

Matthew 22:1-14

If you have ever **hosted** a party for a big occasion, you know that it's a **lot** of work. There's a lot of **planning** that needs to take place. You have to think about the **location**, the **menu**, the **activities**, the **decorations**, the **guest list**, and on and on. Now, imagine if you put in all that **time** and **effort** preparing to throw a great party, and then, on the day of the event, **none** of your guests decided to show up. You would be **devastated**. That's the situation Jesus was talking about with members of the Sanhedrin in our sermon text for today. His message to them was clear: **Don't Miss The Banquet**. And in an **eternal** sense, that same message applies to us **today** as well.

Jesus spoke this parable around the same time as He spoke the **other** parables we've taken a look at over the past few Sundays. It was **Holy Week** - the final days before Jesus' suffering and death on the **cross**. The Jewish religious leaders were exerting an all-out effort to **discredit** Jesus, and to stop Him from gaining an even larger **following**. Jesus spoke to these religious leaders in **parables** to point out their **hypocrisy** and their **foolishness** in light of **God's truth**. This is certainly true of the parable of the **wedding banquet**, which we have before us today.

Jesus said that that kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a **wedding banquet** for his son. We have to understand that this was much more than what we usually think of today as a wedding reception. It wasn't just a nice **catered** dinner on a Saturday night for a few hundred friends. The king's banquet was a whole **series** of special meals. It was a celebration which would go on for a **full week**. The king had pulled out **all** the stops - killing the **best** oxen and the **fattened** calf. All that was left now was for the **guests** to show up, and **enjoy** the party. But that's where this parable takes a strange **turn**. We would **think** that the guests would have been **thrilled** to be heading to the king's palace for this week-long banquet. But when the king's servants went out into the community to announce that the banquet was **ready**, the guests **refused** to come. Even when the king sent out a **second** round of messengers, the people **still** stayed away.

We're told that there were **two reasons** why the people weren't coming to the banquet. Some of the people just didn't **care**. They thought they had **better** things to do. As Jesus said, "*Those who were invited paid no attention and went off, one to his own **farm**, another to his **business**.*" The **second** group of people who wouldn't come were much more **in-your-face** with their refusal of the invitation. They **hated** the king, and they wanted **nothing to do** with his

celebration. They even went so far as to **seize** the king's messengers, and **kill** them - actions to which the king **responded** by "*sending his **army** and **killing** those murderers, and **burning** their town.*"

That's pretty **shocking**, but Jesus was explaining the shocking **spiritual reality** which existed in the world at that time. God had sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to **save** the world. In just a few days, His **suffering, death** and **resurrection** would put the **finishing touches** on God's plan of salvation. Through the sacrifice of His one and only **Son**, God had prepared a **banquet** of salvation for His people. It was a banquet of **forgiveness, peace, and eternal life**. God's own people - the nation of **Israel** - had received a **special invitation** to that banquet. For hundreds of years, God had sent **prophets** to them, to **inform** them that He would send the **Messiah**, who would prepare a heavenly banquet of **salvation**. And, yet, when the time actually **came** and the messengers, including Jesus Himself, announced that the kingdom of God had **arrived**, most of the people for whom this banquet had been prepared **rejected** the invitation. They wanted nothing to do with **Jesus** as their **Savior**. Some of them were simply **apathetic** towards Jesus, but others, like the members of the **Sanhedrin**, actually wanted to take the **next** step which Jesus talked about in His parable - they wanted to **kill** the Messenger - an action which would **seal** their own fate. Just as the king in the parable sent out his army to **destroy** those who had murdered his servants, God's judgment would **also** come to those who had rejected and murdered **His Son**.

But that's not **us**, is it? We would **never** turn away God's invitation to the banquet of salvation. Or **would** we? Remember, not everyone in the parable who rejected the king's invitation did so out of absolute **hatred** for the king. Some were simply **indifferent**. Is there a possibility that we might treat God's Word and His Gospel promises with a similar kind of **indifference**? I think there is. Perhaps one of the greatest spiritual problems in our world today is that of **apathy**. God **prepares** His rich banquet of salvation for us, **invites** us through the Word and the Sacrament, and people respond with, "**Whatever**. I don't care. There are more **important** things to worry about. We have to think about the **pandemic**, and the big **election**, and our **finances** and our **families**." But, perhaps what people are **unaware** of, is that when we treat God's message of salvation with such **apathy**, we run the risk of **missing out** on the heavenly banquet altogether.

Thank God that He doesn't **give up** on us. Jesus points out the **persistence** of God's **love** as He **continues** the parable. After the **first** round of invitations was **rejected**, the king didn't **give up**. He sent out **more** messengers to take invitations out to the **street corners**, and to invite to the feast **anyone** who would **listen**. It's

interesting that there were **many** people who responded **positively** to this round of invitations. In fact there were **so many** who responded, that the king's banquet hall was **completely full**. But then we hear about **another** problem. Not everyone at the banquet was properly **dressed**. The king noticed at least **one** man who wasn't wearing the **wedding clothes** which he had provided for everyone, and when the king asked the man why he wasn't properly **dressed**, the man had **no response**. So the king threw the man **outside**. He, along with anyone else who wasn't wearing the right clothing, was also going to **Miss The Banquet**.

Of course, Jesus wasn't using this example to teach the members of the Sanhedrin the importance of always **dressing your best**. The picture is of the banquet of **salvation**. And the point is, if we're going to take part in **that** banquet, there's only **one way** to get in. Nobody is going to be able to **sneak in** the side door of heaven. We must be wearing a **perfect** robe of righteousness - the righteousness of **Jesus** - righteousness which He freely **provides** to all those who put their trust in **Him** for salvation. That's what it takes to enjoy the **eternal banquet** of heaven.

Are **we** wearing the right clothing for this banquet? Wearing the right clothing means first of all **despairing** of our **own** ability to stand before God dressed in our **own** righteousness, because even if we would devote our life to all kinds of **good causes**, and even though we would try to live out each and every day in the **best** possible way - when we would stand before God on the Last Day, we would still be covered with **sin**. The only way we can enter the banquet is by being covered with the perfection of **Jesus**. By faith in Jesus as our Savior, we can stand before God without fear. Very shortly we'll be singing the hymn - "*Jesus, **your** blood and righteousness My **beauty** are, my glorious **dress**; Mid flaming worlds, in **these** arrayed, With **joy** shall I lift up my head.*" Covered with the perfection of **Jesus**, we can look forward with all **certainty** to enjoying the wonderful banquet of **heaven**, which God has prepared for us.

That's **good news**, and right now, good news is in **short supply**. But, knowing that we have eternal life in **heaven** waiting for us, is better than knowing that we've been invited to dinner at the **governor's** mansion, or to attend the president's inaugural **ball**. We have been invited to a banquet in the mansions of **heaven** - a banquet which lasts **forever**. **Don't Miss The Banquet**. God graciously continues to **invite** us to be a **part** of that banquet through His Holy **Word**. Don't treat God's invitation as though it's not a big deal. Don't allow a single day to go by without **thanking** God for the love He has shown in **securing** our eternal salvation. And let's make sure we're always wearing the **right clothes** for the

banquet by making faithful and frequent use of **God's Word** and the **Lord's Supper**, for the strengthening of our **faith** in Jesus. And while we're at it, let's not be satisfied to attend the banquet **alone**. Let's extend God's invitation to everyone we can, so they can learn about God's love for them, and look forward to spending an eternity at the great heavenly banquet **with us**. It's the one thing we **don't** want to miss, and by God's grace, **We Won't Miss The Banquet**. Amen.