

The Wedding Crasher
Matthew 22:1-14
Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill
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Suppose someone famous like the Queen of England or your favorite Hollywood celebrity invited you to an important wedding. Imagine that, you are singled out and given the privilege of attending the celebration of the century. Would you jump at the chance to go or would you offer the lame excuse, “Sorry, that’s the day I wash my hair.”

Unless the host of this fabulous wedding was famous for being infamous, you’d probably pack your bags and be ready to go. But oddly enough that’s not what happened in Jesus’ parable. Instead, the invited guests reject the invitation out of hand with some of them even roughing up the messengers. Once again Jesus steals our attention and intrigues us with a provocative parable that forces us to rethink our preconceived notions about God and us.

“Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.’” (Matthew 22:1)

Let’s stop right there. This is primarily a parable about God celebrating our union with Christ. Several times in the gospels Jesus referred to himself as the groomsman and the Church, God’s people, us, as the Bride of Christ. This metaphor illustrates the sacred and intimate relationship God desires to have with all mankind. To seal this relationship, God covenants with us to be united with him forever.

But what is a covenant? Covenant is the Hebrew word for a solemn, binding agreement between two parties. Simply put, a covenant is a contract. In the Hebrew Scriptures God made a covenant (or contract) with Israel when he gave Moses the Ten Commandments with the promise, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” In return for giving them Chosen People status the Hebrews were instructed to keep the Commandments, which were the terms of the contract that spelled out their responsibilities towards God and each other. You might say at Mt. Sinai there was a wedding ceremony. God was the groom, Israel was the chosen bride. Promises were made to be kept by both parties. Then in the gospels, in the story of the Last Supper, Jesus offered up the bread and wine as “the new covenant in my blood” with the new terms of the contract being “Remember me” and “love one another as I have loved you.”

Hopefully this explanation gives a new appreciation of this parable. “The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.” God’s kingdom isn’t just a place or even a state of mind; it’s a state of being and participating in a constant celebration of God’s love for humanity.

You’d think when the king’s messengers spread the word of the prince’s wedding there’d be great rejoicing. Instead there’s a huge collective “So what?” No one’s

impressed or excited. Unlike you jumping at the chance to attend a royal wedding these guys couldn't care less. Remarkable!

When the king hears nobody accepted his gracious invitation he thinks maybe there was a breakdown in communication. So he sent out new messengers. "Tell those I've invited: Look I've prepared my dinner, my oxen and fatted calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready, come to the wedding banquet." (Matthew 22:4)

This time instead of a passive rejection the messengers are greeted with blatant hostility, insulted by some, beaten up and killed by others. The king got their message: total, abject rejection.

Now, so far, as you hear this parable unfold, you're probably thinking, "I'm certainly not like those ungrateful, wicked men. I've accepted God's invitation and the proof is, here I am, spending another Sunday morning in church, so don't lump me in with those who mock and attack his ministers who preach the Gospel. So, I'm in the clear, right?"

Not quite at least not yet for you see, the parable doesn't end there. After the king settles old scores there's still a wedding to be celebrated. Since the privileged few refused to come, the king now orders his doors opened wide. Everybody, both the good and the bad, are welcomed into the wedding hall, nobody's turned away.

So far, so good. Now maybe you're thinking, "This is where I come in. I'm one of those who graciously said 'yes' to the invitation and God has welcomed me into his kingdom even though, to be honest, I'm both good and bad at the same time, but so is everybody else; I mean, we're all sinners, but Jesus made that 'new covenant' in his own blood. So, I'm forgiven, and have a right to be here. Right?"

Here's where this parable gets dicey and makes us squirm because there's a wedding crasher at the party. He got in, but apparently he didn't belong.

"When the king came in to see the guests he noticed a man not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here not wearing wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie his 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.'" (Matthew 22:11-14)

This last twist is not the happy ending we wanted to hear. There's a wedding crasher. But wait a minute, wasn't he invited? Didn't he qualify as "anyone you find"? And what's this new requirement about wedding clothes? How many poor people walk the streets dressed for a wedding? Wouldn't most of the guests come as they are, in rags? So why was this poor guy singled out? And why is it so important we know? Because each one of us is wondering, "Is that wedding crasher me?"

Remember what I said earlier about God's covenant with Israel being compared to marriage and that Christ's new covenant with us is by his blood, cleansing us of our sin and covering us with his righteousness?

You get to go to a state dinner at Buckingham Palace or the White House by invitation only. Likewise, we are invited into the celebration of God's Kingdom, by invitation only. But in the Kingdom's case your invitation isn't based on achievement or your high social standing. You are invited only by God's grace.

The Wedding Crasher's problem was the king detected Cheap Grace all over him. "Cheap Grace" (a phrase coined by Bonhoeffer) happens when you take grace for granted, and don't take Christ or your salvation seriously. Outwardly you appear to belong; inwardly you've never really repented, you haven't let God change you, your old attitudes and behaviors.

Real grace costs a lot. How much? Take a long look at Jesus, his body broken and his blood poured out for many. This costly grace demands a costly response: the radical discipleship/stewardship lifestyle of sacrifice and service that's an imitation of Christ. That's why that Wedding Crasher was booted. He wanted it both ways to be an honored guest but without honor.

This parable was not meant to have a happy ending. Jesus was trying his best to shock the scribes and Pharisees out of their spiritual malaise, all the while knowing in a few days these same religious men would nail him to his cross.

So, maybe there's no happy ending to this parable, but there is a happy ending to the Gospels. The bridegroom is still calling his Church to be his holy bride. The celebration has already started and promises to go on forever so why not accept Christ's invitation and hospitality and jump at the chance every day to trust and obey your Lord with your life. Be prepared to love and serve your neighbor in need. Always extravagantly give away your time, talent and treasure. In the words of St. Francis, "Love God, then do what you like," knowing your love for God will always bring you to doing what's right and good.

Follow these simple suggestions and you'll never have to wonder if you're a wedding crasher because you'll become too caught up in God's wonderful celebration of life now and forever. Amen.