10 says, “For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.”

Well, in this parable one of the invited guests chooses (and it was his own choice) not to wear the proper attire. He’s not wearing the proper wedding garment. He’s wearing what he wants to wear. When asked to explain himself he’s speechless (v 12). He offers no satisfactory explanation. In fact he doesn’t say anything at all because there is nothing he can say. Because of his failure to meet the king’s requirement, he is cast out of the wedding feast. It makes no difference what he is wearing. The bottom line is that he is NOT wearing what the king required. He is without excuse and he is held personally responsible for it. Ultimately, he alone pays the price for being clothed in his own self-righteousness rather than with the righteousness of God in Christ. The man in this parable is cast out into the darkness of the Jewish night away from the bright lights and joyous celebration. He has been rejected by the king for doing things his way, on his own terms, rather than doing things the king’s way. The weeping and gnashing of teeth represents that the man had great regret for his failure. But it’s too late. He’s been cast out and the door has been shut.

READ Matthew 22:14

God’s invitation is extended to many, but few accept it. People reject God’s invitation because they don’t care or are too busy or don’t think it’s important enough to interrupt their lives. Some accept God’s invitation, but only on their terms. Unfortunately for them this yields the same result as an outright rejection. God invites all to come to Him, but they must come on His terms. Those who refuse to respond to His invitation will not thwart God’s divine plan and purpose.

2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

The latter part of 1 John 3:10 reminds us, “Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

Jesus says in Luke 10:16: “The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent me.”

I trust that each of you have accepted God’s invitation to the wedding feast, to the marriage supper of the Lamb. If you have not done so, then today is the day of salvation. For those of us who have already accepted His invitation, it is our responsibility to take our King’s invitation out to our neighbors, to our families, to our schools and to our work places. We, the redeemed, are His messengers. Let’s do what we can to be sure that heaven is filled when the wedding feast is served. Our responsibility is to extend the King’s invitation and then let God, the Holy Spirit do His work in the hearts of people. We’ve been talking about the King’s invitation this morning so it is only fitting that we sing a hymn of invitation, “Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me…”