

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. ³He 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. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷The 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. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So 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. ¹²He 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.” (Matthew 22:1-14 NIV2011)

The King Has Chosen You

It was finally time. He had sent out the notice a long time ago. The plans all worked out. Everything is ready. The day has come and he can't wait for everyone to show up and celebrate with him. His son was getting married! Who wouldn't be excited? The only thing that could make it better was the people. After all, as you know, it's not just the event that is special, it's the people with whom you celebrate it. So the king sends out the servants with the good news. He had told them a while ago to be planning for this and to be ready whenever he would call. This wasn't something they would want to miss. So the servants go out. They share the good news. They are just as excited as the king himself. This is a big deal.

The reaction couldn't have been more disappointing. The people refuse to come. They couldn't be less interested.

But the king wasn't going to let this stop him. No, he wants the people to be there with him! This is his son's wedding banquet. He's chosen them to be part of it. So he sends the servants out again. The oxen and fattened calf are ready to go. The prime rib is perfectly cooked. It's an all-you-can-eat affair. He's pulled out all the stops. Everything is ready. “Seriously guys,” the king could be saying, “I have this all ready for you. Come to the wedding banquet.”

But, the schedules were too full. There's work to be done on the ranch. Cows need to be taken care of. She had business that needs her attention at the moment. It wasn't the right time for others. And still some were sick of hearing those servants. They didn't care that the king had chosen them. They were fed up with his message. So they mistreat the servants and even kill them.

When Jesus shares this message he's speaking to a group of people who knew God's—the King of kings and Lord of Lords—invitation. God had chosen them, the Jews, to be his people. He wants them to be part of his feast. And like those reactions in Jesus' parable, the Jews had much the same. Indifference. Too busy. Rejecting and killing God's messengers.

God still sends his servants to you today. The invitation is still the same. The message has not changed. God, your King, calls you to be part of the wedding banquet for his Son. You get a taste of it when we are in God's Word and receive the Lord's Supper looking ahead to the great banquet of heaven. But like with the Jews, we see indifference to God's invitation from so many. We know others who flat out say they are too busy. We might know some who maybe don't kill God's servants, but they speak poorly of and mistreat them.

But what about you? You quite clearly have accepted God's invitation to be with him—you are here right now with Him hearing His word. But there are those other times, right? You know when you've been indifferent to his Word and less-than-caring when you continue in a sin. You maybe have a nonchalant attitude when it comes to partaking in the Lord's Supper feeling like you shouldn't really need it or all that often. Other times you tell yourself you are too busy to have those family devotions at home. Being in God's Word is something you do when you don't have anything else planned for that day. No, you don't seize and kill God's messengers. But, how do you treat His called workers? How do you talk about them? How do you react to that friend who comes to share God's message confronting you of a sin or encouraging you to be in His word? You have the invitation today much like Jesus' original audience did too. And one point I'm sure many of them were excited for God's Word. Others maybe were all ready to feast with him at one time. But something along the way distracted them from being with the King and his feast. Be careful with thinking, "That could never happen to me."

The king is very patient. But his patience eventually runs out. At first, the king's reaction seems almost extreme. But the king is serious about his invitation and how people treat his messengers. So when he finds out some killed his servants, he sends his army to kill those murderers and to destroy their homes. And what happens to those who reject his invitation? He takes the invitation away. They are no longer worthy to be part of his feast. Jesus is warning the Jews in his day and warning you today. If you

continue to reject the king's invitation, they will not be welcome at the wedding banquet of heaven.

But the king still wants people to be with him. So he sends the servants again. This time the servants go to the outsiders. They share this invitation with anyone they can find. Those who looked good on the outside and those who didn't seem like they should be invited—the king wants them all. And they fill up the wedding hall! The king's wish has been fulfilled! It seems like there's going to be a happy ending to this parable. The king goes out into the feast and takes a look at everyone. You could see the smile on his face as looks out over the crowd. They are all here to celebrate and be with him! But then he sees him. Who does he think he is? Did he really think that he could get by without wearing the gift the King gave? Somehow and in some way he had found himself in the feast. He might have been able to fool others, but the king always knows. He asks the man, "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" And the man is speechless. What could he say? He was caught. The king tells his servants, "**Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" Jesus concludes the parable with this truth: "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Jesus is not teaching that God predestines some to be saved and others to go to hell. God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23). His desire is for them to turn from their wicked ways and live (Ezekiel 33:11). God wants all to be saved and to come the knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4). God sent his Son to save the world (John 3:16). At the same time, there is only one way to be saved and to be part of the feast that is heaven and eternity with him. The devil wants you to believe that you can just go through the motions of being a Christian while continuing to hold onto those sins, not confess or turn from them. He whispers in your ear, "Just speak the words when you are supposed to. You don't have to mean them." The world wants you to believe and promote the idea that all it matters is you believe something and God will allow you a place with him. Our sinful natures want us to believe that as long as we try to do the right things, fight the right cause, do your best, you should be safe.

But Jesus teaches us it's not about being in the right place—whether that is the place of that pew you sit in or place in society. There is only one way to be saved. And God, the host of that feast, is the one in control of who is part of heaven. He's not interested in what the world, your reason or opinion thinks. God chooses who will be saved. You may be able to fool others, but the king knows. Unless you have what God expects, you will be cast into hell where the weeping of missed opportunities does not stop and the gnashing of teeth from eternal torture does not end.

So what does this mean for you and me? Because all too often have we listened to the devil's lies. You know how you've just gone through the motions thinking you just need to do the right things. You maybe have convinced yourself that what's important is that you are in church. At least you are here for your one hour a week; the rest of the week is fine. You know how you've been indifferent to your sin. You know how you've gone along with the world instead of going against the culture. You know how you've tried to bargain with the king in order to gain his favor. All of those actions are like that man in the parable who rejected the garment, taking God's gift and throwing it away.

So what does the King do? He does not tie your hand and foot and cast you out of his presence. But when we come through those doors wearing our nasty sin, he offers you new clothes to wear. So we strip off that self-righteousness, we despair of our own capabilities, and lay ourselves bare before the king confessing our sins and plead: Lord, have mercy on me a sinner. And instead of flicking you out of this building into the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, your King comes to you through his called servant who says: I forgive you all your sins. He gives you a new garment, not from yourself. It's a new cloak. It was won for you on the cross with Jesus' perfect life lived for you and his innocent blood he sheds. It was guaranteed to be the perfect garment when he rose from the dead. In fact, it's the same cloak that Jesus wraps you in when he washes you in Holy Baptism presenting you as his radiant bride to God as holy and blameless. So when God looks at you he does not see the sinner that we all are when we walk through those doors. Instead he sees you covered with Jesus' blood and righteousness as your glorious dress—a welcome member of his feast. He sees someone who he has chosen bearing the name he put on you when you are baptized.

When you hear God's Word you partake in that feast—you taste and see that the Lord is good! Jesus feeds your starving soul with his body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. There you partake in the foretaste of the heavenly banquet that waits for us all. There Jesus assures, "The king has chosen you. Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace." When you come to God's house, when you hear his Word, it's not about you doing something for God. It's the King coming to you in Word and Sacrament to feed and assure you, although you have fallen into sin, I still forgive and love you.

And now that King has chosen you to be his servant. He sends you out to love your neighbor. And out of love for your neighbor he sends us to invite them too to take part in this feast. So we go out, with names reserved at the wedding feast of heaven, to invite more to take part of the feast here in God's house being fed with Word and Sacrament. All the while we wait for when the King will choose to call us to that eternal banquet with him. Because the King has chosen you. Amen.