

## Chosen and invited

### Matthew 22:1-14 CEV The Parable of the wedding feast

Once again Jesus used stories to teach the people:

<sup>2</sup> The kingdom of heaven is like what happened when a king gave a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup> The king sent some servants to tell the invited guests to come to the banquet, but the guests refused. <sup>4</sup> He sent other servants to say to the guests, "The banquet is ready! My cattle and prize calves have all been prepared. Everything is ready. Come to the banquet!"

<sup>5</sup> But the guests didn't pay any attention. Some of them left for their farms, and some went to their places of business. <sup>6</sup> Others grabbed the servants, then beat them up and killed them.

<sup>7</sup> This made the king so furious he sent an army to kill those murderers and burn down their city. <sup>8</sup> Then he said to the servants, "It's time for the wedding banquet, and the invited guests don't deserve to come. <sup>9</sup> Go out to the street corners and tell everyone you meet to come to the banquet." <sup>10</sup> They went out on the streets and brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike. And the banquet room was filled with guests.

<sup>11</sup> When the king went in to meet the guests, he found one of them wasn't wearing the right kind of clothes for the wedding. <sup>12</sup> The king asked, "Friend, why didn't you wear proper clothes for the wedding?" But the guest had no excuse. <sup>13</sup> So the king gave orders for that person to be tied hand and foot and to be thrown outside into the dark. That's where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain. <sup>14</sup> Many are invited (called), but only a few are chosen.

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How do you feel when you're invited to a wedding celebration and reception? Do you feel honoured or annoyed? Does it make you feel special or cheap?

Would you answer, "It depends?" Depends on what? On whether you're busy or not? Whether you've got a better offer? Or would it depend on who's getting married and who's offering the invitation?

Jesus tells the interesting and confronting story about the wedding feast. We should be careful not to conclude too quickly who the story represents. Jesus says the story illustrates what the kingdom of heaven is like and therefore we might too quickly assume the king represents God and so on.

Think about the story. A king organises a wedding banquet for his son. He sends servants to tell the invited guests to come but they refuse. How weird is that? This is an invitation from the king. This is likely to be one of the best shows ever - and they refuse? He sends more servants with a message of urgency. Some ignore the invitation as they go about their business and others beat the servants and have them killed. What a shocking response.

So, you could say the king gets into the spirit of things and responds in a shocking way. In a drastic move he has all these people - who remember were invited as guests to his son's wedding - has them all killed and their city destroyed.

Then he's straight back to planning the banquet. He's determined to have a big party for his son's wedding. Out go the servants again and every single person they meet is invited, bad and good alike. And they come to the wedding banquet.

It's party time! The king goes in to greet the guests. But there's another shock, one isn't dressed right! Only one? That one is thrown out into the dark.

Jesus wraps it up with the words, "Many are invited, but only a few are chosen."

What does this teach us about the kingdom of heaven?



Is it a story of grace or judgment? It's a story about judgment. Maybe, more accurately, it's a story about judgments. Note well, all the judgments happen in the context or atmosphere of royal grace.

By the end of the parable everyone is invited to the feast but not everyone is enjoying the festivities. In Jesus words, "All are invited but not all are chosen".

The invitation is the first judgment. Everyone is invited. Would it be true to say everyone is considered worthy to be invited? What sort of judgment is that? When we think judgment we always end up with a least two groups. Welcome or unwelcome? In or out? Invited or not invited? The king decides or judges everyone is to be invited.

I chose the theme, "Chosen and invited" because that's how we do it. If we're having a party the first thing we do is choose. We don't invite first, we choose first. We choose who'll be invited. Then we invite those we've chosen. Could we choose to invite everyone? Certainly, we could but it's highly unlikely we would.

Jesus says, as he wraps up the shocking story, "Many are called or invited, but only a few are chosen." This appears to be an interpretation minefield. Although it's clear enough not everyone who hears the gracious invitation of God ends up in heaven, it's unclear who's responsible for the choosing and the reason for the choice.

If we try to conclude what this story teaches us about our life in the Kingdom of heaven? Would it be fair to say God invites us to party, and the party is the marriage feast of the Lamb? Would it also be fair to say the acceptance of the invitation is crucial?

The king in the story is deadly serious when it comes those rejecting the invitation. Those rejecters are dead wrong if they think there's a party outside the wedding party.

So what does it mean to accept the invitation? It means to trust God's gracious invitation is real. To believe nothing can separate us from the love of God which is ours in Christ Jesus. The invitation isn't based on our goodness because the bad and good alike are brought into the party. The bad don't have to get their act together and become good before they're allowed in.

It's most likely correct to assume each guest in the story was offered a wedding garment by the king. The one without the wedding garment had refused to wear the garment freely provided as he arrived. Compare this idea with **Isaiah 61:10** (NLT) *I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness. I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding or a bride with her jewels.*

Or we might compare the idea to Revelation 7:9f *After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar,*

*"Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!"*

We won't need to provide our own wardrobe for heaven.

Would it be fair to say God invites the whole world to a party - the marriage feast of the Lamb?

Is it true what Robert Farrar Capon writes, *"God isn't mad at anybody: because of his Son - because his Son, by death and resurrection, has drawn all creation to himself as the bride of the Lamb - God wills above all to celebrate."*?

We are called and chosen. We are chosen and called. We are invited and chosen.

God invites each of us to the party of all parties. God invites you. Will you accept?

You're invited and chosen to the eternal party, the marriage feast of the Lamb. Do you believe it?

God wants all people invited to the party. Who have you invited, for God's sake?