



# Preach **Matthew** sermon

(Year A Proper 23)

## RELATED

Isa 25:1-9  
Psalm 23  
Phil 4:1-9

## CONTINUOUS

Ex 32:1-14  
Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23  
Phil 4:1-9

## Matthew 22:1-14 (NIV) The Wedding feast

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."

Jesus liked a good party; remember his first miracle with the wedding at Cana turning water into wine. Here he uses the illustration of invitations to a wedding to show the gracious invitation God extends to all to join the party, the commitment of love, and the feast! The wedding banquet was an image associated with the coming of the Messiah. Who would wish to miss that?

But there are those who refuse, and refusal of the king's invitation is tantamount to open rebellion. The first invitations are sent out to those who receive the invitation owe their protection, their land and prosperity to the king, of all people they should wish to honour their King and accept his offer to join the party. The second invitation carries a note of urgency "everything is ready".

These two invitations include an element of obligation based on blessing and promise received. The Gospel is gracious invitation but acceptance implies recognition of God's sovereignty and with that obligation.

Those who owe their protection and livelihood to the King reject the invitation to celebrate and to honour that sovereignty. Instead they focus on their business activities, rejecting the authority of the one whose patronage is the source of their wealth and power. It is almost impossible to give a modern example of how shocking this would be to the listeners of the story as we don't have such absolute dependence on one person for our well being, safety and income. It would not simply be rude, it would be offensive, ungrateful and indeed dangerous since they may lose their income and security

Matthew again has the servants represent the OT prophets calling the people of Israel back to their status and calling as God's chosen people - those who had been invited. The servants are then sent



out again, this time to the outlets of the city, not the crossroads but the points of exit on the city walls to seek new guests. This represents the gracious invitation of the Gospel to the marginalized, not those we expect to be at the party but the good and bad alike - but those who accept the invitation!

The story about the man thrown out because he wasn't wearing wedding clothes is rather difficult for us to understand when all and sundry have been invited. The point being made is that even an open and gracious invitation carries with it an appropriate obligation. The wedding clothes represent appropriate behaviour.

#### Stewardship reflections

A man went to see his pastor to discuss his giving to the church. On hearing that a tithe was the Biblical standard he was shocked - that was an awful lot of money each month to give away. Confessing that he did not know if he could do that the pastor offered to pray. The man was even more shocked to hear his pastor pray for a reduction in his monthly wage so that he could afford to tithe!

Stewardship is what we do after we say that we believe; mature stewardship acknowledges that God has a prior claim on our lives which supersedes all our priorities and preferences. This can sound harsh and can certainly be misinterpreted as a cruel form of self-denial. The promise of the Gospel is that acknowledging God's lordship in our lives is an invitation to be free, to joy and celebration. Jesus talks frequently about money, much more so than faith or prayer. This is not, as Carol Johnson notes because he was obsessed by money. Rather Jesus was obsessed by the abundant life that he promises to us. But he also knew that how we handle money could hinder or help us enter into the life that is promised.

#### Core

God has a prior claim on our lives and we are under an obligation to acknowledge his Lordship in our lives. This is mature discipleship and it is to this that we are called. It has a prior claim that superseded all others, even that of work and family. But the obligation is born of God's love for us in Jesus and the invitation is to enter into joy and to celebrate. It is perhaps all too easy for discipleship to focus on perceived obligation and lose its joy. All that we have is gift and grace; cultivating a spirit of thankfulness is a key part of discovering and growing into joy. The discipline of planned giving is a key element in acknowledging Lordship, expressing thankfulness for all we have received. The key question is not "how much do I give" but whether my gift truly reflects who I am and what I have received from God.

#### Congregation

It is hard to acknowledge Jesus as Lord when our own priorities are front and centre in our lives. In Luke's version of the parable those invited offer polite excuses almost defensible under the Law of Moses. In Matthew all that is abbreviated to the telling phrase, "They paid no attention". Their lives and livelihood was the first claim on their lives and it is this that prevents us from entering into the joy of our discipleship. More than that, our private choices have consequences not only for us but also for the church. Matthew's account of soldiers sacking the city may reflect the actual destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 or may simply be literary convention but the point is that the citizens are





dealt with as the leading men of a city in rebellion. The reality is that failure to provide adequate financial resource means that parish and para church ministries are often cramped and ineffective. Money, which is a gift from God to be celebrated, becomes a burden and what should be a joyful sharing of resources between the parts of the body of Christ is transformed into a fearful, defensive and resentful calculation of how much we can afford.

### **Fringe**

The heart of the parable is not the judgement of a city but the gracious and beautiful picture of an invitation to joy sent to those who never dreamed they might be invited. It is the joy of the surprise 40th birthday party, the reunion with old friends, the award for community service, recovery from serious illness, the rediscovery of life after bereavement or divorce, the job you never thought you would get, the reconciliation with a friend you thought lost for ever. The Gospel invitation is all this and much, much more. We are invited to joy; we cannot settle for less by taking it for granted. Such gracious invitation requires the best that we have and the best that we are.

Amen

