

The Church as the Wedding Banquet

Matt 22:1-14

Let us pray: Gracious God, thank you for giving us Jesus as our Lord. Feed us today with the rich word of life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

At almost every event we attend, food is present. When we meet family or go on a date, we often choose a good restaurant and enjoy a meal together. The expectation of delicious food makes the gathering richer and adds joy.

Friends, when you come to church, do you also come expecting a rich meal for your spirit?

God delights in eating with us. He gives us physical food, and he also gives us spiritual nourishment. In Psalm 23, he leads us, his sheep, to green pastures and quiet waters, and he prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies. He even gives his one and only Son to us as the bread of life (John 6:35).

In today's passage from Matthew, the kingdom of heaven is shown as a wedding banquet. Jesus says it is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. I believe this image helps us understand the church, because Jesus brought the kingdom of God to earth and established the church to reveal that kingdom.

The kingdom of God means the rule of God. The church is the community that is meant to show God's rule most clearly, if it operates properly by following the Holy Spirit. Many people think that the church is a solemn, stiff, and boring place. However, Jesus, who is the head of the church, says that the church is a place of celebration like a wedding banquet. The first miracle of Jesus' public ministry took place at the wedding in Cana. A life of believing in Jesus is a life filled with heavenly joy that the world cannot understand, and it is the most exciting and wonderful life.

Among the nine fruits of the Spirit, the first is love and the second is joy. In Psalm 122:1, David says, "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'" David rejoiced so much that he danced with all his might. I bless you to have that same heart of David.

In the parable, the king was so joyful because it was the wedding of his one and only prince, so he sent invitations to all the VIPs he knew. He probably notified them several months in advance. During that time, he prepared abundant food and drink for the banquet, and the king and the prince put on their wedding garments and finished all the preparations to

welcome the guests. When the day drew near, he sent his servants again to remind the invited guests.

However, the report that the servants brought back was unexpected. These first-priority VIP guests did not want to come. The king could not understand it. The king was very generous and patient, so he sent the servants again with this message: "I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." It is truly amazing that the king lowered himself and pleaded so earnestly. This king represents God, and the son represents Jesus. The fact that the king slaughtered his oxen and fattened cattle symbolizes the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The wedding banquet expresses the union of Christ and his bride, the church.

From the Old Testament, God often used the image of marriage to express his heart toward his people. In Hosea 2:19–20, God says, "I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord." How humbly does the exalted God say that he wants to marry us.

In Matthew 9, Jesus also compared his coming to a wedding banquet. When the religious leaders questioned why his disciples did not fast, the Lord said, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them. Then they will fast."

We knowing God and God knowing us happens in a relationship as intimate as marriage. In Revelation 22:17, the bride, the church, joins with the Spirit and says, "Come."

This amazing heavenly banquet has been prepared by God. When someone shared the gospel with us, God gave us the ticket to this great banquet.

It is said that membership at a golf course like Augusta, where the Masters is held, is strictly by invitation and cannot be purchased even with money. Some exclusive group memberships are also extremely difficult to obtain. Yet God has given us an invitation to the membership of heaven, which is incomparably greater.

In verse 5, it says that they "paid no attention" to this precious invitation. They completely ignored it. One went to his field, and another went to his business. Are we not sometimes like this as well? While managing our possessions and doing our work, are we living in such a way that we do not even look toward the word of God and are absorbed only in our own tasks? No matter how busy we are, if God were to take our life today, nothing would be more important than the destiny of our eternal life. These people said they needed to manage their field or that their business was busy, but these were excuses. They had no desire to come. It was a

matter of priority. In verse 3, it says that from the moment that they first received the invitation, they did not want to come.

Do you remember the parable of the rich man in Luke 12:19–21? The rich man says, “And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’” But God says, “You fool. This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” Jesus explains, “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.” If one desires to be rich toward God, one would never refuse the invitation. But those who decide to be rich in something other than God have no interest. I bless all of us to choose to be rich toward God.

The VIP guests whom the king first invited were the people of Israel. They did not recognize Christ, and they rejected his invitation. Not only that, but they insulted and even killed the king’s messengers. They killed the prophets, and eventually they killed Christ himself.

For those who rejected the king’s invitation, the king also rejected them. Verse 7 says that the king was enraged and sent his army to destroy those murderers and burn their city. In reality, around 70 AD, Jerusalem was invaded by the Roman army, the city was destroyed, and the temple was ruined. Historical records say that just before this happened, the Christians in Jerusalem remembered the prophecy of Jesus and fled, so they were kept safe.

Now the king tells his servants to go to the street corners and bring anyone they find. This means that the door of the gospel is opened wide to Gentiles like us. Interestingly, it says that the servants brought in both the evil and the good. This is from a human point of view. In the church, there are both evil people and good people. However, the way we see and the way God sees are different. Someone who looks evil to us may be completely changed when held in God’s hand, and someone who looks good to us may still reject God. Judgment is not the task of the servants. The servants only need to bring them in. We are also these servants.

Now the guests were gathered, and the hall was filled. But there was a problem. “When the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.” This refers to the time of Christ’s return and judgment. The king said, “Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?” When the man had nothing to say, 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.”

In the ancient Middle East, anyone attending the king’s banquet had to wear the finest royal garments that the king himself provided. Ordinary people could not obtain such clothing, so the king graciously gave it to them. When entering the palace, one simply had to put on the

garment the king had prepared. Not wearing the garment given by the king was considered a deliberate rejection of the king's kindness and a challenge to his authority. Yet one guest thought his own clothes would be good enough and entered as he was.

The wedding garment symbolizes the grace of Jesus' cross. No one can meet God in the condition of a sinner. We must be clothed with Christ in order to participate in the king's banquet.

Have we put on Christ? How do we know? It matters whether we have confessed Christ not only as our Savior but also as our Lord. Even if we have confessed Jesus as our Savior, if our life is still busy with our fields and our business, ignoring the word of God, then we have not received Jesus as Lord at all. There is no rule of the Lord in such a life.

When the king continued to send his servants, he was giving them an opportunity to repent. When Jesus first appeared to the crowds, the very first words he preached were "Repent." The next words were "For the kingdom of heaven has come near." To participate in the heavenly banquet, we must repent. We must turn from a life that pays attention only to our fields and our business, and come to the heavenly banquet. Our possessions and our work must also be under the rule of the king. We must be able to see that the king is generous and able to give us things far greater than our fields and our business.

At the end of this parable, Jesus says, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." In the parable, there was only one person who did not wear the wedding garment, but in light of this statement, there are many like him.

Dear beloved, we are gathered here as the church, which is the wedding banquet of heaven. The price of the heavenly ticket given to us was simply handed to us, but it is not actually free. Jesus paid the price with his own death. We must not treat this grace lightly. He is our king and our Lord. I bless you to put on the wedding garment of Christ by submitting to his lordship, and to enjoy the heavenly banquet here and now. Amen.

Let us pray: Father God, thank you for inviting us, who have no qualification at all, to the wedding banquet of your Son. We pray that none of us would fail to put on Christ as our wedding garment and be excluded from this banquet. We desire to acknowledge and follow the lordship of Jesus in every area of our lives. Help us become messengers of the gospel who can deliver the invitation to the heavenly banquet to everyone we meet. Make us a church that loves one another and enjoys the heavenly banquet. In the name of Jesus, our Bridegroom. Amen.