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My friend in my office that day was struggling. He said, "I can understand that you can only be saved if God chooses you. How could it be otherwise in this broken world? We're too far gone. And I know my own heart. It's too sinful. But how can I know God wants *me*? How can I know *I'm* chosen? I don't think I'm going to make it into heaven." I told him, "You *will* make it, because the work is God's, not yours, and the fact that you're even asking the question, that you know you're *not* worthy, is a sign he's already at work in you." That's what we're going to talk about today. Let's begin by looking at the setting of the parable.

How banquets took place in the Bible.

Banquets were an important part of life together in the Bible times. They were a part of gatherings of state and also of wedding celebrations, where there was food and wine, as much as you could afford. Jesus and his disciples were invited to one at Cana in Galilee, and Matthew the tax collector threw a banquet in Jesus' honor.

For most banquets the invitations would go out in advance, and then guests would be notified when the feast was prepared, and so the king in Jesus' parable sends the message, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner." There's message like that in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25, when the groom arrives and the announcement is made, and the feast begins.

The usual custom was to try to get the richest and most influential people to come. But Jesus told his disciples to do it differently:

"When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:12-14)

Now, why would Jesus say that? Was he just saying, "Be nice, don't be concerned for social status"? Well, in part. That's a good message that we need to hear. But he was making a more important point. He was telling us how we get into the kingdom—how we get saved. The banquet is a Bible picture for salvation. And people that get saved don't deserve it.

Solomon said the banquet is a picture of God's love for his people:

He has taken me to the banquet hall,  
and his banner over me is love. (Song of Solomon 2:4)

Isaiah says heaven is going to be a great banquet:

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare  
a feast of rich food for all peoples,  
a banquet of aged wine—  
the best of meats and the finest of wines.

In that day they will say,  
"Surely this is our God;  
we trusted in him, and he saved us.  
This is the LORD, we trusted in him;  
let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation." (Isaiah 25:6, 9)

The heavenly banquet to come is like no other, and it's a definitive sign that God has removed all sadness and the effects of sin. Again, Isaiah wrote:

On this mountain he will destroy  
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,  
the sheet that covers all nations;

(What do you think that sheet is? Isaiah tells us in the next line.)

He will swallow up death forever.  
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears  
from all faces;  
he will remove the disgrace of his people  
from all the earth. (Isaiah 25:7-8)

So the banquet is where you want to be—it's the place of joy, celebration, and where God has defeated death, the greatest enemy of all. That leads to an urgent question: How do I get in? Let's look at the text again with that question in mind.

First, God's preparing a party for his son, and he wants us to come. (2-4, 14)

Jesus' parable opens and closes with invitation. The king sends out the servants to round up the invited guests. He says,

"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." (22: 4)

What a wonderful invitation. He's saying, "The time has come." The kingdom is at hand, and God wants you there. In fact, the Bible says,

God our Savior...wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)

That tells us that the invitation to trust God, to come into the kingdom. But to actually make it in, you can't count on your own strength. It can only happen by a miraculous work of God. The Holy Spirit has to work in your heart to bring you to faith.

It's an open invitation. The wedding feast is a picture of Jesus coming into his kingdom. He already referred to himself as the bridegroom, and his disciples as his guests (Matthew 9:15). Jesus is saying this is a king who goes out on the road, in the public places, to bring together everyone he finds. That's just what Jesus did in his ministry, travel around to all the towns and villages of Galilee. And when he went, Jesus didn't make them pass a test before they came to him. He didn't care about their past, or their character, or their social standing or talents. He just wanted them to come to him, the king, the bridegroom, and to enjoy the banquet with him.

Anyone who wants to be at the wedding feast is welcome. God can save anyone, but for that to happen, they have to be called. That's why Jesus says in verse 14, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." So anyone is welcome, but it has to be by invitation. The king sent out his servants to invite people to the wedding. You can only come when Jesus deals with your heart.

So the first truth to see this morning is that Jesus is preparing a wedding party, and he wants you there.

Second, some people resist God's invitation. (3, 5-6)

The parable has some ominous lines,

- "But they refused to come" (22:3b).
- "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business" (22:5).
- "The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them" (22:6)

It simply goes from bad to worse. People hear the invitation but don't go. Then they actively ignore the invitation, shutting their ears to it. Then, when they've had enough, they attack the messenger.

When we share the Gospel, the good news about Jesus, something always happens. It might be a happy reaction, or it might be resistance, but something always happens. That tells me it's not our responsibility how people respond. It's simply our responsibility to tell about the invitation. We're not supposed to be successful, we're only supposed to be faithful. In fact, real ministry isn't us at all—we're supposed to submit our ministry to Jesus, to crucify our ministry, and it's Jesus that does the ministry through us. If that's not happening, then I can guarantee you you're setting yourself up for frustration, failure, resenting others, and burnout.

Be ready. Some people resist the invitation of the king.

Third, there's a coming judgment. (7, 11-13)

There are two parts to the judgment. First, the king is outraged because the people he invites to the banquet mistreat his servants. That's what happened in the history of Israel. God sent prophets to bring his word, but the people mistreated them. God sent judgment on his people for their failure to listen to him.

The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. (7)

In fact, it's hard not to read this and think of the destruction of Jerusalem that would happen within 40 years of Jesus' earthly career. Now we're in the in-between time, but he's coming again to judge the living and the dead. That comes through in the part of the parable that says,

"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.'" (22:11-13)

That's a little scary, isn't it? The darkness is a picture of Hell, because along with the good news of God's undeserved kindness, there's also warning. Jesus is telling us to be ready—there's a day of accounting coming.

That's what the wedding clothes mean. The clothes were an outer garment, a special robe. Rich people may have provided white robes for wedding guests in ancient times. When guests accepted the invitation they were given the robes, and then they'd be expected to wear them to the wedding. In any case, it would insult the host to arrive with stained clothes.

Jesus uses that as a picture for our salvation. When you accept the invitation, when you receive Jesus, you get a robe of righteousness. You're forgiven, and your sins are washed clean. It's the picture we have from Revelation, with a crowd of people in white robes,

[who were] from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9)

If you trust Jesus, if he is the forgiver of your sins and the leader of your life, then he is your king, and he gives you a robe of righteousness. God sees you just like he sees his son, pure and without fault. Your mistakes no longer define you. We have to be ready, because there's a coming judgment.

Fourth, there's going to be some surprises in the kingdom. (8-10)

Look who shows up! Like Jesus said in Matthew chapter 21—the tax collectors and prostitutes get into the kingdom ahead of the chief priests and elders, the riff-raff before the respectable. This is major theme of Jesus' kingdom teaching—the humble, the “poor in spirit,” they get saved, because “the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16). That's the point Jesus makes here when he says,

“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.” (8-9)

And the people the servants find are a motley bunch, “both good and bad,” and the people keep coming until the wedding hall was filled. And when they're wearing the robes of righteousness, who could tell if they had been rich or poor, shabby or chic? Whatever they looked like when they were called, it was gone, covered, and all you can see is shining wedding clothes.

Revelation gives us a picture of that assembly of God's people, gathered for the feast:

Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him glory!  
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.  
Fine linen, bright and clean,  
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)  
Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” (Revelation 19:7-9)

So, let's return to our opening question: How do I get into the party?

You get in one way only—by faith in Jesus. The. Nobody ever gets the robe of righteousness by being religious, or good, or Catholic, or Presbyterian, or American, or Democrat, or Republican. It comes when a sinner puts their trust in the work of Jesus. And when you put on the robe, you're perfect in God's eyes. He looks at you through blood-colored lenses, the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, and you are justified in his sight.

That means it's free. You can't find the robe at Nordstrom, and you can't find it on E-bay. It's not for sale at any price. All that matters is whether you have faith; not faith in yourself, not in our country, not in the economy, not in your church's leadership, not in anything else but in Jesus Christ. When you trust in him, God gives you the wedding robe, and it always fits perfectly. And if you have the robe, it's your backstage pass—everyone who has one is welcome at the Father's table in heaven. You have a place at the table because of Jesus. It's all about him:

Because he's the Advocate, the Almighty, the Alpha and the Omega, and *he is for you*.

He is the great Amen, the atoning sacrifice for our sins, the Author of Life, and the Perfecter of our Faith. *He can save you*.

He's the Bread of Life, the Bridegroom, the Blessed and only Ruler; *he can fill your hunger, and he can give you joy*.

He's the Christ, the capstone, the Deliverer, and *he can give you eternal life*.

He is Faithful and True, the First and the Last, the Firstborn from the Dead, and First over all creation, and *he holds your future in his hands*.

He's the Great High Priest, the Head of the Church, the Heir of all things, he is Holy and True, and *he will never let you down*.

He's the Hope of Glory, the Horn of Salvation, the Image of God and the Great I Am, and *he is your hope*.

He's our Redemption, our Righteousness, the Power of God, the Resurrection and the Life, the Rock. *He can hold you up in the storms of life*.

He's the Son of David, the Son of God, Son of Man, the One Mediator between God and Man, the Stone the builders rejected. He knows you perfectly well, and he's purchased your freedom with his blood. He is the Word. He is Worthy. *You can trust him. You can trust him*.

Remember my friend I met in the office? He found assurance of his salvation that day. If you don't respond to Jesus, that's a sign that you aren't chosen, but only called. But I'm here to announce to you today that his invitation is for you. If you give your heart to him, it will make all the difference for you. I'm going to give you the chance to do that now. Are you ready for the party? You have to be dressed in Jesus' righteousness to get in. Won't you come to him?