

“The Kingdom of God is a Party” Mt. 22:1-14

For the second consecutive year I have a daughter making wedding plans. Let the games begin! I’m standing by with the check book as decisions are being made about caterers and venues and photographers and honeymoon plans. One of the things I have noticed is how things have changed since Jana and I went through this process. For example many couples now send out a “Save the date” notification before they send out the invitations. An invitation used to be sufficient but in our fast-paced, high-octane, low-commitment culture apparently you have to warn people that you are going to invite them to something to insure a response. Apparently it’s not working. I was reading an article written by a guy who did an experiment by sending party invitations to 45 friends. He requested an R.S.V.P., French for “Respond if you please.” Two weeks later he followed up with an email message reminding them to R.S.V.P. Still, only 23 people bothered to respond at all. He told about one lady who had the opposite problem. She received a dozen “yes” responses only to find her party besieged by 35 people – 23 had not responded but came anyway. It seems that the R.S.V.P. is becoming a thing of the past. At the end of the article he suggests that we change R.S.V.P. to R.V.O.M. From, “Repondez s’il vous plait” to R.V.O.M. or “Repondez Vite – ou Mourez,” which means, Respond quickly – or die!

Our parable this morning is about an invitation to a banquet. God expects an R.S.V.P. In fact, this parable is actually an R.V.O.M. – respond quickly to His gracious invitation – or die.

The kingdom of God is a party...Mt. 22:1-4. The first thing we notice is how Jesus emphasizes the importance of the occasion. He describes a feast but not just any feast, a wedding feast. And it’s not just any wedding feast, it is a feast thrown by a king. And it’s not just a wedding feast thrown by a king but it’s for his own son, the crown prince. In other words this is the event of the decade. A person would be crazy not to come to this occasion. Jesus describes the kingdom as a feast not a fast. Some people picture the Christian way of life more as a funeral than a party. But the kingdom is a banquet, a joyful occasion full of food and fellowship, laughter and music. It seems a little ironic that Jesus would be telling so many stories about parties the last week of His life. It seems like the closer He got to the cross, the more ominous the situation, the more He talked about a great celebration. This comes out even more clearly in Luke’s Gospel where this parable is found in chapter 14 and followed by three more stories about people throwing parties in chapter 15.

A feast is not just about food but it’s about fellowship, the celebration of community. Just think of being invited to an important occasion where the host has spared no expense. You arrive to see everyone dressed in fine apparel, provided by the host of course. The tables are covered with delicious food. The best wine is served as a string quartet plays in the background. The room pulsates with the hum of excited conversations punctuated frequently with laughter. This is not one of those stuffy, black tie, rubber chicken, boring speaker, fund-raising banquets where your friend trap you into filling their table or your boss sends you so a client sees you there. This is the party of a lifetime. It is only going to happen once and you are invited. Have you R.S.V.P.ed?

The grace of God can be rejected...Mt. 22:5-6. The kind intention of a gracious and glorious king requires an appropriate response. The only appropriate response is to come to the banquet. This parable provides not only an invitation but a warning to all who fail to respond

appropriately to God's gracious invitation. The immediate context is Israel's failure to embrace God's sovereign rule but the warning is extended to all people in all cultures for all time. Insurrection against God comes in two varieties: active rebellion and passive indifference. Some people will miss the party because they are indifferent to God's gracious invitation. They all have good reasons for not attending. One goes to his farm and another to his store. These people decide that some things are more important than attending the King's banquet. Luke summarizes the excuses in even more detail. (Lk. 14:18-20) Land represents financial security, oxen represent occupational security and marriage represents relational security. There is nothing wrong with any of these things but they can keep us from what is most important. Whatever keeps us from responding to God's gracious invitation becomes an idol that endangers our soul.

Some are outright hostile to God's gracious invitation (v. 6). This verse is a clear reference to the way God's prophets have been treated throughout the history of Israel. In **Matthew 5:11-12**, Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." And in **Matthew 23:29-31**, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets."

The Scribes and Pharisees not only rejected Jesus and His teaching, they found a way to dispose of Him, the Son of the great King. Or so they thought.

The patience of God has limits...Mt. 22:7-10. When God's mercy is not matched by repentance judgment is the result. "The kindness of God leads us to repentance." (Ro. 2:4) Those who fail to respond properly through repentance will be under judgment. In Romans 9-11 Paul reveals that the judgment of God toward His chosen people means the reconciliation of the world. "I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation *has come* to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry (I make a big deal out of this), if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their* acceptance be but life from the dead?" **Romans 11:11-15**

God's gracious invitation has gone out to the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike, but the kind intention of a gracious and glorious king requires an appropriate response. The response of the Jewish leaders was to reject the grace and mercy of God and hold on tightly to the Law. They were more interested in protecting their sacred laws and traditions than they were attending the party thrown by the King.

I can't say it strongly enough. I can't say it often enough. You are invited to the most wonderful banquet imaginable. And all you have to do is say "yes," and come to the party.

Notice how the story ends...**Mt. 22:11-14**. Everything is provided for those who respond appropriately. And what is an appropriate response? Put on the righteous robes provided by the King. Frequently the Bible speaks of putting on the righteousness of Christ or simply putting on Christ. When we “put on Christ” we put on joy, righteousness, forgiveness, identification with Christ, submission to the will of the King. There is no way to justify yourself before God. You have no righteousness. You can only be justified by accepting God’s gracious invitation to put on the righteousness of Christ.

Robert Capon has a wonderful description of how foolish it is to try and justify ourselves before God. Arthur dies and tells God he wants to see the books so he can make his case. God says, “Just forget it, Arthur. I suppose we have those books around here somewhere, and if you’re really determined to stand in front of my great white throne and make an ass of yourself, I guess they can be opened (Rev. 20:12). Frankly, though, nobody up here pays any attention to them. What will happen will be that while you’re busy reading and weeping over everything in those books, I will go and open my *other book* (Rev. 20:12, again) the book of life – the book that has in it the names of everybody I ever drew to myself by dying and rising. And when I open that book, I’m going to read out to the whole universe every last word that’s written there. And you know what that’s going to be? It’s going to be just *Arthur*. Nothing else. None of your bad deeds, because I erased them all. And none of your good deeds, because I didn’t count them, I just enjoyed them. So what I’ll read out, Arthur will be just *Arthur!* Real loud. And my Father will smile and say, ‘Hey, Arthur! You’re just the way I pictured you!’ And the universe will giggle and say, ‘That’s some Arthur you’ve got there.’ But me, I’ll just wink at you and say, ‘Arthur, c’mon up here and plunk yourself down by my great white throne and lets you and me have a good long practice laugh before this party gets so loud we can’t even hear how much fun we’re having.’” Capon, *Parables of Grace*, p. 128. **All are invited, some will RSVP. (22:14)**

Listen to the invitation of God. Come! Come to the party. “Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” (Isaiah 55:1) Come now. Come as you are but put on the royal robe, the garment of God. And now “Go.” Go from this place and invite someone to the party. Invite them to Good Friday or Easter service. Invite someone to hear the gracious invitation of God to “Come to Life.”