

MESSAGE – The Kingdom of Heaven is like a Black-Tie Event

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There's a familiar and recurring story out there that for me, is heart-breaking. It is the story of a child's birthday party where everyone in the class is invited. The day comes, the cake is ready, the balloons and streamers are hung, and the games are ready to be played....and one, two or no one shows up to the party.

It's heart-breaking

And perhaps a bit humiliating.

We've been taking a look at some stories that Jesus told which give a glimpse into the kingdom of God

So that we can recognize it when what we've been praying for happens: the kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

We heard the story told about

A guy who is forgiven a very large amount of money but then doesn't forgive someone who owes him a very small amount of money

And we heard the story about

And a payday in which everyone gets the same wage no matter how many hours they worked

And today we are given another story:

SCRIPTURE Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ "Then he sent some more servants and said, '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.' ⁵ "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them

and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

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This story offers us several points of reflection:

1) *There's a party*

it's a party with a purpose: to celebrate something:  
in particular that something lost has been found:

Like a woman who found her lost a coin

A shepherd who found his lost sheep

And a dad whose lost son returned home

A party is thrown celebrating the restoration of a great relationship with God.

The party is the celebration that all has been healed  
and made right.

- It's party like a wedding banquet where people promise to live together
- It's a party like a family reunion picnic where people remember they are related to one another..j Isaiah 25

2) *The party invitation demands a response.*

In those days: when an invitation went out.....

The servant waited for an immediate response and would take the tally  
back to the host so the host can get ready.

Makes me think about the passage in Revelation where Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock"....there's a couple famous pictures painted to depict that. My favorite

rendition is the one that where there is no door handle on the outside of the door....it has to be opened from within...just like our response to the kingdom of God....we have to open ourselves to it; God doesn't force it.

As I said, in those Roman times, the servant would stand and await a response.

The kingdom of heaven awaits a reply from us as well.

*3) There's no follow through on the invitation.*

Because they have something else to do: they go off to their respective businesses.

When Luke tells this story, he includes reasons people don't follow through on their response:

bought a piece of land

bought 5 yoke of oxen

just got married

seems understandable; justifiable and yet, whatever

the reason – the result is the same: humiliation to the host saying that something else is more important....when there really is nothing more important in that moment.

*4) There is an initial reaction.*

Matthew includes something that Luke doesn't – the king's vivid anger that is acted on: "destroyed those murderers and burned their cities."

I recognize that some of us might have a hard time dealing with a reality of punishment. Especially when we're talking about God who is full of grace and mercy. But the fact of the matter is: choosing to not respond to the invitation has it's consequences.

*5) There's a second invitation sent out.*

It's a huge invitation....a radical invitation: people you wouldn't think belong

It goes everywhere....like seed that a sower scatters, indiscriminate.

It is the picture of pure grace

*6) A fulfilled response is still required.*

Someone's there who doesn't dress for the party

On the surface, it seems an absurd demand:

These people have been invited that very day... they're coming from work... who has time prepare? ...to get cleaned up and clothes changed?

But this isn't about someone showing up underdressed....which is a relief, given the many times I've felt underdressed.

This is about not even putting in any kind of effort. Everyone else whose there was able to put in some kind of effort to show they knew they needed to change.....but this guy didn't even try to make some kind of change.

And that's the point:

This is a *new* kingdom with new priorities and values and you can't act like it's the same. Paul used the imagery of new clothes to explain this very thing to people new in the faith:

Colossians 3:5-14

<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

In Romans, Paul talked about this required change in another way:

"what then, shall we go on sinning so that grace may abound?" And he answered:

"By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?"

Doing so cheapens the grace....says that the gift hasn't changed me.

Or like our proverb for the day said:

*"You can't whitewash your sins and get by with it; you find mercy by admitting and leaving them."*

*7) Choosing to not change also has it's consequences.*

The guy who didn't change was thrown out of the banquet.

This whole parable, as told by Matthew, could be understood as an allegory in which the people who are initially invited are the people of Israel; the Jews....and the people who are secondarily invited are Gentiles.

But, I think that we can all find ourselves in this story as we take in the three basic principles for all:

That we've been invited to a party:

*Do you know there's a party you've been invited to?*

A response is requested:

*Is your invitation still sitting unanswered?*

Follow-through and change is expected.

*How aware are you that God has expectations of you; that if you fulfill them, your life and its priorities will change?*