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God Will Not Be Insulted

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TEXT: Matthew 22:1-14 (ESV)

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'" But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

Dear Friends:

No one likes to be insulted – you don't, and I know I don't; neither does God. We learn that from today's parable from Jesus. It's a parable about a wedding feast. He said the

kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. He sent out invitations not once, but twice. He even went to the point of describing the bountiful, delicious banquet that awaited them to entice the people to accept his invitation. Now, an invitation to a king's banquet would be a very generous offer in those days and in these days as well – no one in their right mind would turn that down. It was considered a great honour. But in this case, Jesus said everyone who was invited refused to come. They weren't interested and ignored the king's servants and went off to their places of work. And some that were invited got nasty about it – they were hostile to the king's messengers and even murdered them. All of these invitees insulted the king, they dishonored the king, and that's not a good thing to do. The king was now provoked to anger, and so he exercises severe judgment upon these people. He sent in his troops and destroyed them and burned the city down. The king says to his other servants, I'm determined to have this party, the wedding feast is ready, go to the street corners, invite as many as you find. So they brought back all kinds of people, both good and bad. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But the story doesn't end there, does it? We hear, though, that whether one is good or bad, there is appropriate attire to be worn at this wedding feast. A dress code, you might say. The king notices a guest who has no wedding garments on. He said, friend, how did you get in here? The man is speechless, and his speechlessness proves that he knows that he is guilty of dishonoring. He didn't clean up, or perhaps as some hosts that would offer a robe at the door, he refused or took it off once he got in the door. And once again, the king is insulted by this person's behavior, thinking to himself, “The nerve of this guy.” So he has a man tied up and thrown out into the outer darkness in that place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, Jesus says. And then He concludes the story with this little saying, “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

And so, what is Jesus getting at with this parable? To understand the gist of it, you need to be aware of the setting in which Jesus is telling it. His ministry is just about to be completed. He has left Galilee, where He's met so much rejection, and now He's in Jerusalem. He's entered the city riding on a donkey like a king. On Sunday, He's raised some eyebrows and the ire of the religious establishment by driving out the corrupt profiteers in the Jerusalem temple who had turned it into a marketplace. The religious leaders and their followers do not like Jesus one bit. They reject him. They want to arrest him and get rid of him altogether. They want to destroy his reputation. So they approach him out in public, in front of a crowd, and they challenge his authority. By

what authority does He have the right to do what He's been doing and to teach what He's been teaching? And this parable is a part of His response to their challenge. He is talking to them in this parable. But keep in mind He's talking to us as well. The Spirit is talking to us.

When you know the setting, the parable becomes easier to understand, doesn't it? The king is God, the wedding feast is the kingdom of Heaven that Jesus has been announcing and calling people to repent and believe in. The son is Jesus. We know that Jesus is described elsewhere in the New Testament as a bridegroom. The servants were perhaps the prophets and then later on, Christian missionaries. The first invitees who reject the invitation are Israel, the people of God, who reject Jesus in His message. And the next group that's invited are those who are outside of Israel, the gentiles who respond to the invitation to come to the party. Those who are considered outsiders and unclean, even in amongst the Jews, they are now the new community of faith called the church. They come to the party, both good and bad are welcomed into the party, righteous and unrighteous. The wedding robe – it equates to righteousness. We talk about the robe of righteousness in the New Testament. Here we have a church member without it. This errant guest has declined to put on Christ, has not valued holiness, has not chosen to live as a saint, set apart to serve God. He has refused to be a disciple; to change.

It's clear from this parable that not the beginning, but the end is crucial, isn't it? Jesus is employing a storytelling method that's called the end rule. The emphasis is on the end. God will not be insulted, we learn, as we see the judgment passed out. It's a lesson on God. His grace is not to be treated with contempt and dishonor. He's not an angry God, but He is provoked to anger in these stories, and judgment ensues. We find something here that we're not all that comfortable with: God's judgment. It makes us squirm a little bit, this picture of Him takes us back a little bit. We prefer a gentle, kinder God who loves everybody, who would never judge or reject anyone or condemn someone to hell. But there it is, right in our faces from the lips of Jesus. He expands our vision a bit in the story, doesn't He? He says, wait a minute. Yes, God is love. God is grace. But there's more to Him that you need to know and understand so that you don't miss out and perish. Jesus offers this little commentary at the end: for many are called, but few are chosen. You see, many are invited, but some refuse to come. And others who do come refused to submit to the norms of the kingdom, and are therefore rejected. And those who remain are disciples of Jesus are called chosen.

We need to ask the question then: so what is Jesus looking for as He tells this parable? What's He after here? He's after a response of faith and repentance for each of us to follow Him and be His disciples and come to His party. We see that human response plays a major role in this parable, the wedding feast. While in the end, many unexpected guests accept the invitation and come, many insult God in this story with their refusal or presumptuousness. It's a call for self-examination for you and for me, to ask the question, where am I in this parable that Jesus tells? Am I rejecting the invitation to receive Jesus and enter the kingdom as many do? Treating it lightly as trivial, ignoring it, dishonouring it – “maybe later when I'm near death,” we reason with ourselves, “then I'll have time, then I'll take this more seriously. But in the meantime, I'm going to chase after my own goals and be busy with life, my life instead.”

Or are we dishonoring God's invitation, saying, “no way,” getting almost angry about it? “This is too narrow for me. Jesus is the ‘way the truth and the life’? And ‘no one comes to the Father but by Him’? That is too narrow and exclusive. My God, is it like that? I refuse to believe this.” Walk away.

Or I'm attending Christ's wedding party, but on my own terms, staying the same, living life, my way for myself, for my pleasures, my comforts, my desires; showing no fruits of repentance like love and mercy and justice and righteousness and kindness.

In Colossians 3 Paul talks about putting on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience; forgiving as Christ has forgiven us, putting on, above all, love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. You see, God receives us as we are: sinners in need of a savior, but He refuses to leave us that way. He wants change in our lives, transformation, fruits of repentance, to be disciples. One biblical commentator writes about this: “This parable is not meant to frighten us as Christian followers, but to encourage us to take seriously the challenges of Christian discipleship.” Are you taking seriously Christian discipleship?

Are you enjoying the wedding party with Jesus? That's the other way to go. I mean, this is a joyful experience. It's been offered to you and to me as we hear from God, our king: “The feast is ready, I want you to come because there's this joy at this feast,” the joy of forgiveness for your sins, the release from carrying your burden of guilt and shame, wondering where you stand with God. Because all has been made ready. When the

rejected, insulted suffering Jesus Christ announced, as He hung on the cross, it is finished. Sin's debt has been paid in full by Jesus, He paid it all. There is the joy of a restored relationship with God then, and God's presence at work in your life daily. He's there to carry you through the good times and the bad times. No moment of your life will ever be faced alone or on your own strength when you attend the party accepting that invitation.

Where are you in this parable, my friend?

Last year, I wrote a wonderful book by a lady named Rebecca McLaughlin entitled "Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion". It's an excellent read and I recommend it to you. And in the book, she tells a story to illustrate what we've been talking about here. She writes:

In a classic Russian novel, Eugene Onegin, a jaded aristocrat, Onegin meets an innocent young girl in the countryside. The girl, Tatiana, writes him a letter offering him her love, but he does not reply. When they meet again, he turns her down. "The letter was touching," he tells her, but he would soon grow bored of marriage to her.

And years later, he enters a St. Petersburg party and sees a stunningly beautiful woman. It's Tatiana, but she is now married. Onegin falls in love with her. He tries desperately to win her back, but Tatiana refuses him, of course. Once the door was open, she offered him her love. Now it is shut.

McLaughlin writes:

For many of us it's easy to reject Jesus now. Like Tatiana's letter to Onegin, His offer is touching, but we believe we'll be happier without such a commitment. We worry He'll cramp our style. So we move on with life and leave them in the spiritual countryside. And one day, the Bible warns us, we will see Jesus in all His glory, our eyes painfully open to His Majesty. We will know in that moment that all our greatest treasures were nothing compared with him, and we will bitterly regret that decision. But it will be no more unfair than Tatiana's rejection of Onegin. If we accept Jesus now, we will live with Him forever in a fullness of life we cannot imagine. If we reject him, though, He will one day reject us and we will be eternally devastated.

The choice is ours. My dear friends, all has been lovingly and generously prepared for you to the suffering and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And God is saying to you today, lovingly, graciously, "Come to the wedding feast. All is ready for you, won't you come?"

Amen.