

*The Kingdom of Heaven is like...
A King's Invitation
Clay Weed*

TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

Matthew 22:2-14 (NLT)

2 "The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. 3 When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come! 4 "So he sent other servants to tell them, 'The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!' 5 But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business. 6 Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them. 7 "The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their town. 8 And he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, and the guests I invited aren't worthy of the honor. 9 Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.' 10 So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests. 11 "But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. 12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' But the man had no reply. 13 Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Romans 2:11 (NLT)

11 For God does not show favoritism.

Isaiah 61:10 (NLT)

10 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.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT)

21 "Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. 22 On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' 23 But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

Matthew 21:12-14 (NLT)

12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' But the man had no reply. 13 Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- Have you ever invited someone to do something with you only to be constantly rejected? How did it make you feel?

Start **thinking**. Ask a question to get your group thinking.

- **Read Matthew 22:1-10.** How many of those invited to this special wedding banquet accepted the invitation and attended? How did the king respond?
- **Read Matthew 22:2-3.** Who does the King represent? Who does the King's son represent? Who do his servants represent? Who do those invited represent?
- **Read Matthew 22:11.** Why was the king upset with the one man who was dressed differently? What kind of person does that represent? What's the garment the King was looking for? How do you get that garment?

Start **sharing**. Choose a question to create openness.

- Do you feel you should be allowed to come to God on your own terms? Are you wearing the garment God has prepared for you?
- Many people reject Christ because of hypocritical individuals who claim to be Christians...Some are and some are not. How does this truth affect you? Does it make you angry, determined, sad, convicted? Why?
- How should Christians bridge the gap between themselves and those without a relationship with Christ? When was the last time you shared your faith with someone? Are you currently cultivating relationships with others for the purpose of sharing Jesus with them?
- Have you ever shared your testimony with another person? How did it go? How did you feel afterwards?
- How do I know for sure that my service in the church and community are righteous and not just being done to please myself or others? How do the 'me' layers get chipped away to reveal the truth of who I am before God? God knows my heart, but how can I be more vulnerable with other believers from my small group?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Commit this week to facing your spiritual reality so that you will be properly clothed for the wedding feast.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Jesus, thank you that You died for our sins and invited us to be in Your family. Help us to choose to follow you daily. Ignite a passion in our hearts to share our testimony with others so they can hear how awesome You are. - Amen

Start **digging**. For further study.

- Read the 2nd page and discuss it.

Question: "What is the meaning of the Parable of the Wedding Feast?"

Answer: Jesus told the Parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22:1-14. This parable is similar in some ways to the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24), but the occasion is different, and it has some important distinctions. To better understand the context of this story, it is important to know some basic facts about weddings in Jesus' day.

In Jewish society, the parents of the betrothed generally drew up the marriage contract. The bride and groom would meet, perhaps for the first time, when this contract was signed. The couple was considered married at this point, but they would separate until the actual time of the ceremony. The bride would remain with her parents, and the groom would leave to prepare their home. This could take quite a while. When the home was all was ready, the groom would return for his bride without notice. The marriage ceremony would then take place, and the wedding banquet would follow.

The wedding banquet was one of the most joyous occasions in Jewish life and could last for up to a week. In His parable, Jesus compares heaven to a wedding banquet that a king had prepared for his son (Matthew 22:2). Many people had been invited, but when the time for the banquet came and the table was set, those invited refused to come (verses 4-5). In fact, the king's servants who brought the joyful message were mistreated and even killed (verse 6).

The king, enraged at the response of those who had been invited, sent his army to avenge the death of his servants (verse 7). He then sent invitations to anyone his servants could find, with the result that the wedding hall was filled (verses 8-10).

During the feast the king noticed a man "who was not wearing wedding clothes" (verse 11). When asked how he came to be there without the furnished attire, the man had no answer and was promptly ejected from the feast "outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (verses 12-13). Jesus then ends the parable with this statement: "For many are invited, but few are chosen" (verse 14).

The king is God the Father, and the son who is being honored at the banquet is Jesus Christ, who "came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him" (John 1:11). Israel held the invitation to the kingdom, but when the time actually came for the kingdom to appear (see Matthew 3:1), they refused to believe it. Many prophets, including John the Baptist, had been murdered (Matthew 14:10). The king's reprisal against the murderers can be interpreted as a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Romans (cf. Luke 21:5). More broadly, the king's vengeance speaks of the desolation mentioned in the book of Revelation. God is patient, but He will not tolerate wickedness forever (Obadiah 1:15). His judgment will come upon those who reject His offer of salvation. Considering what that salvation cost Jesus, is not this judgment well deserved (see Hebrews 10:29-31)?

Note that it is not because the invited guests could not come to the wedding feast, but that they would not come (see Luke 13:34). Everyone had an excuse. How tragic, and how indicative of human nature, to be offered the blessings of God and to refuse them because of the draw of mundane things!

The wedding invitation is extended to anyone and everyone, total strangers, both good and bad. This refers to the gospel being taken to the Gentiles. This portion of the parable is a foreshadowing of the Jews' rejection of the gospel in Acts 13. Paul and Barnabas were in Pisidian Antioch, where the Jewish leaders strongly opposed them. The apostle's words echo the king's estimation that those invited to the wedding "did not deserve to come": "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). The gospel message, Jesus taught, would be made available to everyone.

The matter of the wedding garment is instructive. It would be a gross insult to the king to refuse to wear the garment provided to the guests. The man who was caught wearing his old clothing learned what an offense it was as he was removed from the celebration.

This was Jesus' way of teaching the inadequacy of self-righteousness. From the very beginning, God has provided a "covering" for our sin. To insist on covering ourselves is to be clad in "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Adam and Eve tried to cover their shame, but they found their fig leaves to be woefully scant. God took away their handmade clothes and replaced them with skins of (sacrificed) animals (Genesis 3:7, 21). In the book of Revelation, we see those in heaven wearing "white robes" (Revelation 7:9), and we learn that the whiteness of the robes is due to their being washed in the blood of the Lamb (verse 14). We trust in God's righteousness, not our own (Philippians 3:9).

Just as the king provided wedding garments for his guests, God provides salvation for mankind. Our wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ, and unless we have it, we will miss the wedding feast. When the religions of the world are stripped down to their basic tenets, we either find man working his way toward God, or we find the cross of Christ. The cross is the only way to salvation (John 14:6).

For his crime against the king, the improperly attired guest is thrown out into the darkness. For their crimes against God, there will be many who will be consigned to "outer darkness"—existence without God for eternity. Christ concludes the parable with the sad fact that "many are invited, but few are chosen." In other words, many people hear the call of God, but only a few heed it.

To summarize the point of the Parable of the Wedding Feast, God sent His Son into the world, and the very people who should have celebrated His coming rejected Him, bringing judgment upon themselves. As a result, the kingdom of heaven was opened up to anyone who will set aside his own righteousness and by faith accept the righteousness God provides in Christ. Those who spurn the gift of salvation and cling instead to their own "good" works will spend eternity in hell.

The self-righteous Pharisees who heard this parable did not miss Jesus' point. In the very next verse, "the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words" (Matthew 22:15). The Parable of the Wedding Feast is also a warning to us, to make sure we are relying on God's provision of salvation, not on our own good works or religious service.