

Responding to the Ultimate Invitation

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 0 0] Question. I want you to think about this. Have you responded appropriately to God's invitation?

! You know when you're invited to something important, some big event or some function, normally! you have to RSVP. You have to respond. And the more important the event, the more important it is to make sure that you respond appropriately. Well, in this parable that we have before us this morning, Jesus wants us each to consider what God is inviting us to, what God is inviting you to in His Word and in your life, but not just to consider what He's inviting us to, but whether we've responded appropriately to it. That's what the purpose of this parable is. It's a very important question. Whether we've responded appropriately to God's invitation in our lives. And so I'm going to pray and ask for God's help as we consider that question this morning. Let's pray.

Oh God, we thank you that you've spoken. We thank you that we have your Word, that every week we can gather around it like this and that through these ordinary means, you pour your grace and truth into our lives. And so we pray, Lord, as we open your Word this morning once more.

And we thank you, Lord, that as we do, you are inviting us to something amazing. But we pray, Lord, that you will help us not just to pay attention to what you say, but help us to know how to respond to your invitation this morning in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, this parable here, Matthew 22, that you've got in front of you. If you understand what's going on in this parable, you pretty much understand the storyline of the whole Bible.

[2 : 0 1] What Jesus is saying in this parable is He's summarizing God's dealings with humans up until this point. So let's read it with that in mind. I'm going to read it again from verse 2.

And listen carefully to the story, the plot, and the figures, the characters involved. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

Then He sent some more servants and said, tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.

But they paid no attention and went off. One to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then He said to his servants, the wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you can find. So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. Okay, so so far, what do you think Jesus is talking about? Well, let's look at each of the characters. Let me summarize to you so that you don't have to do the work to understand what this parable is about. The king is God.

The son whose banquet he's preparing is his son Jesus. The feast, this feast that's going to take place is the coming of God's kingdom to this world. The servants that go out and invite people, they're the prophets and the apostles of the Bible, especially the prophets of the Old Testament. The first group of people who were invited are the Jews who Jesus is talking to who refused to recognize God's son when he came. And the second group, once they refused, the invite went out to all the people on the street.

[4:18] The second group represent the church in our age today from every nation who are now invited into God's kingdom. That's what's going on in this parable. And we're going to look at the responses of those who were invited. But before we do, before we consider how people responded to the invitation, which is the purpose of this parable, I just want us to spend a few minutes considering the invitation itself. What exactly have we been invited to by God? I don't think we spend enough time considering heaven. We're so distracted by this age and this life that we don't spend enough time considering heaven, but more specifically considering when heaven and earth are going to unite to begin a new age for this world and just what that will be like. The prophets for centuries have been talking about that, have been pointing towards that. God has been telling us about that, but I don't think we stop and just consider what the future of this world holds. But we get a hint of it in this parable.

It's described as a wedding feast. Now think of a wedding feast. If you've been to a wedding recently, you'll know the feeling that that's meant to conjure. When you think of a wedding, I think it's such a good picture actually of what's coming and how we are to think about the future and God's plans for this world. Because what do you think of, what do you feel when you think of a wedding feast or when you're at a wedding feast? What feelings does it conjure? A wedding and a wedding banquet, that reception where you have all that nice food and everybody's happy. I've never been to a sad wedding. Have you been to a sad wedding? I've never been to a sad wedding. No, weddings are happy occasions. Weddings are invariably happy. Why? Why is there happiness at a wedding banquet? Why is there such celebration? Because think of what a wedding is. It's the start of something new. It's the start of a marriage. That's the start of this union of two people who love each other, who are starting a new relationship with new hopes for the future and new joys. A wedding banquet by its very nature is forward-looking and it's optimistic about the future. Well, that is how the beginning of eternity in the kingdom is described. And you know what the Bible says in multiple occasions? That when eternity begins and this new age for the world that God has planned starts, it's going to kick off with an amazing party, an amazing feast. And this feast is going to be like a wedding banquet. It's going to be looking forward. And as people have, the people who are there, who are celebrating, are going to be looking forward to an eternity of absolute joy, of a new start for this world, a new beginning, where the old order of sin and death and pain has passed away. And we get to start to live the life we were created to live. And we will enjoy God Himself in a new unbroken relationship. And every day from that moment will be better than the one before. And it'll never end. And every day will be better than the one before because God is infinite. And so every day for eternity we will get to experience and know and love and enjoy more and more of God. And that'll never end. And we get to enjoy God and His gifts and all His gifts without limit forever. And that is what God wants. Think about that, okay? We get to enjoy a little bit, little snatches in this life of the things that God wants us to enjoy in eternity, forever without limit. But in this life, because of the fall, because of our sin, because of brokenness in this world, we only get them in limited snatches and they don't last. But in eternity, when we begin the new age, all of those gifts will be available without any limit and without end. And that is why it is described in this parable. Did you see how the wedding feast is described?

As a lavish and luxurious party with everything you could ever want. Look at verse 4. Tell those who have been invited that I've prepared my dinner, the king says. My oxen and fattened cattle.

Okay, now to us, we're like, okay, that's nice. But to a person in the ancient world, when they heard those words, oxen and fattened cattle, they would have started salivating because that was the best of the best of the luxury you could have. That was what kings ate. And yet now this party, there's this oxen and this fattened cattle that's available for everyone. It's a lavish feast.

It's describing the ultimate pleasures that could be had. And that is what God wants of his people. That's what this king is inviting these people to. And what is that telling us? It's telling us that our God wants us to enjoy the richest of fair. He wants, this king wants people to come to this lavish feast that he's laid on. That's what God wants for you and for me. You know, not only is our creator who formed us in our mother's womb and knit us together and gave us life and caused our heart to start beating so that we could wake up and enter into life in this world. And not only does he sustain this world every day, the seasons, every year, and every day, the sunrise and the sunset so that we could have new day every morning. And not only does he provide for us every day with what we need to eat and drink, not only is he our creator and sustainer and provider, but this God also wants to give everyone a chance to enter into and be part of his world to come. That same creator is the one who wants, like this king in the parable, wants people to come to his eternal feast. As we heard in Isaiah 55, listen to what he says again. Listen, listen to me and eat what is good and you will delight in the richest of fair. This is God speaking. He wants you to enjoy the richest of fair, the greatest gifts he could give you without limit. That's what God wants. And the reason that we, in this life and this world, the reason this world is so far from enjoying the richest of fair is because by nature, we are so far from the God who wants us to come to his feast and enjoy it. That's why we don't have the joy we're seeking, that our hearts yearn for. And we never have it in this world, which means, as C.S. Lewis put it, that our hearts have been made for something greater than this, than what this world, this age can give.

[12 : 05] And all of us yearn for something more than this. And the reason that we don't have it yet is because by nature, we're far from the God who wants to give it to us. But Jesus came into this world to bring us near to God when he died for our sins on the cross, when he removed the separation between us and that God who wants to give us everything. And because of what Jesus did on the cross, when he represented his people and died for their sins to remove that separation with this amazing God, because of that, look at what we see in this parable. Because of that, entry into eternity is now free of charge for anyone who comes near through Christ. Look at what he says. The king says, everything is ready. You see that? In that second appeal from verse 4 onwards, he says, come, come to the wedding banquet. Everything's been prepared for you. Everything's been done. There's nothing more that you need to do. And that is why, eventually, in the story, he's going and inviting just anyone, people on the streets. He sends his servants to invite anyone, no matter who they are.

All they've got to do is accept the invitation. Because everything's been done. That's the gospel. That's the gospel. God has done everything. Jesus has done everything for us. All we've got to do is respond to the invitation of a lifetime.

The invitation of the gospel. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, no one in this world is exempt from this invitation. Everyone is invited.

And that is why, you know what the biggest tragedy in this world is? The biggest tragedy is that so many people in this world have not received the invitation yet.

Have not received the invitation of a lifetime. And the reason is, so many people have not received the invitation is because no one's taken it to them yet.

[14 : 15] No one has told them what their creator is inviting them to. So many people are living in this life, going to work, pursuing their goals in life, and they think that this is all there is.

They think that this world, between when you live and die here, that's all that existence consists of. That's what so many people think. They have no clue that there is a bigger picture. They have no clue of God's plans for this world and His plans for the future, simply because no one has told them.

And I'm not just talking about, you know, the unreached tribes in the deepest jungles of Cambodia, wherever it is. I'm talking about the person next door. I'm talking about people who live in these houses, a stone's throw from this church.

Okay? We live in a post-Christian world. You know what that means? And the older generation of people still are not quite used to that.

The younger generation are realizing this. It's a post-Christian world. What that means is that people are born and they can get to adulthood without ever hearing about the news of Jesus.

[15 : 25] That is a new phase we're in in this world. You know, for 2,000 years, at least people have been brought up hearing that. But now, things have changed.

I was doing, early on when I started ministry here at St. Mark's, we were going door-to-door, our outreach team. And I remember I knocked on someone's door and he answered.

And I said to him, hey, we're just from the church around the corner. And we, you know, we love Jesus and we want to talk to people about Him and make sure people know and can respond to Him.

And you know what the guy said? I kid you not, he said, who's Jesus? He was confused. I assumed, I went there assuming at least he's heard about Jesus, right?

He hadn't. He was a grown man. He had come up in this world to adulthood and he'd never heard about Jesus. We've got unreached people groups right next door who do not know about God's invitation in the gospel.

[16 : 26] So many people in our world still need to get this amazing invitation to this amazing future that God has issued to every person. And it's our responsibility as Christians to take it to them, as the church.

That's what we're doing here. That's why Jesus left us here and hasn't taken us to eternity yet. Because it's our job to invite, to issue this invitation to those who haven't yet heard it.

Not just that we have to, we get to. We get to take this amazing invitation to people. I mean, think about it. It's a nice feeling to give an invitation to someone to a really awesome party, isn't it?

Or a wedding. You know, a wedding invite is a really nice thing to get, isn't it? Normally it's very fancy and there's like a gilded invite. Right? Because people have put a lot of money into the invitation.

And now you get to take this to someone and tell them that they are being invited to this wedding or whatever it is. It's a great feeling, isn't it? To be able to take an invite to someone.

[17 : 26] Well, it's a thousand times better to invite someone to eternal life. We should be excited about that. We should be really, we should be looking forward to that, to do that this week in whatever way we can.

And yet we're not. We're timid. We're scared. Why? Well, I think it's because we haven't thought enough about what's coming. That's why we need to spend some time thinking about what God has planned.

We need to fill our minds with what we've been invited to. And when we do, that will motivate us to go out and take the invitation to those who haven't heard it yet. And we get to invite people.

And we get to invite anybody. Not just the decent people or the people who make the cut. But those on the margins. Those who have been rejected by society.

Who think that they've got no future. And we get to be the one to deliver it. Isn't that exciting?

[18 : 25] That's the invitation. That's what God is inviting us to. But, as we go into the parable, we realize that's not all this parable is teaching us about.

It's got a dark side. Because despite how amazing the invitation is, sadly, not everyone accepts it. That's the next thing we see.

Look at verse 3. This is the king. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come. But they refused to come.

Look at verse 5. They paid no attention and went off. One to his field. Another to his business. Isn't that sad?

Now, Jesus was talking about the people of his day. He's come to bring the fulfillment of all of what the prophets have said. And he's shown time and time again how he fulfills those prophecies.

[19 : 33] And yet, they didn't want to listen. They were too busy with other things. But as we read that. As we read about Jesus talking about the reaction of the people of his day.

Isn't it exactly the same today? When people hear about Jesus? Isn't it the same? God has issued this incredible, incredible invitation to eternity in the gospel.

But people are too busy with their own lives to pay any attention to it. Isn't that true today?

That's crazy. It's crazy. Think about it. Right here. Right here we have. As we open it up. As we come here every Sunday and open this up. We are receiving this invitation to the most amazing future.

But people are like, oh well I've got spinning class on Sunday. Or I've got a business deal that's really my focus right now.

[20 : 38] You know, church is not important for me. Or life is just too busy. I can't fit it in. Do you see how crazy that is? Do you see how crazy it is to let those things distract you from the greatest invitation you'll ever get?

So many people will just ignore this invitation because the things in their passing away temporary life are more important. But others don't stop there at just ignoring the message.

We see others react aggressively to the invitation. Look at verse 6. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them.

Why would they do that? Why would they do that to servants who are bringing an amazing invitation? It's a crazy picture. These servants are saying, hey you've been invited to this amazing lavish feast. And they beat them up.

And they kill someone. Why would they do that? Have you ever wondered why Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world?

[21 : 46] If you're a Christian. If you're a believer. However, you are in the most persecuted people group in the world. By far.

Stats don't lie. Even though Christians are no threat to the world and to people around them. They bring a message of grace and forgiveness and peace. Why then?

In sub-Saharan Africa alone is a Christian killed every two hours on average. You know, between the time that you left home this morning and the time that you return, another Christian will have been killed in sub-Saharan Africa.

Why? I'll tell you why. Because people know deep down inside when they're ignoring this invitation that Christians invite them to, they're actually rejecting their Creator.

And that's why many people don't just ignore it, but they want to silence the message. Because their conscience is screaming at them.

[22 : 51] You are rejecting your Creator. And they don't want to hear that. So they silence the messenger. And that also explains why the king, in this parable, reacts like he does. And you might think it's a bit excessive to do this to someone who rejects your party invitation.

The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. That escalated quickly. But, you see, if we understand what's going on here, we understand that there was a totally justified response by the king.

Because, especially in this culture, to reject the king's invitation is not just a matter of personal preference. It is an act of treason against the king.

People would have known that. People would have understood why the king is reacting this way. To ignore Jesus, in the same way, is to tell God to get lost.

It's not just a matter of, ah, that's not for me. Or, you know, that's not my kind of thing. But our consciences tell us, because we know, we know God is here.

[23 : 55] When we ignore this, when we ignore Jesus, our consciences are screaming out at us that we are telling our God to get lost. And when you do that, when you do that to the source of life, to the one who makes your heart beat right now, to the one who gives you every breath you breathe, when you tell him to get lost, do you know what he does?

Well, he eventually obliges. And the result is complete and utter destruction. And so the warning of this parable is, don't ignore God's invitation in the gospel.

Don't be so busy that you make things in your life more important than coming and hearing and responding to this. But that's not the only warning.

Did you notice that the parable doesn't end there? It could have. It could have easily ended at verse 10. It's a nice ending. That's kind of at the end of an episode that you're watching.

That's when the fade out happens and the credits roll. You know? So the servants went in the streets, gathered all the people, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

[25 : 16] Yay, happy ending. But that's not where it ends. It goes on from verse 11. And it gives a warning to the second group of people in the parable.

Who are the second group? It's the church. It's us. It's the people from all nations who've been gathered from the streets into God's kingdom. And the warning that the rest of the parable gives us, that we're going to see now, is just because you're in, doesn't mean you've actually responded appropriately.

Just because you're here at church, doesn't mean you've responded appropriately. Let's see what he says from verse 11. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.

He asked, How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend? The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, Tie him hand and foot. And throw him outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For many are invited, but few are chosen. Okay, so you don't come to a wedding in shorts and t-shirt, right?

[26 : 27] If you're invited to a wedding, you're going to make sure that you don't just come like in your schluffy clothes. That's what we call them at home, schluffy clothes. That's what we, you know, what you put on on Saturday when you don't have to go out.

And you see people, and then you've got to go get milk at the spa, and you see people in their schluffy clothes at the spa. You know what I'm talking about. Okay? But when you're invited to something amazing, you don't just go with your schluffy clothes.

Okay? A wedding has an appropriate dress code, and you make sure that you dress appropriately when you go there. Well, in the same way, you see what Jesus is saying here?

You don't come into God's kingdom dressed however you want. Entry into the kingdom is free, and that's glorious because of the gospel. But if you're in it, there is an appropriate way to live as a member of that kingdom.

You can't carry on living how you used to. And the New Testament describes this over and over again. Okay? So let me read to you from Ephesians 4, for example, from verse 20.

[27 : 29] You don't have to turn there. Some of the verses will be on screen. Ephesians 4. Paul is writing to the church, and he says this, That, however, is not the way of life you learn.

So he's just been talking about the lifestyle of the world and how people in the world live and what they live for and what they chase after. And he says, That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in Him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

You see what the Christian life is? It's a putting off of what doesn't now fit in our new citizenship, and it's a putting on of what does. And it is vital that we put on the right clothes for the kingdom because look what happens here in our parable if we don't do that.

Verse 13, Then the king told the attendants, Tie him hand and foot and throw him outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[28 : 46] Wow, Jesus, couldn't you have made it a little less kind of mean? That's shocking actually because this is the language of hell.

Weeping, gnashing of teeth, just eternal regret and sadness of what he's missing out on.

And it's the language of hell and it's shocking, but you know, it's meant to shock us. What Jesus is saying here, he doesn't say lightly. It's meant to be a wake-up call for us.

That many people who call themselves Christian and are in the church are still heading for hell. And Jesus has been saying this in Matthew time and time again.

You can't miss it. You'll remember, if you've been with us so far in the journey, he calls these people like a fig tree that has all these leaves but no fruit.

[29 : 51] All this religion on the outside but there's not actually living how God wants. Or the son who says yes but doesn't actually obey his father.

Or the people who say, Lord, Lord, but never enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus has been warning us time and time again of the people who claim the name Christian but they are still wearing the old clothes.

They are still living life on their own terms. If you really want to go to this wedding banquet, if you really want to be part of this kingdom, this most amazing future that God has planned for this world, you need to get dressed for it.

you need to get dressed for it. You need to start living now in a way appropriate for what's coming. And this new way of life is what the New Testament in the Bible is here to describe to us.

This new way of life that we are to put on, to put on holiness, to put off sin, to start relating to people around us in a whole new way with grace and patience and consider others ahead of yourself and with a new focus in life to make sacrifices for Christ and the growth of the kingdom rather than just living for ourselves in our own little kingdoms.

[31 : 13] These things are the new clothes that are fit for the age to come. But don't think you now have to go and earn these clothes, okay, by trying to live a better life now.

No, you don't earn the clothes through work. You know, interesting, one of the commentators on this passage said, traditionally in this culture when a king held a banquet, especially a wedding banquet, he provided clothes to the guests for them to change into.

They didn't have to buy the clothes themselves at a royal wedding. And it's the same with these, this new life, this kingdom way of life that God is calling us to. God gives it to us by His Spirit working in us.

These clothes, these new priorities, this new character, these are things that are gifted to us, they're gifted to believers, things we get to where we get to live a new way of life, we get to have different priorities by grace alone.

we get these clothes. But we still have to put them on. That's the point. We still have to make the choice to put them on. Because there is a big difference between being invited and dressing the part.

[32 : 37] And that is why Jesus ends with these sobering words. If you haven't listened to anything else, hear these words. Verse 14, For many are invited, but few are chosen.

In the original it says, Many are called, but few are chosen. You may be called, you may be in church, but have you been chosen?

Are you one of God's elect that the Bible speaks about? Chosen before the creation of the world to be holy and to be part of the amazing world to come?

Because not everyone who is called is chosen. Are you? Well, that will be evident in how you've responded to the invitation.

Whether you've put aside other things in life to respond properly to the gospel and whether you're in the process of changing out of the clothes of the world and into the clothes of the kingdom.

[33 : 43] Let's pray. Oh Lord, Lord Jesus, we thank you for this sobering message that you give us with such encouragement that we've been invited to something so amazing in eternity.

But also, with sobering warning that we must all respond to that. And so, help us, Lord, in this church to respond appropriately and help us to spur each other on to respond appropriately and to put on more and more each day the clothes of the kingdom in Jesus' name.

Amen.