
Kingdom Call

Matthew 22:1-14

Russ Kennedy

My father had a great system for keeping two boys from wandering off too far on our station in Africa. The station itself was open and fairly safe. We rode our bicycles around the station. But dad would go out on the back and whistle for us – he had an amazingly loud, long way of whistling through two fingers. We had one minute to respond. We learned where the one-minute border was. We learned to listen for that whistle, that call, that father’s summons to the house.

Jesus will give a parable about a call, an invitation, a sovereign summons. But notice what He has just said and to whom He is talking. (Matthew 21:41-46 (NLT))

⁴¹ The religious leaders replied, “He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop after each harvest.”

⁴² Then Jesus asked them, “Didn’t you ever read this in the Scriptures? ‘The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the LORD’s doing, and it is wonderful to see.’

⁴³ I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. ⁴⁴ Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on.”

⁴⁵ When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers.

⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.

Remember the function of parables: they are to hide the truth from those who do not believe and to reveal the truth to those who do. This parable functions at two levels.

It is an explanation of what had just taken place in Jesus' ministry. This is the immediate audience that Jesus is speaking to.

It is anticipating what will happen during with the church. This is the audience Matthew is speaking to.

As we approach the parable, note that there are three groups who are called and who respond:

There are the ones who reject the invitation the master gives.

There are the ones who accept the invitation the master gives.

There is the one who presumes the invitation the master gives.

What is the Lord teaching us? This is a clear, simple, unmistakable explanation for why people reject the kingdom and gospel invitation.

There is the personal, observable reason: the people refuse the King's call to honor the son.

There is the Divine, hidden reason: God has a sovereign plan that is unfolding.

This parable of the wedding feast emphasizes what happened with Israel's exclusion/replacement. The New Covenant age of the church is emerging (at the time of Matthew's writing), based upon Israel's refusal to honor the son whose wedding is in view in the parable. In Matthew, Jesus is shown to be the king (2:1-3; 21:5; 25:34). Here, God is the king and Jesus is the groom to emphasize that God's sovereign call is for His people to acknowledge and to honor His Son. Matthew is showing us that those who reject the king's invitation to honor the son by not attending the wedding, are not being responsive to God's reign. On the other hand, those who accept the king's invitation acknowledge his authority and demonstrate it by honoring the son.

The Striking Invitation (v.1-10)

With that in mind, listen to the opening of the parable in its striking invitation.

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ 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." ' ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

The Event Prepared (v.1-2)

This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. We want to be careful trying to over-realize the parable while at the same time believing what Jesus is saying so we can understand it. The kingdom of heaven is unfolding. It is developing. It does not come into existence all at once. There is an already and not yet aspect to it. Without that, Jesus' parables are meaningless.

There is a king. He has a son. This son is to be wedded. There is to be a big event, a huge feast. The king is rich and powerful. In typical fashion for the time and culture, the invitation had gone out before. The people know the feast is coming. They should be "saving the date". The preparations had all been made. All was ready.

The king sends his servants to issue the call. It is time. All is ready. Honor the king's son by coming to the feast that has been prepared. Now, those who were invited are called to the wedding feast. This is a divine summons, a royal call.

The Invitation Rejected (v.3-6)

The people refuse to come. Now listen, this is intended to shock. Why in the world won't they come? They knew the feast was coming. The king seems to be gracious and benevolent.

Is the king kind and patient? Yes. He sends other servants. It is almost as though he wants to make sure that the people understand. Everything is ready. It is going to be a huge, huge feast.

Are the people casual and indifferent, uninterested? That is what the text says. The people actually are dismissive. This great feast and invitation and call do not even merit the time and attention to interrupt their lives. They were more interested in their work, their businesses and farms. They cannot be bothered to accept the invitation, respond to the summons and honor the son of the king. We sense that this is not going to go well...

Are the people obstinate and rebellious? Yes, some are. "...the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them." The servants are an extension of the king. They serve him. They do his bidding. And it cost them. They were abused, shamed and killed.

Now we are sure that it is not going to go well...

The Punishment Executed (v.7)

⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city

Yes, the king was angry. But this is not a "retreat into your castle" anger.

Now, pause for a moment. What is Jesus talking about? Why is Matthew relating this parable? I am convinced that Jesus has in mind the rejection of the Messiah by the people of Israel. God was kind, patient and benevolent. Over and over again, He invited Israel to accept His rule and enter His Messianic kingdom. God promised the most amazing things if they would come. Yet, they ignored His call. They went about their pursuits. They were too busy, too preoccupied. Sometimes, they abused and killed His servants. The long history of Israel is being represented here.

The parable before highlighted the way Israel treated the servants of the king and finally, the son of the king. This parable is focusing on the response to the King Himself. It is aimed at the Jews, but the true target is the religious leadership of Jesus' day. God in all His wonderful grace has been ignored. His son has been dishonored.

Jesus is implying here what He will be predicting later in the book of Matthew. There is a massive judgment coming. What Jesus says here is a graphic description of what happened in the fall of Jerusalem to Titus, the Roman general. Then great horrors were perpetrated, and the destruction that followed brought Jerusalem and the Temple down. It marked the full and final end of the Old

Covenant. It would be hard for the Christians not to see this as, in part at least, a judgment from God on the nation that had rejected their Messiah when he came to them.

The Repeated Invitation (v.8-10)

This is not the end of the parable nor the end of the story.

.⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ 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.

It is Expanded (v.8-9)

The wedding feast proceeds regardless, even though so many from the originally invited people have refused the invitation and rejected the call. They are not worthy to come to the feast, the king tells his servants. Therefore, the invitation is expanded. Go to those who are considered to be outsiders. Go to the streets, the alleys, the farms outside the gates. Go to anyone who will listen and invite them to come to the wedding. Invite them to honor the son. Invite them to respond to the gracious benefice of the King.

As in the previous parables (Matthew 21:31-32; 41-43) those who failed to respond to God's call are replaced by others who humbly honor and accept the son. The result is a wedding hall filled with guests. The invitations have gone out and brought in all kinds of people, common people, street people, those not accepted by the proper Jewish society. The Jewish conventions of Jesus' would have thought that such an inclusive practice of table fellowship would be ritually polluting and morally wrong. Jesus' parable envisions something completely different. The king's servants invite and call, not driven by exclusivism or the rejection of people based on social status or legal purity. Many from the *street corners*, the highways and hedges have come into the wedding feast of the kingdom. The invitation goes out to all and assorted. As one writer put it, "Indeed, we catch a whiff of the evangelistic fervour of Matthew's church in the very phraseology: '*invite to the banquet anyone you can find*' (9)." (Green, p. 230).

It is Accepted (v.10)

The wedding hall was indeed filled with guests. The largesse of the king has led to a room packed with guests. What a sight. The king and his son, the tables loaded with feasting foods and crowds of people from all kinds of people fill the great hall.

Jesus is pointing out that it is the common people, not the religious elite, that have accepted God's call and honored Jesus, the Son. Remember who Jesus is talking to. Remember who His parable is aimed at. The elite in the parable do not obey the king and honor the son. This is exactly what the religious leaders, the

social elite, have done. They have failed to heed the invitation and the call to honor the son.

Matthew is relating this parable, not only to tell us what happened to Israel, but also to press home what is happening during the age of the New Covenant. People are responding to the gospel the same way. God is sending his servants into the world, not just to the lost sheep of Israel, but to all the lost people of every tribe, nation, and language.

The Unprepared Guest (v.11-13)

In the next scene, the king is walking among his guests, greeting them and welcoming them.

¹¹ “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³ 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.’

What do we make of this?

The Presumption (v.11-12)

The man has come to the wedding feast. He seems to have responded to the invitation. He is there, after all. We do not know if he is from the last group, or part of those elites who were invited first. The king addresses him as, “friend”. This might indicate that he is from the first group.

But he has not come in the proper attire. In our casual day where rarely are there required dress codes, this seems a bit... well, harsh. The question here is whether the king’s way of addressing him is ironic or genuine. It is hard to settle. Given the king’s harsh punishment, I think it is ironic. The question the king asks is aggressive, accusatory. “Friend (are you really a friend since you are here at my invitation – who are you?), how did you get in here without what is required for entry? A wedding garment is required. You have responded to the invitation, but you have not truly honored my son. If you wanted to obey my summons and honor my son, you would have come as was required. Yet you have not., You are here but should not be.”

This is presumption. The man has come because there was an invitation. The man has come seemingly to get what is being offered. But he thinks that since he is a “friend” of the king, he can just come without the proper attire. He views himself as special, as above the rest. To the question, he has no answer. It is more than that... he is speechless. He not only has nothing to say, but this is a deer-in-the-headlights moment.

Who is being referred to here? Pointedly, this is aimed at the Pharisees. They think they have responded to God. They think they have the inside track. They think they are the “friend” of God. They think they are honoring God. They think

they can have a relationship with God without honoring the son. They have shown up without the wedding garment.

The Punishment (v.13)

The king is very angry. This is different than a failure to honor his son. This is an active dishonoring of his son. It is not excusable. Understand, the king's reaction is not inappropriate or disproportional to the offense. The king's reaction tells us the how grievous the offense was. The man is taken out and cast into hell. In this, Jesus blends the parable with reality as He often does when it comes to the judgments in the parables.

Now, maybe in the parable the reaction is over-wrought. But this is meant to highlight the severity of the religious leader's offenses. They have scorned God when they have dishonored the Son. Michael Green is so pointed when he writes:

The punishment is ludicrously severe for having come to a wedding improperly dressed. But the point goes far deeper. The man who scorned his host's provision of wedding clothes insulted the host and showed personal complacency. His best was good enough for God! And God says that it is not. The king in the story has the man thrown out. God will do the same to anyone who relies on his own fancied goodness to gain entry into the kingdom. There are overtones of Isaiah here. 'All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.' That is the human predicament: we are literally not fit to be seen before God, let alone to enjoy the feast of his kingdom. But the prophet had already found the solution: '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.' (Green, p. 232)

This is sobering. Matthew's readers and we, as well, need to think carefully. It is easy to point outward to others who we think might fit into this category. But that is not what Matthew intends. He expects that we will pause and seriously consider our own state. Have you truly responded to God's gospel invitation and honored His Son? Are you clothed in your own self-righteousness? Do you think God accepts you on your own merit? Have you presumed on His grace? Have you come to Jesus in faith and repentance, believing and in bowing to Him as Savior and Sovereign?

The Shocking Point (v.14)

¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen."

Many are Called...

Jesus points out that the invitations in the parable are a general call from God. The invitation, the call used in the parable is what we do in evangelizing and in preaching. We are inviting, calling people to respond to the gospel. But this is a general call, an open invitation. It is widely spread. It is like the sowing of the seed. It has within it the content needed for regeneration, faith, and repentance. It

is necessary for salvation. But unless God does something more, then there will not be a saving response.

What about this word, “called”? In the writings of Paul and Peter in the New Testament, the word is used in this way but with a power to cause a response included. It is used to describe people who have believed and are regenerated. There is a sense in which each one of us who are true believers are called. It is not possible to be saved without this sovereign summons. All who respond to it have been invited, have been called.

Consider, Romans 1:4-7:

⁵...through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, ⁶ including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

⁷To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are called to belong to Jesus. What makes the difference?

Few are Chosen...

The difference between those who are invited, those who are called with a general call and those who respond savingly rests with God. Those who are chosen respond to the invitation. The gospel goes out widely in the streets, by-ways to all kinds of people. Those who were chosen will respond because grants them regeneration with faith and repentance.

Maybe this is the first time you have heard this truth. Yes, and truth it is. At the bottom is an important question: whose will is sovereign, man's or God's? According to text after text in the Scripture, God's will is sovereign. Yes, our choices are real. Yes, we are responsible for them. And (notice, not “but”, not “yet”, and certainly not “or”) God moves with His own powerful initiative to accomplish what His wisdom has purposed and planned.

The meaning of this parable is clear. God has provided the feast of the kingdom. It is the wedding feast for his Son. The invitation goes out far and wide. If you reject it, you miss the party. If you think you can get in relying on your own fitness, you will be thrown out. *Many are invited*, but few show, by their response, that they *are chosen*. In the Old Testament, the word translated ‘chosen’ was originally used as a synonym for Israel. The nation failed to enter the Messianic kingdom. This led to the word being reinterpreted. The *chosen* now are those who share the inheritance of the chosen covenant people. And there is a double nuance to it; both the divine call and the human response. Without the latter we do not show ourselves to be among the elect. So, Jesus means that many had received the call, but few had shown themselves to have been chosen by responding to it. (*Adapted, Green, p. 232*).

Reflect and Respond

Behind Israel's rejection of Jesus, behind the religious leaders dishonoring of the King's Son, is the sovereign plan and purposes of God. God patiently and persistently invited Israel to the messianic banquet. Most Israelites rejected the invitation. The parable shows us two basic types of rejection. One rejection was busy indifference, and the other was violent indignation.

We are responsible to respond the call. Notice that everyone who refused the king's invitation was judged, either by being left outside the hall or being actively cast into hell. Biblically, we must believe in both the sovereign choice by God and the responsibility of people to respond.

We have a responsibility to share the gospel call, the evangelistic invitation to all who will listen. That is our responsibility. That people respond is entirely up to God.

How will people respond to the gospel invitation? The parable shows us three kinds of responses.

There will be indifference. People will simply not care. Life and business and fun are too important. The cares of the world weigh more heavily on them than God.

There will be hostility. People will aggressively resist the gospel. They will walk away from relationships. They will make a scandal and attack the messengers. They will persecute the servants of God.

There will be fake respondents. People will respond to the gospel invitation. They will appear to be a part of the feast. But they will not have been clothed in the garment of salvation. They are among God's people without being God's people. They will end up in hell.

So, I must ask you, on behalf of the king of heaven, "Will you honor His Son, the Lord Jesus?"