

Kingdom Stories  
Week 8: The Wedding Feast

**This is Palm Sunday;** the day Jesus makes what we call his **triumphant entry** into Jerusalem. His preaching and his miracles have all of Jerusalem in a fever. **Is he the promised Messiah?** This is the question on many lips and their actions demonstrate that they believe he is. If you recall, he **enters on the back of a donkey** with a crowd of people cheering him on and waving palm branches as if they were **welcoming a triumphant warrior king** back home after victory. They were confused about what kind of messiah they were getting.

**Instead of immediately taking the throne** and driving the Roman occupiers back home, he goes to the temple. **The temple is the center of worship** and faith for the Jewish people. This is where sacrifices are given to take away the guilt for their sins. **This is God's home on earth.** It is the point **where heaven meets earth.** But he **doesn't go there to give a sacrifice of worship as the new king;** instead, he knocks over tables and chases people out with a whip. These were people selling animals for sacrifice and **exchanging different kinds of money** for what was accepted in the temple. They were making a profit by **gouging** those who came to sacrifice and worship.

**Jesus is establishing his authority over what the temple is doing.** He will be the only sacrifice needed. **The temple is now obsolete.** **In the kingdom, the temple will be the people who submit to Jesus' authority as their king and savior.**

**As you can imagine, those who were giving the people spiritual direction,** who were dependent upon the things staying as they are, do not appreciate what Jesus is doing. **To those people, Jesus tells three parables that speak of his authority in hopes that some will repent and follow him.** We are going to read the last one.

Jesus also told them other parables. He said, <sup>2</sup> "The Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a king who prepared a great wedding feast for his son. (Let's just stop right here and establish that this is a big deal. The king's son is getting married. He's the heir to the throne. Who wouldn't

want to come?)<sup>3</sup> When the banquet was ready, he sent his servants to notify those who were invited. But they all refused to come!<sup>4</sup> "So he sent other servants to tell them, 'The feast has been prepared. The bulls and fattened cattle have been killed, and everything is ready. Come to the banquet!'<sup>5</sup> But the guests he had invited ignored them and **went their own way**, one to his farm, another to his business.<sup>6</sup> Others seized his messengers and insulted them and killed them.<sup>7</sup> "The king was furious, and he sent out his army to destroy the murderers and burn their town."<sup>8</sup> And he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, and **the guests I invited aren't worthy of the honor**. (Remember who he is talking to?)<sup>9</sup> Now go out to the street corners and invite everyone you see.'<sup>10</sup> So the servants brought in everyone they could find, good and bad alike, and the banquet hall was filled with guests.<sup>11</sup> "But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper clothes for a wedding."<sup>12</sup> 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' But the man had no reply.<sup>13</sup> Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'<sup>14</sup> "For many are called, but few are chosen." Matthew 22:1-14

**So we have three parts** to this kingdom story. We have the people who were invited to the king's party. **These people are on the list**. They may have even received a **save-the-date card**. They either **tossed it in a pile** on the counter or they did not take much notice of it. They **didn't put it on their calendar**. **They dismissed an invitation from the king!**

**Part two is that he sends his people to personally invite some of these insiders again** because they didn't respond to the save-the-date or the actual invitation. They **didn't return the RSVP**. These personal invitations are rejected, even to the point of killing the messenger. The rejection goes from, **"I don't want to go," to complete disdain**. The fact that you are asking me again is offensive. **It's a rejection of the king's authority**.

The king must **exert his authority**. The king, because he is the king, burns their village down.

**The feast is ready so the king sends them out to bring in the regular people**. If the first were **A-Listers** then these people weren't even B-list guests. **The food is ready, so let's fill the seats**. Remove the names and

**trash that seating chart** that made sure that the **one duke who divorced the one lady** isn't at the same table. **The Make America Great Again uncle** and the queen's mother, who is a member of PETA and graduated from Berkley, are on opposite sides of the room from one another. The queen's mom can **throw a shrimp cocktail** a full 30 ft. All of that planning is for not.

**It's now only about who wants to come and celebrate with the king, not who might have expected an invitation. These people appreciate what it means to be invited by the king to his son's wedding feast.**

**Then, finally, see that weird thing** where a person who was invited and came is cast out into the darkness and is punished **because he wasn't dressed properly**. What is that about?

**Are we getting the picture?** The feast is the kingdom like the vineyard was before. **Entering the kingdom is responding to the invitation from the king to join him. In order to do that, you have to recognize who is making the invitation and what is really being offered to you.**

Here are the **different responses**. The first is that... **Some ignored the invitation and then rejected it**. They simply **put it aside** as unimportant. Then they reject a personal invitation from the king, beating and killing his messenger.

**Can you see the progression?** Ignoring or dismissing the invitation from Jesus to enter his Kingdom will ultimately lead to rejecting his kingdom.

**They were asked two times.** They had two **chances** to enter into the kingdom of God.

**Then, those who are less desirable are invited in an open invitation.** That's a big deal, not knowing how many will come and how many you will need to feed. Like the old weddings at the hillside...

**The king is much more patient than he needs to be.** When you are king and you are offering something so amazing as a feast on an important day for you. **Kings aren't obligated to ask twice**, but this one does.

**This is an example of how a heart gets hardened. When you dismiss the knock on your heart's door enough, you start to get annoyed and even angered by it.**

- I'll wait until I'm older.
- I'll have to do my own thing now and then I'll join the feast later.
- I don't want someone telling me where to sit and what to eat, etc.

**This is worse than when we talked about hearing God's voice.** Remember that business about if you have ears, you need to hear. And those who don't listen will lose even what they think they know. **It's becoming numb to The Holy Spirit meeting your spirit.** You just don't notice it any more. **This is worse because these people notice the invitation, but it repulses them and angers them.**

**It's like a guy I knew back in the first church I served in.** He was very negative about church and all things spiritual. It was ok for his wife and daughters, but not for him. He was not simply uninterested, he was negative.

**I learned his back-story once.** He heard the voice of God, or at least he cried out to God in a foxhole in Vietnam. **He promised God** that if he got him home safe that he would give his life to Jesus and follow him. He didn't do that when he got home. I'm sure he went back to that promise in his mind upon returning home safely and God invited him to the feast. **I don't know how many invitations he received from the Holy Spirit,** but by the time I met him, he was no longer saying, "not now," or "no thank you." The invitation made him mad. **It seemed to me that he had lost the ability to accept the invitation and it was of his own doing.**

The second response that we see in this kingdom story is...**Some had more important things to do.**

**"But the guests he had invited ignored them and went their own way, one to his farm, another to his business."**

Did you hear that? **They went their own way.** I don't need a king telling me what to do. **I've got a farm** to take care of, that's my kingdom. **"Is the king going to take care of my animals when I go to this party? I've got**

**my business, that's my kingdom. Is the king going to pay someone to cover my shop for that time?**

**Don't you see I'm building something here? I've got something going that is my own. I want to be in control of my own destiny."**

**I don't have time for the things of God because that's his agenda. I don't have time to gather weekly. Can't you see that I'm building something? My kids are going to get into U of M. My kid's going to get a scholarship. I've got bills to pay toward what I'm building. I'll be able to retire early because of what I'm building, and then I'll be able to do a lot of stuff for God. Yeah, right.**

**The problem is, what I want to build is so puny when put up against what God is building that I can be a part of. It's like the player who would rather be a star on a bad team rather than a role player on a great team.**

**Is God's call just one more thing in the midst of your life? I'm really not reacting to the invitation like it's coming from a king. "Oh, I'm really not that close to so and so and there are only so many Saturdays in June."**

**The next response to an invitation to enter the kingdom is...Some were at the wedding, but clearly weren't all in.**

**Now we get to the inappropriately dressed guest.**

**They would have been giving wedding clothes that were clean and appropriate for the occasion. This isn't about picking on the poor person who didn't have wedding clothes.**

**Look at the response. Did he try to explain? No. He knew he was not really dressed for the kingdom. <sup>12</sup> 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' But the man had no reply. He didn't ask for grace or understanding; he had nothing to say other than he wasn't prepared for the feast.**

The way we operate now in the kingdom as it is being revealed on earth, is practice for how we will operate for eternity. Therefore, if you don't have time to worship God, can't seem to see how good he has been, don't want to follow Jesus into a life of service, then why in the world would you want to do all of that for eternity?

Hit the buffet and get to the door before the party gets going. If it's an open tab, maybe stay a little longer. "But I'm not really excited about the king or his son. What is in it for my family and me."

Anyone who insults God's gracious offer of the kingdom of heaven by presuming on it without honoring the Son will receive due judgment. 718

If we don't want to honor the son, then we can't have his father's kingdom. This begins and ends with Jesus.

Do we presume upon his grace by saying things like...

- But I'm a good person.
- I haven't murdered anyone or cheated on my wife.
- I believe in God.
- I've done a lot for other people.
- I attend church 1.5 times a month (That's the national average).
- I even put some money in the plate.

Those are all good things, but they aren't the same as honoring the son. If they are done as a part of the kingdom I am building, then they are idolatry. They are like working in the garden, not taking a shower and showing up to the banquet to put in an appearance.

It's like baseball fans when I lived in LA. I would go down the 110 to Dodger Stadium. After trying to find parking and getting ripped off there, I'd make my way into one of the most beautiful stadiums in the world. The grass is perfect and the lines are crisp. There are hills out back of the outfield bleachers. This is called **Chavez Ravine**. The **grandstands that wrap** between third base and first and rise up three levels. Behind those seats on the concourse, **DownTown Los Angeles is framed** in front of you. When it's dark the lights of **downtown rise up** and the **street lights head out** until they either stop at the Hollywood hills or the Pacific Ocean.

**There are fans that come and take it all in. They watch their team and cheer for them. They celebrate being with their families and enjoy a game that is elegant, beautiful, played by the most skilled athletes in the world. There are signs all around of the Dodger greats from the past, the hero's of the past who made this one of the great places in sports. Then you turn on your radio and here, Vin Scully makes poetry as he describes this scene like no other. Oh yes, and it's always 75 degrees and sunny.**

**There are fans that come dressed for the runway. They want to see and be seen. They are there because it's the cool thing to do. This type of fan wouldn't think of eating a hot dog. They come in the third inning and leave in the seventh, regardless of the score. They are usually white and wealthy.**

**Then there are the other fans. They come to watch batting practice and call out to their favorite players. They appreciate all that this place and time provides. They smell the grass in the middle of a huge concrete city. They watch and celebrate what they couldn't do themselves, but what is provided for them. They cheer. They high-five people they don't even know. And these fans usually have brown skin and speak Spanish.**

**The second group appreciates the invite to come to the park. They are dressed appropriately. They know that they are there to celebrate with their team and enjoy the beauty and majesty of what is in front of them they could not duplicate in their own strength.**

**We saw the Grand Canyon on our trip. It's like you look at it and say, "Grand, I'm not sure about grand. It's just a big hole in the ground. Get out. Go to a theme park or a 4 star resort."**

**Are we there yet? Are you associated with the king, but not really all in with what he wants to do? Slip in, slip out. Do you really love the king and his son? Is it enough that it's Jesus and his party?**

**The next response to an invitation to enter the kingdom is...Insiders must self-examine by looking for fruit.**

**Am I really one in whom Christ dwells, living in his unshakable kingdom?**

**Am I in the church, but not really in the kingdom? I've got my own kingdom and the church supplements it, making it more well-rounded.**

**Explain fruit...fruit is something good that my life produces that is not only good for me, but will bless, nourish and strengthen others.**

**This kingdom story is challenging us to look at our response to the kingdom. Are we ignoring or rejecting the invitation? If that is the case, then what needs to happen is to take a good look at what is really being offered to you and who is offering it.**

- **It's entering into something where you aren't in charge any more.**
- **It is God's plan for you to serve others, joining his family business here on earth, making the kingdom present for others.**
- **And then enter into the eternal phase of his kingdom where there is no suffering and his gracious rule is in full effect.**

**But it means trusting him with your life and submitting to his leadership instead of building your own.**

**There's this other issue that we don't want to have happen. That is to be found out as someone who is associated with Jesus, but really doesn't have him as king. That person will be cast out. That is why we need to do this self-examination to see if we see the fruit, the evidence that we have been with Jesus.**

**Here are some verses to use as prompts to see if we are starting to take God's grace for granted.**

**"But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven! Matthew 5:20**

**Do I see anything that looks like the righteousness that is a gift through God's grace? This isn't about doing religion better than someone else. Are you trusting in your own goodness or living in the shocking reality that you don't have any, but Jesus is giving you some of his.**

**This is not trying to beat ourselves in order to get the devil out of us. This can't be based upon a wrong view of God that says, "God is good, I am bad, now go try harder." It's not about arriving or achieving. It's about living in the new reality, that he invited you and provided for you to be in his kingdom. He is close because Jesus came close, not because you worked your way to some level of holiness.**

**This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace. <sup>7</sup> You learned about the Good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf. <sup>8</sup> He has told us about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you. <sup>9</sup> So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. <sup>10</sup> Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better. Colossians 1:6-10**

- Do you see life transformation?
- **A growing capacity** to empathize and love others, even your enemies?
- Are you **growing in your understanding of what he wants for your life** or are you still operating based upon what you want?
- **Do you know him and, therefore, love him more than you did?**

**<sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20**

**Is there a place in your schedule where you are making disciples, helping people learn to follow Jesus? Learning how to be a disciple and also make disciples.**

**It's about living like I want my fruit growing on someone else's tree. Or the opposite, my bitterness poisoning others.**

**This isn't about arriving anywhere, it's about evidence that we have been with Jesus and we value what he values.**

Self-examination, looking for fruit, is designed to bring **conviction and assurance**. All of this stuff was written **not so we would be on edge of whether we are in or not**. That is the work that the Holy Spirit is doing right now. **It's the Jesus who was weeping and pained to speak these hard words at the end.**

I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may **know** you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13

**I am demonstrating that I have eyes that see and ears that hear.**

<sup>12</sup> To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given, and they will have an abundance of knowledge. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them...<sup>16</sup> "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. <sup>17</sup> I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn't see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn't hear it. Matthew 13:12 & 16-17

Responding to Jesus' Kingdom Story

1. Do your own self-examination.

What are some signs of life transformation?

**Don't be too hard on yourself. It's not about giving yourself a letter grade.** It could be something in your outlook or **attitude** that has improved. It could be something of **God** that you have a desire for, like hearing his word, prayer, or being more generous with your money.

How have I seen my capacity to love others, even my enemies grow?

Maybe **God** has allowed your heart to break for someone or a group of people who have struggled or been marginalized. Pastor Julie had no idea

that God was going to break her heart for the people in Uganda and those being trafficked.

**How have I grown in my understanding of how God wants to use me? How I can be the fullness of Christ where he sends me or make the Kingdom present for others?**

**How do I know God better than I did two years ago?**

**Think in terms of the time between the pandemic beginning and now.**

**How am I helping someone learn to follow Jesus?**

**This could be as simple as attending a bridge group and actually participating. This is being a disciple and also helping others follow him. Or meeting intentionally with your kid or grandkid.**

**2. Respond to the call to follow Jesus in baptism**

**This is a way of saying I'm with Jesus no matter the cost. He invited me into his Kingdom even though I hadn't done anything to earn it.**