

October 11 Matthew 22:1-14

The parable we are looking at today comes after a series of confrontations Jesus has had with the religious leaders of His day. They questioned whether He had the right to do the things He was doing. They demanded to know by what authority He spoke. They didn't want to be a part of His following, and they didn't want others to follow Him either.

In response, Jesus tells several stories, and this is one of them. He describes the kingdom of heaven as being like a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. The characters of the story represent real people. The king represents God the Father, and the son represents Jesus. The servants represent the prophets who called the people to God throughout history. And the banquet represents the marriage feast of the Lamb at the end of the age. Three points today:

Number one: God is going to throw a huge party at the end of the age. It is going to be a party in honor of His Son and His Bride. That's us. The Church. The Church is made up of all those who love Him and belong to him. There will be feasting, dancing and great joy. There will be nothing lacking at this party. The food and drink will never run out. There will be friends and loved ones there and best of all the King and His Son will be present.

Jesus' hearers were probably shocked at this story because those who were invited did not want to come. People found excuses. They had other things to do. More than that, they didn't even want to be invited to the king's party in the first place. They even became angry at those who were inviting them. Jesus' audience could not imagine people failing to accept the invitation to a king's banquet. For them the story bordered on the absurd. In their minds no one would turn down such an invitation.

This parable points to the staggering sin of indifference. Some of the people ignored the invitation. They had other things on their minds. They had better things to do. They wanted to get caught up on their work or take a walk. The invitation was interfering with their plans.

What Jesus was doing in this parable was attacking the appalling apathy that looks at God's gracious invitation to life and joy, and merely sighs with indifference. Not to mention the hostile reaction of those who were invited. It is an unbelievable response- a gross discourtesy!

C.S. Lewis wrote the Screwtape Letters. It is a satire in which the devil briefs his nephew, Wormwood, on the subtleties and techniques of temptation. The goal, he counsels Wormwood, is not wickedness, but indifference. Satan says to him **"I, the devil, will always see to it that there are bad people. Your job, my dear Wormwood, is to provide me with the people who do not care."**

The call of God is always an invitation to ecstasy and life. Jesus said, **"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."**

He also said, **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."**

How is it then that the world looks at God's invitation to a party like it is an invitation to a funeral? This is a King's feast. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience! How can God's good news be thought of as bad news? Worse yet, how is it can be treated as no news at all. The sin of indifference. I don't know and I don't care.

Remember the words of God to the church at Laodicea in the book of Revelation: **"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth."**

The mystery of the ages is how the human race can look at the Son of God and not see anything which appeals to them.

Nietzsche, the famous atheist, said, **"If you want me to believe in your Redeemer, you're going to have to look a lot more redeemed."**

As someone said, **"If you have the joy down in your heart, notify your face."**

It is amazing how people who are supposed to be feasting at a banquet of joy can be so joyless! We can curse the world for all that is wrong, or we can celebrate with God. That's number one. We are heirs of heaven. We will be banqueting with our God.

NUMBER TWO: The guests had their priorities all wrong. Jesus is saying that there is a huge difference between someone who has the form of religion and a true disciple.

The people did not turn away from the King's banquet to indulge in wild immorality. They simply went off to continue the ordinary things of their mundane existence. It is not that they went off to do something bad. They simply left God's best to pursue something less. They were putting their everyday concerns before the King's business. Faced with the greatest invitation possible, they treated it with scorn and indifference. What they were doing seemed more important than what God was doing. They had lost all perspective.

But Jesus was saying that God's gracious invitation to life is not to be placed as one more thing on a 'To Do' list. It is to be THE priority of our lives.

But for the people in the parable, celebrating with the King seemed less appealing than working in their field or going to the market. Put in modern day terms, fellowship with God seemed less important than watching TV or going shopping. There is nothing wrong with those things, except when they take priority over the things of God.

The servants who are sent out to call people to the banquet of the King are tortured and killed. Why did the people torture and kill them? Why not just ignore the invitation? What Jesus is saying is that there are not a variety of ways to respond to God. There are only two. Either you are for Him or you are against Him. It's one or the other. There is nothing in between. You either accept the invitation or you don't.

The frightening fact is that indifference eventually accelerates into hostility. People begin by thinking they can just ignore God and his call on their lives. They don't hate God. They just have other things to do. But over time indifference turns to hostility as their consciences begin to hound them. The invitation from God keeps coming to their heart and they want to shut it off. Apathy will no longer do, and hostility takes over. And that is precisely what people have done throughout history. The prophets of God come with the invitation to the King's banquet, and people not only refuse to come, they kill those who were sent to invite them.

When priorities are out of order apathy can turn to hostility. A heart that was once tender toward God can be so crowded with other things that God begins to take a back seat. And then, when your conscience becomes uncomfortable, your heart becomes hostile to the very thing it once loved. That's number two.

Number three: The King was determined to have a party. It was the custom in New Testament times to extend two separate invitations. The first invitation was to inform the guests that a feast was going to take place so the people would have time to prepare. Then, when the hour arrived for the party, and everything was prepared, a second invitation would go out. People would begin arriving with excitement. Looking forward to what they were about to experience.

But the people in the parable are so rude that they refuse the very first invitation. When the first invitation was rejected the king's servants were stunned. They reported back to the King what had happened. So what did he do? He continued with the preparations for the feast. When it was ready, he sent his servants out with the second invitation to coax them to come, since the banquet was ready.

But those who had been invited simply walked away. Others took the servants and abused and killed them. So, the King said to his servants, **"The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find."**

The King was not to be denied. One way or another, he was going to fill the banquet hall. So, he sent his servants out to invite everyone to the feast, whether they were good or bad. The only qualification was that they were willing to come to the banquet.

This must have stunned Jesus' audience. They caught on that he was talking about God and the great banquet that would take place in his kingdom on the final day, and they could not imagine bad people being there. But this is the good news. What it meant was that even if you have been a bad person, you are still invited to God's feast of joy.

The only condition is a desire to be a part of the celebration. Your desire to be at God's party is proven by the fact that you have walked away from your sin, and even your other interests, to be a part of something which is bigger and more important than anything you have ever known. Perhaps you have been a bad person, but your desire to be with God has brought you to a place of repentance and forgiveness. It has allowed you to come to the banquet when others have been excluded. They were busy with other things and refused to come, but you took the invitation seriously and saw it as good news. You happily took your seat at the banquet of joy.

In Galatians 5:22 we read that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is joy. An inner gladness. A deep sense of pleasure which comes from an assurance and confidence that God does all things for His good purposes. This joy is not the same as the joy found in this world. That joy gives only temporary pleasure and is nagged by incompleteness. Joy found in worldly ways leave a haunting awareness that something could come up and rob you of your joy. Joy received from God gives us the assurance that God does all things well for those who seek Him with all their hearts. God's joy is given by Him through the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us how to experience true joy.

"As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you obey My Commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Jesus' joy was found through obedience to His Father's will; thus, the source of a person's true joy will be found through living an obedient life to the Lord. True joy does not depend on circumstances or happiness. Christians experience joy in the midst of trials as well as blessings. The best way to have joy is to count all your blessings. When done with a grateful heart, joy will abound in you. Joy springs from faith.

Romans 15:13 says, **May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."**

Joy comes in trusting in God who controls all things and knows what is best for you. Hebrews tells us to **"...fix our eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross."**

Jesus did the will of His Father. He was looking ahead to that glorious day, when through His blood He would restore fellowship between man and God. Jesus suffered mockery, shame, a brutal beating and suffering upon the Cross so that you can be forgiven and have fellowship with God. There is a day coming when Christians will stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ and non-Christians as well. Obedient Christians will someday hear "Well done good and faithful servant." Fixing your eyes upon Christ and what he has done, will bring a joy in your labors with the Lord.

Choose the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Receive God's joy and discover an inner gladness. Have the assurance that God will do what is best for you in the building of His Kingdom. Someone once said, "**The difference between happiness and joy is that happiness comes from happenings and joy comes from Jesus.**"

The feast is prepared. The invitation is extended, the banquet table is set, and God's arms are open wide. The only question that remains is whether or not you will accept the invitation. As we walk this adventure of life together on the highway to heaven, we know that every day brings us a little closer to the other side of eternity, when we will be with our beloved Jesus face-to-face, along with all others who love Him. That's our true home. We don't rush our homecoming. We depend on God's timing. Yet, because of the certainty of the life ahead, we can have an eternal joy, no matter what life brings our way here.