

Introduction

Several years ago we were in the midst of a government shut down. And one of the things that was shut down was the White House kitchen. Now a certain university's football team from Clemson, South Carolina had won the National Championship that year and earned an invitation to the White House to be honored for their victory. Normally there would be a banquet with a full spread of the finest food, but not when there is a government shut down. And yet this team was not going to miss such an opportunity. They went anyway. Kinda funny, but the President himself footed the bill and bought an overabundance of big macs and whoppers for the team. And they didn't really mind in the end because it was such an honor to get to be there. This morning's text sets before us quite the opposite picture. Here a king invites guests to his palace but they don't care, not even when he promises the finest and richest food.

[Read Text and Pray]

The last statement Jesus makes there in verse 14 is the point he is making with what is now his third parable in a row. He is still speaking especially to the elders and chief priests of the Jews, many of which were Pharisees. Through his parabolic action and one story, he had shown that they were fruitless hypocrites. Through the next two parables he went even deeper, revealing that they were haters of God and they were going to be replaced. The parable of the wedding guests builds upon the previous ones to depict the irrational nature of their hostility and rejection. And yet the parable explains the reason for such irrationality and for why it is that some who seem to get in the kingdom of heaven will ultimately be cast out. It is because many are called but few are chosen.

In the parable I want you to see . . .

I. The Irrational Rejection of the Kingdom by Those Invited First.

A. In this parable, Jesus depicts God the Father as a king who is hosting a wedding feast for his son. Such feasts would last for days. Certain privileged folks were given advance alert of the upcoming event. The king had in effect sent out "save-the-date" cards. They had every advance advantage to be alert for the coming feast. They had every reason to want to come. They represent the Israelites who had every advantage to be on the lookout for Messiah and to be ready to welcome him and follow him. Paul speaks to their advantage in Romans 9. He says, "to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ." They were full of advantage. According to the flesh, they should have been chomping at the bit to get in to the feast.

The feast is now at hand and the king sends out his servants to call those who had been invited to come. But they will not. The king, undaunted by the resistance of his invitees, sends his servants out again appealing to the fact that the feast was extraordinary. Oxen and fatted calves have been slaughtered and everything is ready.

I mentioned a few weeks ago that Melissa, Ariail, and I recently attended the wedding of my niece. It was in a beautiful low country setting in South Carolina along an open marshland within miles of open ocean. It was quite the affair. And of course we were looking forward to the food at the reception. The main feature of the menu was shrimp and grits. I didn't go just for the food, but it was one of the highlights of the evening. Everybody was saying how delicious it was.

Well, the king in the parable sought to get the attention of his invitees by sharing the banquet menu on his second appeal to come to the feast. Who would want to miss a chance to attend an event at the king's house? This is an enormous opportunity, like the ball in honor of the prince in Cinderella! And not only that, the feast that was being put on was to die for!! Everything in this parable suggests to the listeners that this was an event NOT to be missed. So it raises the curiosity of the listener why anybody would ignore the summons to come to the palace of the king to attend a feast in honor of his son.

But the story gets even worse. The king issues the second summons along with a preview of the menu for the feast. But those being called refused to come. They paid no attention to the summons. They were preoccupied with what seemed like better things, more important things—their farms and their businesses. But some who received the second call were offended. They treated the king's servants shamefully even killing some of them. Now when was the last time you heard of someone being angry to receive a wedding invitation or being offered a feast of prime rib and steak? Could you imagine a British citizen refusing an invitation from Buckingham Palace? You see, the parable presents these invitees as out of their minds because their hearts are filled with animosity. They hate the king and their resentment toward him clouds their rationality. These folks are doing what no one in their right mind would do. And this is the very point Jesus is making. They are not in their right mind. They would need something more than an outward invitation in order to value the privilege and honor and blessing it is to attend the feast of the king. Without that something more they are actually offended by the call of the king!

You see the same reactions today when you are out and about proclaiming the gospel call to crowds. I have been at the Public Market a couple times this summer as groups have gone to share the good news. Many turn their heads and walk away without a word. A few now and then will take a tract. And I have a certain understanding for how people in this day and age are programmed. I myself am. But when you want to talk about eternal things and the gospel many simply ignore you and others smirk as if to say, "leave me alone; get out of my space." Thankfully there aren't too many who seem like they want to kill you. But when you think of how the Lord sent his prophets as servants to call the Jews and Israelites back to himself, and now as you think of how Jesus was standing before these Jews who were filled with hatred, who would soon put Jesus himself on the cross, and who after that would violently persecute Christ's followers, killing some and seeking to kill many, you realize that Jesus stood in the face of such hatred and hostility.

The invitation to come to the feast at the home of the king is the gospel call. It is a call which summons humans to confess themselves as sinners and come to embrace Messiah Jesus. The thing is, sin corrupts and debilitates and disorients and darkens the mind. Sin in the heart produces selfishness and hate and meanness and arrogance and pride. It darkens the mind to pursue one's satisfaction in the context of a finite world with created things rather than by finding satisfaction in the One who created those things. It is a darkness that desires to shut out holiness and so the glorious blessings and offerings that come from holy God of a great feast are reprehensible and objectionable to a heart in that condition. When you imagine the unlikely picture of prominent and favored folks turning their noses up at the invitation of their king to attend a fabulous feast, you are getting the picture of the irrationality of the human heart radically corrupted by sin. There is deadness. There is darkness. It is a darkness Paul depicts in Romans 3. He says, "Jews and Greeks are all under sin . . . None is righteous no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are

ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." To the Ephesians Paul describes the futility of the minds of the lost. He says, "They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart."

B. And so the rejection of Jesus by the Jews is evidence that for people to actually come into the kingdom, it takes more than an outward call. It takes more than a promise of glory. It takes more than an invitation. A heart-change is required that brings a renewed mind is what is required. This can only be accomplished by God himself. And it is a work that is based purely upon his own choice. Hence it is that Jesus explains the reason why many reject him: Many are called but few are chosen. The reason why few come to the feast is that few are chosen. The reason why so many do not come is because of the devastating effects of sin upon the heart and the mind.

But someone might object, "Aren't the Jews God's chosen people?" Well they certainly are. They were chosen to receive every outward provision that could prepare them and influence them toward receiving King Jesus. But they resisted God all along and at last they rejected King Jesus the son himself. It takes more than outward incentive to produce saving faith. It takes a heart being renewed by God's sovereign grace according to his own sovereign choice.

It is not the children of the flesh, says Paul, who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. It is so that God's purpose of election might stand, not according to works but because of him who calls. For God declares that he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. He has mercy on whom he wills and he hardens whomever he wills. Many are called but few are chosen.

Next, let us see . . .

II. The Graphic Judgment of the Jews by God.

The king's reaction to the hostility and rejection of the invitees was anger. He sent his troops and destroyed those murders and burned their city.

Their behavior was unlawful and despicable. The king was abundant in his patience. He had sent three separate waves of summons to call the invitees to come. But there was an end to his patience, and at last he visited justice upon the wicked. They had a city with which they were identified. He destroyed the sinners and burned their city. Couched within this parable Jesus was prophesying God's visitation of justice upon Jerusalem. It would come about in 70 AD. In that year Titus, the son of the Roman emperor Vespasian, brought troops against Jerusalem. More than a million Jews who were crowded in the city perished in the conflict and the Temple was destroyed and burned to the ground.

The destruction of Jerusalem foreshadows the coming day of judgment and destruction in which the wrath of God will be visited upon all who have not come into his kingdom. This graphic depiction along with the fulfillment of prophecy should put fear into the consciences of all who are not resting in Christ. It presents the justice of God in action against those who live their lives enjoying all the benefits and blessings of their creator King, all the ways in which he has manifested himself, and yet who have ignored him, trampled his law underfoot, thumbed their noses at him, and even raised their fists at him, and who have refused his own overtures of peace.

But though the King brought justice to the privileged who refused, he was not yet done. He still had a feast and he purposed for his son to be honored. So he turned to others to fill the wedding hall.

Notice next . . .

III. The Merciful Move by God to Invite Others.

So the King turned to people who were previously uninvited. He issued an invitation to be carried by his servants anywhere there were people to be found. Never mind those who lived in the city and go to those you find as you travel the roads.

Does this not sound like what we call the great commission? Jesus says to his disciples, "GO therefore and make disciples of all NATIONS." God's purpose has actually not been thwarted by the Jews' refusal. He spoke through Hosea, "I will call those who were NOT my people. 'MY people,' and her who was not beloved, 'BELOVED.' And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they shall be called sons of the living God." (Hosea 2:23)

Now in the parable the servants of the king find all kinds of people, both good and bad and fill the wedding hall. No doubt this is good and bad in a relative sense, according to the world's standard. What MacArthur observes in his commentary is right. Neither the good nor the bad in themselves measures up to the perfect standard of God. Neither is more acceptable to God than the other because "neither is righteous enough and both are equally in need of salvation." The only acceptable way into the wedding feast is being qualified by a righteousness that none of Adam's descendants possesses. We need the righteousness of the second Adam, the second representative, and that is the righteousness of Jesus and it can only be obtained through faith in him. We have to accept him and we have to trust in him. We must rest ourselves in his perfect life, his satisfying death, and his victorious resurrection. Those who do, who become Christ's disciples, are the ones who will fill the wedding hall. And whosoever will, may come.

Perhaps this is the moment when you sense yourself as a sinner to desire to come to the wedding feast of God, to enter his kingdom, to partake of the bounteous riches God has spread out for those who come to him. His servant is inviting you and your heart says, "Yes!" Then come. Come in faith to Jesus. Turn your back on yourself and turn away from your life of sin. Treasure the glory of the King; trust in him; believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Now! And then soak in the message of this parable that many are called but few are chosen. We still have to get to that, but next I want you to be encouraged as we look at . . .

IV. The Amazing Delight by God in His Guests.

So at last the wedding hall is filled with guests. And the king enters to look at the guests. The verb here translated "to look at" is translated BEHELD in John 1 where John is speaking of the glory of Jesus and says, "we have BEHELD his glory." There is more to this verb than simply to look at something. It intimates that the one who sees is CAREFULLY LOOKING OVER with contemplation and wonderment. It is truly striking that the king here when this feast is for his son comes out to look over, to check out, to BEHOLD his guests. God takes pleasure in his work. Think of the days of creation. From day three forward we are told that God saw what he had done and it was good. Finally on day 6, God saw everything that he had made and, behold, it was very good. That is the sense that comes across here in the parable. The king comes out to feast his eyes on his guests. It has long been his purpose to fill the wedding hall with guests in honor of his son. Now he comes to look out at what HE by his persistence, patience, and grace has done. Isaiah 53 depicts the suffering servant as considering the anguish of his suffering. He shall see and be satisfied. Zephaniah depicts the Lord as speaking to his people with assurance on that great day. He says, "The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; . . . The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

Know this, God delights in those upon whom he pours out saving grace. He rejoices over the ones he has predestined to share in the riches of his glory. He truly loves and delights in his people. And that means YOU if you are his and it means me. This nugget in the midst of this parable warms my heart and I hope it warms yours. The Lord wants his people to know they are prized.

But let us be careful as we look at . . .

V. The Just Exclusion by God of a Disallowed Intruder.

As the king looks out over his beloved guests, he sees one there who is dressed improperly. The analogy of salvation by which sinners are clothed by God with garments of salvation and robes of righteousness suggests that the attendees were not dressed with their own clothes but with garments supplied by the king. Only in this way is their attire worthy of the occasion. However, here one individual stands out from the crowd. He is not dressed in appropriate clothing. He presumed to come in as he was. Addressed by the king as to how he got in without a wedding garment, he is speechless. He did not come according to the invitation. He wanted in but he did not want to pay the price of humbling himself. Rather, he thought his works were good enough. This is not the gospel. Those who think they can enter on the basis of their own righteousness are unworthy. They will instead be cast out into hell with all the others who have not believed the gospel.

And thus we come to Jesus' main point . . .

VI. The Undeniable Declaration by Jesus of God's Amazing Grace.

It is summed up simply this way: for many are called but few are chosen. The terrible side-effects of sin are many. It caused the Jews to behave irrationally in rejecting the gospel. But it also leads people to form their own ideas of truth and to form even their own gospels. As Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" The darkness of the mind results in humans overestimating their own righteousness, underestimating their sin, and coming up with all sorts of their own ideas of how to get to heaven, any way at all except purely by the blood of Christ. So corrupt is the mind that apart from God's sovereign grace, no one would ever even see it.

If there is going to be any salvation, it is going to be a work of God. And this is the way it is. And even its human components such as the exercise of faith are a gift of God's grace. No one can and no one will come to the kingdom of Christ on one's own. And therefore, if you are in the kingdom, it is ultimately because God has chosen you from the foundation of the world.

Listen carefully to Romans 9:22ff.

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles.

Many question this doctrine. They charge that it is unfair. But I submit to you that it is better than fair. People who charge the doctrine of God's predestinating choice with unfairness do not understand the nature of human sin. They miss the point of the parable that EVEN the people with the greatest advantage and most outward incentive do not want in. And if left to ourselves none of us would want in. We would only find God's general call worth ignoring. We would all find the world more desirable. We would all snub the King's invitation or would seek to get in our own way.

The implications are these. Do not be surprised by the many who refuse or reject the gospel, who reject Jesus, who would rather imbibe the things of this world than repent of sin and come to Christ. The god of this world has blinded their minds.

On the other hand be completely overwhelmed with amazement if you are in the kingdom. It is not because of you. Your repentance and your faith are a part of God's great work that all began with his unconditional choice in eternity past.

Sin leads people to wonder why there are disasters. Where was God? Why didn't he stop that from happening? Jesus showed those who came to him with such questions that they were asking the wrong question. The real question is not why are there disasters.

Grace teaches us to ask a different question. In light of my sin and its corruption and the grace that leads me to understand it this way, I rather ask when thinking of disasters, why was I spared? Why wasn't I taken down? Grace teaches me also to ask, "Why am I a guest at the feast? Why does God love me?" And these are questions for which the answer will never be found in you or in me!"

Conclusion

I close with the words of a wonderful old hymn:

How sweet and awesome is this place
With Christ within the doors,
While everlasting love displays
The choicest of her stores!

Here every bowel of our God
With soft compassion rolls;
Here peace and pardon bought with blood
Is food for dying souls.

While all our hearts and all our songs
Join to admire the feast,
Each of us cry, with thankful tongues,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"

"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly drew us in;
Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin.

Pity the nations, O our God!
Constrain the earth to come;
Send Thy victorious Word abroad,
And bring the strangers home.

We long to see Thy churches full,
That all the chosen race
May with one voice, and heart and soul,
Sing Thy redeeming grace.

Brothers and sisters, we are not there yet, but one day we will be. Right now we are the servants called to go into the highways and give the invitation of the gospel. And by this means, our great God will fill his wedding hall. Let us do our part with awe and wonder and gratitude.

Prayer

Benediction

Now may our great and GRACIOUS GOD who loved and chose us before the foundation of the world fill us with awe and wonder that he would choose us. Overcome with humility let us spend our days serving him with gladness and confidence knowing that he who chose us will also hold us fast.