

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH GOD’S INVITATION?”
Matthew 22:1-14 – October 25, 2020 – Pastor Heath Butler

1971 marked the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Empire. Shah Reza Pahlavi led the celebrations with a 4-day celebration costing \$100 million. The focal point of the event was a grand banquet, a gigantic silk tent lit with \$840K worth of colored lights! The guest list matched the occasion: more than 600 dignitaries from 69 nations. While similar celebrations today perhaps don’t match that of the Shah Pahlavi, most people are willing to shell out big bucks for weddings, birthdays, and bar mitzvahs ranging in the 10s of millions.

While I’ve never attended nor been invited to such an extravagant event, it doesn’t take much to look at a card in the mail to realize we’ve been invited to an important celebration. The extra thick envelope which has another, more decorative envelope inside of it, with even another envelope inside of it with special announcement, be it a wedding or a graduation, a retirement or an anniversary milestone.

Most of these events normally center around a meal, special food prepared for the special occasion. Much more special than an invitation in the mail which you receive from a fast-food restaurant. If you are anything like, such a low-key invitation typically finds its way quickly to the recycle bin or underneath the kindling wood used for a campfire in the backyard.

An invitation to a banquet normally comes with a card to announce your acceptance, an RSVP, to the event. Unlike junk mail addressed to the ‘current resident’, the invitation to a elegant banquet is formally personalized with “Mr. & Mrs.” or “Ms.” “Mr.” And the food? Well, since it doesn’t happen very often you can’t get the RSVP card in the mail quick enough. You eagerly anticipate the date, savoring the moment to experience such a treat! An invitation you want to hold on to and respond to, you don’t want to miss it.

This evening/morning we have opened another invitation to an even greater banquet. Unlike the limited number of special events you and I might be invited to, God continues to deliver an invitation to his banquet constantly, all the time. That is just what he does. He throws big parties; fancy banquets are the norm for him. The special thing about God is that

he gives great parties, he gives the best, he gives his all, and he gives in abundance.

This evening/morning we have another parable before us which is used by Jesus to teach us about the kingdom of heaven; specifically to teach us what it means to live in the assurance and abundance of God’s love. Jesus compares it to a king, God the Father, who gives a banquet for his Son, Jesus. The invitation is an invitation to everyone to believe in him and in his love and in his Son who was sent to be the Savior of the world.

The prophet Isaiah describes the banquet for us, *the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.* It will be the best of the best, all that God has to give and it will be in abundance!

The question for us this evening is, “Do we believe this? Is this really true? Is this what God is going to do for us?” If it is going to be the best of the best, then we wouldn’t we come? Why wouldn’t we show up with our invitation and enjoy?

Through the parable Jesus makes the point that there are many who don’t believe, who don’t want to come. He explains, *“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.*

- Some were too busy. Things of this world were too important, demanding too much of their time and attention.
- Others were hostile to the king. They didn’t see the king’s goodness as good at all. Rather they saw it as an intrusion on their life, a burden, a waste of time.
- There was one who came but he came on his own terms, thinking his own clothes were fine, thinking the king would accept him as he was.

All of them failed, refused to see the king’s banquet as the expensive gift that it was, the best of the best. They viewed the banquet as much less, less than they wanted or needed.

I don’t think the Pharisees failed to understand that Jesus was calling them out, identifying them as the ones who had failed to see the goodness and

graciousness of the king's love. And we might stand alongside Jesus and say, "Shame on you!" But let's remember one of the purposes of parables, namely, to serve as a mirror, to show us today something about ourselves.

God's gracious invitation continues to be delivered to the world through his church and through his messengers and through his children, like you and me. The feast is ready! Bring yourself and come to enjoy and to celebrate! You don't even need to buy any clothes. He provides the richest of fare to eat and the appropriate, best clothes to wear. Just come!

But some/many don't come...they are too busy, too distracted. For some reason many are infuriated at the king's undeserved offer and still others want God to accept them on their own terms. How does God respond? ***The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.*** Reject God's goodness? Receive his wrath!

What are you doing with God's invitation? Are you coming? It's all ready for us, right now! We don't have to wait! How could we not want to go?

Remember the mirror? It exposes the human hearts inside which by nature are turned inward and away from God. What is a good, tremendous invitation is often not seen by sinful people for the good that it actually is. What about you?

- Too busy to enjoy God's banquet! Too much of a burden to add it to your already hectic schedule. Just one more thing, to squeeze personal meditation time or church into your list of things you have to do?
- Maybe you are hostile towards God; disappointed with what he offers as his best, his all and what he offers in abundance? Feel like you aren't getting his best when still struggling in life? Getting the left-overs when see others who are flourishing in life? Feel as though his messengers are just getting in the way of your life?
- Or do you expect God to accept you on your own terms, not in humbleness and repentance, not in compassion and patience.

To be honest the feast doesn't always look that spectacular.

Remember, though, how Isaiah describes it. God gives his best, he gives all that he has and he gives in

abundance. ***On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.***

This parable not only serves as a mirror but also as a window. A window into God's heart revealing his amazing grace and mercy. Come to my wedding banquet! Feast on my Word! Feast at my Holy Table! There is all that you need and could ever want:

- Full forgiveness
- Power from God
- Comfort & calm knowing You are His!
- Power for every task/test
- Patience for every trial
- Sure and certain hope of heaven.

On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

This is not one of those "take it or leave it" invitations. It is an invitation we can't do without. See how much God loves you! He has proved this by delivering this invitation personally to you through baptism...signed by the heavenly Father, written in the blood of his Son and sealed by the Holy Spirit. The invitation is to come and he will will clothe you in the righteousness of his son. His beauty is your glorious dress. Come and take your seat at the King's Table

Notice, though, there is more thing we learn from the parable. The King wants to invite more people, more than just you and me. The invitation is for all who are weak and weary. It keeps going out again and again through his church, through his messengers, through you and me. All are to simply bring their thirst and their hunger for God's love, for his true peace and the certain hope of an inheritance and a home in his heavenly kingdom.

Until then and also then, we will toast the heavenly Host, "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation."

So, what are you going to do with God's invitation to enjoy his best, all that he has to give and what he will give in abundance?