

## Introduction

In Matthew chapter 22, Jesus tells a story that has to do with clothing, and what to wear, and he even talks about wearing the wrong thing.

It's a disturbing story in some ways, it doesn't have a happy ending. At least not for the one dressed who wasn't properly dressed.

Now it was very unlikely that any of the people Jesus was speaking to had ever actually been to a royal wedding feast, but they were all familiar with wedding feasts in general. They had some idea of the importance and magnificence of one that a king would prepare for his own son.

In that day and time, a wedding feast was the highlight of all social life. A wedding feast that a king prepared for his son would be the "feast of all feasts".

Jesus was painting a picture here of the most elaborate celebration possible. If it took place in Monkton & Prestwick North Church, it would no doubt make everything that's happened all year long look like nothing at all.

I think it's important to notice that Jesus compared his kingdom to a feast or a banquet. Being a part of God's kingdom is like going to a party.

It's a festive occasion, a time of fellowship, a time of joy.

Some people seem to think that you can't enjoy yourself if you're a Christian, they think that to be a Christian means you have to denounce every joy and pleasure in life.

I think Jesus wanted us to understand that the greatest true joys this life has to offer, are found in his kingdom.

Now in that place and time, there was a two-stage process of being invited to a wedding.

The invitation was actually sent out well in advance of the banquet and everyone sent back their RSVP.

Then, those who had said "yes" received a courtesy reminder on the day of the banquet itself.

So, the king sent out his servants to tell everyone to come join the party, those who had been invited wouldn't come.

So, he tried again, sending out his messengers to say, "Look, it's going to be a great party -- lots of food and fun!" But they said, "We've got other things to do. Sorry, can't make it. We'd love to, but we're just too busy."

And you know how the king felt also. We've all had that happen to us at some time or another.

You work like hard getting ready for something. Maybe it's a party. Maybe it's Sunday School or a get-together for some group in the church.

You spend hours and hours getting everything ready. You work hard and you're excited about what you've got planned.

The big day comes. You planned for twenty and only three show up. You planned for thirty and you get eight. It makes you angry, frustrated and depressed. You know how the king in this parable felt.

There's a story about an elder in a session meeting. This elder had the unenviable task of giving a report on the broken boiler which happened during the coldest January for years.

He began by saying, "I wish to paraphrase Matthew 22: 14." "Many are called and the pews are frozen!"

We'll come back to this parable in the main talk.

## Main

If you know how the king in this parable felt, then in some small way, you know how God feels whenever one of us rejects his invitation to be a part of the kingdom that he has prepared for us.

But it got even worse. I'm sure the Jews listening to Jesus would have thought to themselves, "Who would do such a thing -- refuse to go to a king's banquet?

The very idea is crazy." Let's face it; attending a royal wedding would be the greatest honour most folk would ever enjoy in their entire life. Yet these people refused to attend. They just went on with their everyday lives as usual.

Some of them got downright violent with the messengers. So, the king gets furious. He punishes those rebellious people, then he decides to extend the invitation of this feast to anyone and everyone who wanted to come. He tells his servants, "Round up all the people you can."

Basically, the King says, "The food is ready. The drink is ready. We're going to have a party." And he did just that, he invited everybody. Anybody who wanted to come was welcome to enjoy the feast -- good and bad. The chosen people refused, he invited everyone else. The banquet hall was filled with people.

Now, to understand what Jesus was trying to say, we need to remember that for three years, Jesus had been teaching and preaching the gospel of the

kingdom, which included proclaiming himself as the Messiah, the Son of God. He was inviting people to come into the Kingdom.

His message was primarily for the people of Israel, the chosen people of God the people who had said, "We want to be a part of God's kingdom."

The king in this parable is God, the invited guests were his chosen people, the Jews, who had already been called by him. The servants God sent to them again and again were John the Baptist, Jesus himself, New Testament apostles all the old testament prophets.

John the Baptist was rejected and beheaded, Jesus was rejected and crucified, the apostles and prophets were rejected and persecuted, many being put to death.

When the Jews rejected the kingdom, the invitation was then extended to anyone and everyone who wanted to come.

Notice that by the end of the parable, there is no one who is not invited to the son's wedding feast.

That's one of the points of the parable.

When God throws a party, it's the biggest bash in town, there isn't a single person who is left off the invitation list.

When Jesus died on the cross and was made sin for us, no one was left out. The only thing that leaves us out of the feast is if we refuse to accept the invitation, then it's entirely our own choice and fault. God's desire is to fill his banquet hall with guests. God wants to throw a party; he's invited the world.

So, it's easy to understand the parable to this point, but then there is this "incident":

The king came in to see how the banquet was going, and he spotted someone without a wedding garment, and he was furious.

Here's a true story that might help us understand what is going on.

Illustration:

At the end of World War II, the Russian head of state gave an elaborate banquet to honour British prime minister Winston Churchill. The Russians arrived in their best formal wear -- military dress uniforms -- but their honoured guest did not. Churchill arrived wearing his famous zipper coveralls that he had worn during the German bomb attack in London. He thought it would provide a nostalgic touch the Russians would appreciate. They didn't.

They were humiliated and insulted that their prominent guest of honour had not considered their banquet worthy of his best clothes.

You see, wearing the right clothing to a formal dinner honours the host and the occasion. neglecting to wear can be regarded as an insult.

Weddings were such a big and important occasion in that day and time that people were expected to wear the proper clothing.

Getting cleaned up and dressed up was a way of showing appreciation and respect for the invitation.

At first, you might wonder how any of those who accepted the king's invitation could have been expected to come properly dressed.

They had been rounded up from every part of the land, many of them had been taken off the streets.

Even if they had time to dress properly, they didn't have any clothes for such an event as the wedding of the king's son.

Well, in those days the king supplied the wedding garment himself.

All the guests had to do was just put it on and turn up.

Here was a man who didn't even make the small effort involved in putting on the proper provided clothing. It's important for us to remember that accepting an invitation means accepting the terms of the invitation.

If you go to eat at a restaurant which has a sign out front that says, "Jacket and tie required", Then you wouldn't go wearing jeans and T-shirt and expect to get a good reception at the door. Accepting an invitation means accepting the terms of the invitation. At first glance, it seems a small

thing, but it's not. This man without a wedding garment thought he could come to the king's feast on his own terms. Forget about what the king wanted or had provided for the event.

That's the case with a lot people and the kingdom of God, isn't it?

A lot of people want to be a part of the feast, but they don't want to submit themselves to God's terms. The parable of the wedding feast was originally intended for the Jews, especially the Jewish leaders.

Just like God's salvation.

God sent Jesus and the people

of Israel refused to believe that he was the Messiah.

So, the invitation was then given to anyone -- the good and bad, those who knew God's law and those who didn't, both Jews and Gentiles.

And that's a nice way to read the story, because we believe in Jesus.

Since we believe that Jesus was the Messiah, this story sort of makes you want to smile and get excited because after all, we're not like those bad old Jews who didn't accept Jesus.

We believe in

Jesus. We're in!

Except for this part about the one who

"just showed up".

I mean, you could feel good about this story even though it doesn't really have much of a happy ending....

But I believe this story has a message that is somehow deeper than just the difference between those who believe in Jesus and those who don't.

The more you study this story, the more you get the feeling that this story says something about the difference between believing in Jesus and really following Jesus.

The difference between accepting Jesus as Saviour, and serving Jesus as Lord, the difference between "joining the church" and being the Church.

It's a dangerous thing to make light of God's invitation!

In the parable, some of those who were summoned ignored the king, others declined because they were too busy with other things, still others became hostile and violent.

But all of them, each in his own way, "made light" of the invitation.

The invitation to the feast just wasn't important to any of those who were invited; it had no priority for them. Reminds me of people we know who just don't seem to have any interest in spiritual things. They just simply have no time for them.

Even those of us who are Christians need to examine our lives to see if we are responding to God's invitation on a daily basis.

Do we still have the love for God that we once had, the desire to do everything we can to serve him? Or have things changed?

Somehow our original enthusiasm for the kingdom has a way of growing dim.

We can find ourselves in the position of making light of God's invitation to be his people.

It's not just our initial response in becoming a Christian, but our continued response in being an obedient follower of Christ.

Who can accept the invitation of God?

Anybody who wants to!

God's invitation is extended to people who have lived moral, upright lives since the time they were little children, as well as to the most wicked sinners of society -- the murderers, rapists and prostitutes of this world.

Everyone is invited, "both bad and good".                      That's what's known as grace.

It's one of the things that distinguishes the kingdom of our Lord. By grace, God invites all kinds of people to the party -- God has prepared a spiritual feast for anybody who wants to join him.

He wants you to be part of that joy with him.

But no one will enjoy the "feast" of the kingdom if they refuse to take the kingdom seriously. Whether or not you come to the feast depends on you.

If you take the kingdom of God lightly or on your own terms, you won't be there.                      There will always be some excuse you can come up with.

But if you give the King's invitation the priority it deserves, willing to believe it and obey it, then you will enjoy the blessings of that kingdom throughout eternity.

Amen.