



## Northwest Bible Church

MATTHEW • THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET • MATTHEW 22:1-14 • 10/3/2021

### MAIN POINT

The limitless grace of God comes with a limitless demand.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is the funniest prank you've experienced, pulled off, heard about, or watched?**

**What are the essentials of a great prank?**

**Where is the line between a fantastic prank and a prank that goes too far?**

Pranks are fantastic for a myriad of reasons, including seeing people's reactions both to the prank itself and to the unveiling that they've been pranked—to see someone quite unsettled and eventually quite relieved. Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet is no prank, but it can have the same effect: it can be unsettling and/or relieving.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 22:1-3.

**Compared to the way weddings and receptions are held in our culture, what is unusual about the way the king attempted to gather people for the wedding banquet?**

The sending of the servants corresponds to the standard practice of issuing an invitation to an event without specifying the exact time until a later date. It took weeks to prepare a banquet. It could also take days to come to a banquet. And the banquets would last for days. The people

invited at this stage of the parable are those who had already said, “Yes.” Now the messengers were simply going out to announce the beginning of the party.

**Who do these first invitees to the party represent in Jesus’ parable? Who would that be in our culture? How would we know one if we saw one?**

Those first invited to the banquet most likely represent Israel’s religious leaders at the time. In our culture, we would certainly compare our own pastors or seminary professors with these people, but we ought to also look inward. Truly, anyone who has been baptized, goes to church, and takes the Lord’s Supper is a type of religious leader in our culture. Like the religious leaders Jesus had in view, we have effectively told the king that we are coming to the wedding banquet by virtue of our religious lives. The question is whether or not we will actually come when news of the banquet’s beginning comes our way.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ MATTHEW 22:4-6.

**Why don’t these people come?**

**Why does choosing not to go escalate into hostility toward the one inviting them to his banquet?**

Though they had promised to go to the banquet, this group of people ultimately decided that their immediate concerns related to everyday life were more valuable than the announced banquet. Underneath that indifference is actually a harsh hostility. To be indifferent to the banquet is to be hostile toward the king throwing it. It is to say to the king, “You can’t tell me how to run my life.” This hostility is symbolized in the killing of the servants.

**What is the king’s response in verse 7? What might this be a reference to?**

Verse 7 is often viewed as an after-the-fact prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in a.d. 70. But the imagery also parallels stereotypical Old Testament and intertestamental descriptions of destruction in war (see Judges 1:8 and Isaiah 5:24-25). Still, the Roman invasion of Jerusalem may be seen as a partial fulfillment of the principles enunciated here, even if Jesus had Judgment Day more prominently in mind.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 22:8-10.

**What is the shift in strategy for the king? How do these people compare and contrast with the first group?**

**This section ends with the statement that the wedding hall was filled with guests.**

**What point is Jesus making about the kingdom of heaven here?**

This time, the king sends his servants to the main crossroads in the community, where one would find people of all walks of life, not only with regard to ethnicity, but also morality. Here would be the kind of people the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day would certainly shun, and it's these people that enjoyed the banquet. In the end, the king's purpose worked out. With this parable, Jesus leaves His hearers to see that God's purposes will take effect. Those he calls will be present at His heavenly feast.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 22:11-14.

**What do we make of this last scene in the parable? What does it mean?**

Though the king graciously let anyone who responded to the call into the wedding banquet, that kind of limitless grace does not come without demands. In the parable's terms, one must wear a wedding garment at a wedding. This wedding garment is provided by the king upon entry, and is to be worn proudly. In practical terms, this means that there is no presuming upon our presence in the banquet. We must "put on" the righteousness of the One who graciously invited us to His banquet and gave us His righteousness.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How is the parable of the wedding banquet unsettling to you?**

**How is this parable relieving to you?**

**What does this parable say about what the nature of personal evangelism or church ministries should be?**

## PRAYER

Close in prayer for those who are unsettled and those who are relieved. Particularly pray for God's peace to reign in those who react uneasily to this parable.

## COMMENTARY

| MATTHEW 22:1-14

22:1-2. Jesus proceeded to reveal one more truth about the kingdom of heaven and those who had mishandled it. The main character of this parable is a king, representing God the Father. His son represented Jesus the Messiah. Although not an active character in the parable itself, he is central to its meaning, serving as the reason for the wedding banquet. The feast represented the future (eschatological) union of the bridegroom (Jesus) with his bride (God's redeemed people).

For a person to participate in this celebration presupposed that he had placed his faith in the Messiah and become a part of his people, the Messiah's bride. The invitation to the feast was an invitation to discipleship and salvation. It was also an invitation to enjoy the king's blessing—the "food" of the feast as well as the honor of being invited.

22:3-4. The king sent two groups of servants as messengers. The first group went out to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come. These people, representing Israel, God's chosen people (its leaders in particular), knew they were supposed to attend the celebration—they had already been invited. The messengers (representing God's prophets) informed them that it was time to attend. But the invitees refused to accept the invitation.

In this case, the invitation also carried the force of a command. To disregard this invitation or call was not an option; rejection of the call went beyond discourtesy to the point of rebellious disobedience. Israel had not been invited but commanded to pay the price and reap the blessing of kingdom citizenship.

The king was patient enough, even in the face of such discourtesy, to send a second group of messengers to the people. This group represented the Lord's patient pleading with his rebellious people over the centuries through prophet after prophet (see 21:34-37). The message they carried to the people was, "I have gone to a lot of trouble and great expense to prepare this banquet. Dinner is on the table. Come celebrate with us!" Participation in the feast, in honor of the king's son, was both a responsibility and a privilege. The king was appealing, "Come honor my son and enjoy the honor of my blessing."

22:5-6. The second group of messengers received two responses—apathy and aggression. Some people invited to the wedding feast thought they had more important things to do. They chose to ignore the messengers and tend to their fields and businesses—the everyday pursuits that had taken possession of their hearts (6:19-24). God was just as displeased with those who ignored him as he was with those who opposed him.

The other wedding guests responded like the tenants in the previous parable, mistreating and killing the messengers. The one significant difference between the action of the wedding guests and that of the tenants in 21:36 was that the wedding guests had no motive for mistreating and

killing the king's servants. The murder of the messengers and the message of rejection to the king and his son were irrational, since the king intended only good by his invitation.

God's offer of a covenant relationship with Israel carried a price for those who accepted it, but the blessing and honor that the kingdom citizen received would far outweigh the cost of discipleship. God offered redemption, forgiveness, salvation, and reward. Those who rejected God's grace were displaying blindness to the point of insanity. They returned a curse for God's blessing.

22:7. Because of their perverted attitude, the king sent a third messenger. In the previous parable, the third messenger was the landowner's son. In this story, the third messenger was the king's army. They would serve as messengers of judgment on the irrational rebellion of the original wedding guests. The armies destroyed the murderers and burned their cities. This signified God's judgment of those who reject his covenant relationship.

22:8-10. Meanwhile, the celebration was waiting; the son was yet to be honored. So the king sent out his messengers again—but to a different set of invitees this time. The original invitees did not deserve to come. Their self-absorption and irrationality had displaced their loyalty to the king and his son. The new guests were those who would be honored with such an invitation. These were the riffraff, the outcasts of society, that the messengers would find along the byways (the Gr. phrase is variously interpreted as street corners, "main highways," or "forks in the road," all of which would be places to find many people). "Anyone you find" was carefully worded with indefinite force to include every possible prostitute and tax collector (cf. 9:9-13; 21:31-32).

The messengers went out into the streets and invited all the people they could find, both good and bad. Whereas those who should have been "good" (Israel, God's chosen people) had shown themselves to be evil, the king treated all who were evil as though they were good. The impartiality of the king represented the impartial grace of God, inviting all people of all nations into the kingdom during the church age. By extension, we can identify the king's servants or messengers now as the believers in the New Testament church (esp. the apostles).

It was as shocking then as it is now that God accepts the worst of sinners unconditionally. As long as a sinner shows a willingness to accept God's grace by faith. God will transform him or her into a kingdom citizen. With such a group of people the king filled his wedding hall. It was a blend of good and evil, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, wealthy and poor. Truly, the Lord will fill his kingdom with "all nations" or all peoples.

22:11-12. Jesus had already made an important point, but he was about to clarify exactly who could take part in his celebration of faith. After the guests had gathered in the wedding hall, the

king inspected them and discovered a man not dressed properly. The wedding clothes (sometimes supplied by the host) were not a particular style of garment. But they were the cleanest and best clothes each person had to wear (cf. Rev. 19:6-8).

This man was displaying disrespect by wearing less than the best available to him. The king addressed the man as Friend, implying that he was open to an explanation. But when questioned, the man had no answer. He was guilty of failure to honor the king's son in a proper manner. The garment probably referred to the righteousness of Christ provided through his death. To refuse it would be to refuse Christ's sacrifice. To refuse Christ is to refuse life.

22:13. This disrespectful man was recognized as ill-prepared as every imposter will be. At the king's command, he was bound (a vivid picture of the man's inability to participate) and thrown into the darkness. This represented exclusion from this celebration in the kingdom of light and truth. The weeping and gnashing of teeth indicated extreme pain and sorrow.

22:14. Jesus' closing statement had a proverbial tone. Note that he did not say that all men and women are called. But many are invited. God had issued to a wide audience his invitation (command) to join with him in covenant relationship. But few are chosen. Not everyone who is invited will be among the chosen. The adjective chosen suggests that the faith decision is not totally in our hands, but it is a response to God's sovereign election. In particular, the unbelieving religious leaders were among those called but not chosen.