

## INTRODUCTION

Everybody loves a wedding. A little girl was attending her first wedding with her mom. She was in awe at the decorations, candles and music. She was thrilled when the bride came walking down the aisle dressed in a flowing wedding gown. She leaned over and asked, "Mom, why is the bride wearing white?" The mother thought for a moment to give a good answer that her daughter would remember. She leaned over and whispered, "The bride is wearing white because white is the color of happiness, and today is the happiest day of her life." The little girl smiled at then she frowned and whispered back to her mom, "Then why is the groom wearing black?"

In a little over a month, the eyes of the world will be on the upcoming royal wedding between the future King of England, Prince William, and his long-time girlfriend, Catherine Middleton.

The Prince is a member of the Royal Air Force and a qualified helicopter pilot. Sources say Prince William borrowed a helicopter last fall when the couple was visited Africa. He flew Kate to a deserted lake at the base of Mt. Kenya and got down on one knee and popped the question. Kate's engagement ring is a large blue oval sapphire, surrounded by diamonds. The ring belonged to the William's mother, the late Princess Diana, and was the ring his father gave to her for their engagement.

1,900 guests have been invited to the royal wedding, but the guest list hasn't been published, so there is some speculation about who will be there. There are rumors that Sir Elton John has been invited, but Sir Paul McCartney hasn't. The Beckham's are in, but the Obama's are not. Some sources confirm that Kanye West is invited; William is a fan of his music. Instead of wedding gifts, the couple has requested guests make a donation to one of 26 charities.

The invitations were all hand delivered by royal messengers and arrived on doorsteps in pale brown envelopes. The invitation read: "The Lord Chamberlain is commanded by the Queen to invite (name) to the marriage of His Royal Highness Prince William of Wales, K.G. (Knight of the Garter) with Miss Catherine Middleton at Westminster Abbey on Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2011 at 11:00 a.m." They also specify the dress code as: "uniform, morning coat or lounge suit."

The BBC predicts the televised wedding could have the largest TV audience in history. I didn't get an invitation to the royal wedding, did any of you? Too bad. Don't despair, because in the parable we're studying today, Jesus told the story about another royal wedding, and guess what? You're invited!

Matthew 22:1-14. "Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, '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. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' 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."

This is one of the parables of Jesus that has a summary principle. He ended it by saying, "Many are invited, but few are chosen." Remember the historical context of this parable. Jesus is only a few days from the cross. Every day He is on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem debating with the Jewish religious mafia. The immediate application of this parable is clear. God invited the Jewish people to His party, but they refused when they rejected Jesus. So, God decided to extend His gracious invitation to the Gentiles. In verse 7 Jesus said the King was so angry at having His invitation rejected, He sent an army to destroy the people and burn the city. That makes the hairs stand up on my arms when I read that, because I know that forty years after Jesus said this, the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem and besieged it. They burned it to the ground. The Jewish historian Josephus witnessed it, and he described it in horrific details. To read about it, Google "Josephus" and "destruction of Jerusalem."

But this parable isn't only about how the Jews rejected Jesus. It has a spiritual application for us as well. Let's consider three life-changing applications of this parable.

## **1. GOD IS THROWING A PARTY FOR HIS SON'S WEDDING**

This parable begins with a king throwing a wedding party for his son, the prince. A Jewish wedding during the time of Jesus was a party lasting several days. When we get to Matthew 25 and examine the parable of the Ten Virgins, or the Ten Bridesmaids, I'll give more background about a Jewish wedding. But for now, just understand a royal wedding would be the social event of a lifetime.

The king doesn't wait until the day of the wedding to invite the guests. An initial invitation had been sent weeks earlier. It was like a "save the date" notice. The day would be given, but not the time. The guests would have accepted the invitation and on the day of the wedding, when all the food was ready, the servants would go out and announce it was time for the celebration to begin.

Obviously, in this parable, God is the King and Jesus is His son. A wedding party is already planned in heaven. The Bible describes it in this way, "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, 'Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" (Revelation 19:7-9)

Many people object that being a Christian means a life of no fun. And to support that claim, we've all known people who claimed to be Christians and they were the most boring, dull, sad

sacks you've ever met. No wonder Billy Joel once sang, "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints; the sinners are much more fun." This parable reminds us that Christian life is more like a feast than a funeral. It's a wedding party, not a concentration camp! We have JOY unspeakable now, and heaven is going to be even better!

According to the *Guinness World Book of Records*, the largest and most lavish wedding in modern history took place in Dubai several years ago. An Arab prince was married and the cost of the ten-day wedding celebration was \$44 million. That's nothing compared to the wedding party God is throwing. And *you're invited!* In fact, notice from the parable that:

## 2. EVERYONE IS INVITED TO THE PARTY

Those who were originally invited insulted the king, because on the day of the wedding celebration, they refused to come. In the parallel passage in Luke 14, Jesus said they all began to make excuses. And, when it comes to God's invitation, people make all kinds of lame excuses why they reject Him. There are legitimate reasons, and then there are excuses. Someone said, "An excuse is the skin of a reason stuffed with a lie."

I received an email containing some funny reasons/excuses people gave to insurance companies when filling out an accident form. One person wrote: "an invisible car came out of nowhere, struck my car, and vanished." Another wrote, "The pedestrian had no idea which direction to go, so I ran over him." Another reported, "I had been driving 40 years when I fell asleep at the wheel and had the accident." Another said, "The other driver was all over the road. I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him." But my favorite was a man who wrote, "I pulled away from the curb, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed over the embankment."

If you're looking for an excuse there is even a website in the U.K. offering good excuses for every situation. For instance, if your boss catches you asleep at work here's what you should say, "They told me when I gave blood at the blood bank this morning that this might happen." Or another thing to say if your boss catches you asleep is to just say, "Amen."

But all the excuses the invited guests made were empty lies. And in this parable, the king sent a second wave of servants. He said, "The food is ready! The steaks are on the grill. It's time! Come on!" But the guests who were originally invited did more than make excuses; they ignored the invitation and even killed the servants. Of course, that was a reference to how the Jews killed many of the Old Testament prophets. Then the king sent out his servants and said, "Invite EVERYONE!" And Jesus said the servants invited everyone, both good and bad.

So whether you consider yourself a good person, or a bad person, it doesn't matter. God has invited you to His party.

In the south, it is considered good manners when you're invited to dinner to ask, "Is there anything I can bring?" But in this parable, the king says, "You don't need to bring a thing. Everything's ready." What a beautiful picture of how God invites us to come to Him. We don't need to bring anything; we only need to come. God provides the appetizers; we only have to bring our appetite. He provides the meal; all we have to bring is the mouth!

As I have studied the different religions of the world, I've discovered most other religions consider their god to be a powerful deity who is not to be disturbed. They perform religious acts and rituals to try to appease their god so he won't punish them. They are happy if their god never notices them. They hear their god saying, "Run from me." And they do!

The God of the Bible is saying just the opposite. He isn't saying, "Run from me." He saying, "Come to me." Our God isn't some mysterious deity who is so mysterious and unreachable you have to search all your life to find Him; He's close by.

I believe one of God's favorite words is "come." All throughout the Bible He invites people to Himself. I love Jesus' words in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." In John 7:37 Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him COME to me and drink." After Noah built the ark, the rain began to fall. A flood of judgment was coming. God literally said, "Noah, COME get on the ark." (Genesis 7:1)

One of my favorite verses in all the Bible is found in Isaiah 1:18, where we read, "COME now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow..." Is your soul filthy and dirty today because you are carrying a pile of sin and wickedness? If you will come to the Lord, He can totally cleanse you.

On the last page of the Bible, God extends one final invitation: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." (Revelation 22:17)

From Genesis to Revelation, God has been holding out His arms to sinful people saying, "Come to me, I love you, and I can help you." It's hard for me to believe anyone would decline His invitation, but many did and many do. But notice one more thing about this invitation to God's Royal Wedding Party.

### **3. PROPER ATTIRE IS REQUIRED**

We don't have a dress code for church. Some people still insist on wearing their "Sunday best" and that's fine. Many years ago a man in a suit told me he believed you ought to wear your very best clothes to church in honor of the Lord. I said, "Do you have a tux?" He stammered, "Yes, I do." I said, "Well a tux is considered finer clothing than your suit, so if you are going to be consistent and wear your best for the Lord, why aren't you wearing your tux?" He smiled and said, "I never thought about it that way before." If you want to dress up for church, great! But if you prefer a more casual approach, that's fine, too. God isn't concerned with your clothes; He's more interested in your heart.

While we don't have a dress code for worship, there is usually a dress code for weddings. In Jesus' parable, there is an interesting encounter. The king sees a man who isn't wearing the proper wedding attire and kicks him out.

On the wedding invitation for Prince William and Kate, the dress code for men was stated:

Uniform, Morning Coat, or Lounge Suit. That doesn't mean your softball uniform; it means a dress military uniform. A morning coat isn't the robe you wear in the morning to drink coffee, it means a tux with tails. A lounge suit is not a leisure suit; it's a tux without tails.

Did you notice there was nothing on the royal invitation giving the dress code for females? I think that's because men are often clueless when it comes to fashion, but any woman attending a royal wedding knows exactly what to wear without being told.

There are a couple of points of application we can learn from this parable.

### **(1) The King supplies the proper clothing**

Now before you judge the king too harshly for inviting all the poor people and then kicking one out because of improper attire, you need to know it was the ancient custom for royalty to provide the clothing for the guests to wear. According to *Barnes New Testament Notes*, "In ancient times, kings and princes were accustomed to make presents of changes of raiment to their friends and favorites. To refuse to receive this gift was an expression of highest contempt."

We give wedding gifts to the bride and groom, but it was the ancient custom for the king to give gifts to his guests—a new set of clothes. So when you know this custom, you realize the king had supplied all the guests with a valuable gift, and this guy refused to wear what he had been given.

The New Testament teaches that you have to be wearing the right clothes to get into heaven's party. You need to be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus. That's what happens when you place your faith in Christ. God removes the old garments of sin and clothes with you the righteous robes of Jesus. Paul described our new clothes in Galatians 3:27, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

In 1547 Ivan the IV became Grand Duke of Russia, and he proclaimed himself "Czar" which is a form of the word "Caesar." He actually claimed to be god on the earth. He later became known as Ivan the Terrible, because he was a cruel, vicious leader. He not only had his critics murdered, but family members as well. He was one of the most brutal leaders in history. He had seven wives and abused all of them. He had thousands of Russians massacred. In a fit of rage, he killed his eldest son, who was heir to the throne. He lived a wicked life, but just before he died, Ivan requested his head be shaved and he be ordained as a monk. Some say he was truly sorry for his sins, but the popular opinion is he wanted to be buried in the clothes of a simple monk in hopes God wouldn't recognize him, and he would slip into heaven under God's radar. If that's why he was buried in the clothing of a monk, then he should have been called Ivan the Stupid. The only clothes acceptable in heaven are the clothes of the righteousness of Jesus—and they aren't for sale. The King supplies them as a gift.

### **(2) Anyone who refuses the King's offer is cast out**

Jesus said the stubborn guest who refused the king's offer was thrown out into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Whenever you read that phrase in the Bible you know it's talking about hell.

Now why would anyone refuse to wear the king's wedding clothes? After all, it was a valuable gift. The answer is obvious. This particular man believed his clothing was good enough to be acceptable. After all, he had bought them with his own money, made by the sweat of his brow. He didn't want or need charity or mercy.

That is exactly the attitude of many people I've encountered when it comes to God's grace. They think they can earn heaven by their good works. Go up to the average American and ask them how to get to heaven and they will say something like, "Live of life of doing more good things than bad things, and you'll go to heaven." Nope. You go to heaven by admitting all your good works are like dirty filthy clothes and you to attend the party in heaven, you have to have a new set of clothes and the only way you get them is by accepting a gift from the King. You can't crash God's party wearing your own clothes. You have to come on His terms or not at all.

That's exactly what Isaiah wrote 275 centuries ago: "How then can we be saved? All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind, our sins sweep us away." (Isaiah 64:5-6)

So you can wear your own filthy clothes of self-righteousness, or you can accept the garment the King offers you. I wonder if Jesus had this great promise in mind from Isaiah when He told this parable? "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." (Isaiah 61:10)

## CONCLUSION

The message of this parable is powerful but simple. "Many are invited but few are chosen." To rephrase that, "All are invited, but only a few CHOOSE to accept the invitation." God has given you an invitation to join Him for eternity. He provides the clothing of the righteousness of Jesus. If you accept his gracious offer, then you will enjoy the presence of the King of Kings for all eternity.

However, if you refuse God's offer of grace, then you will spend eternity separated from Him in a place called hell. Even Christians sometimes choke a little on the idea of hell. How could a loving God even create a place like hell and send people there? Jesus mentioned hell 70 times, but the most important insight about hell was given in Matthew 25:41. Jesus said, "Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels." Hell was created as a place where God would eventually dump the devil. But if you spend your life and refuse God's free gift of salvation and try to depend on your own goodness to get you to heaven, then you'll join the devil in hell, and by your own choice. It is a place of darkness, torment, weeping and gnashing of teeth, but you don't have to spend eternity there.

I'm not trying to scare the hell out of you; I'm trying to warn you *out* of hell. This isn't a hell-fire-and-brimstone sermon, it is a heaven-sweet-and-paradise message. God loves you so much that He sent His Son to die for you so you can spend eternity with Him. He has given you a personal invitation. Will you accept?

C. S. Lewis once provided a powerful image of the difference between heaven and hell. He described hungry people sitting at a huge banquet loaded with delicious food. Every person had a meter-long fork and knife attached to their hands (that's about three feet long). The scene in hell was one of anger, frustration, and fighting as people scrambled to feed themselves. They could reach the food with the long knives and forks, but they were too long to feed themselves. The conflict, screaming, and unfulfilled hunger continued for eternity—that is hell.

But the scene in heaven was quite different. The same tables were loaded with food, and the people had the same long forks and knives attached to their hands. But instead of chaos and conflict, there was joy, laughter, and pleasant conversation. The difference? In heaven, the diners weren't trying to feed themselves. Each person was patiently taking the food and feeding the person seated across the table.

C.S. Lewis concluded that people who spend all their lives trying to fulfill their own selfish desires are already experiencing a kind of hell. But those who live a life of service to others will find themselves at home in heaven. They had learned the joy of service on earth, and now they had eternity to enjoy it, only more so.

So don't worry if you didn't get an invitation to William and Kate's royal wedding next month. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords has invited you to be a part of the most important wedding that will ever take place—when the church, the Bride of Christ, will be united with the Heavenly Bridegroom. Don't miss it!

## OUTLINE

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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