

“Don’t miss the Banquet!” Mt 22:1-14

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 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.”” But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, “The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.” 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. “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?” And he was speechless. 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.” For many are called, but few are chosen.”

It is no wonder they killed Jesus. What else could be expected? Whenever He spoke, He said things that were shocking, that were upsetting, that were, as good people say in Australia, extremely offensive and judgmental.

Today’s parable is a great example. I don’t know what is more shocking in it, the deep and terrifying dullness of our sinfulness, or the incredible grace of the Triune God. Both are equally offensive.

In a way, we could say that one part of this parable is addressed to those many who are not here today. Who are too busy with the important stuff and have no time or desire for this religious ... whatever they call it.

Who are, as Paul says, – “dead in their sins”, stuck till the neck in the swamp of their indifference and complacency and have no space or time for Jesus Christ in their lives.

Jesus speaks to them. And the picture He paints is scary. They need to hear these words. But they are not here... And there is only one way they can hear them. If you deliver them the message from Jesus.

Of course, I will put this sermon online, on PastorsBlog.com.au and on [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com), and on [SoundCloud.com](https://www.soundcloud.com), so that also those who are busy can hear it. But only a few will. So, it is largely up to you, to bring it to others.

But then there is this other part of this parable, that speaks to all people who respond to Jesus’ invitation. Jesus speaks to you. And He tells about the incredible grace and mercy that our Father shows us and about incredible gifts

that He has prepared for us. And Jesus desires that everyone hears this part as well. We'll get to it shortly. But first things first.

Let us begin where Jesus begins. "The Kingdom of heaven is like..." The picture He paints is the one of this majestic wedding banquet. And the one who organizes it is no one else as a king. Who wouldn't want to be invited to a king's son's wedding banquet?! It is such an honor!

But even besides that, the wedding banquets are such joyful occasions, where people celebrate, eat, drink, sing and dance. Not to mention that it is the king's son's wedding we are talking about. It means the best food, the best drinks, the best music... the best of everything.

There is one thing we need to remember about Jesus' time. They didn't have fridges or freezers. It may seem a small thing, but it mattered a lot. It determined how banquets were organized.

First, invitations would be sent out asking people to respond with 'yes' or 'no', so that the exact number of guests would be known. Only then one could sort out how much food to prepare.

Then, once the banquet was prepared, the messengers were sent out once more, just to tell 'come, for everything is prepared'. This is what Jesus is referring to in this parable. "Everything is ready, the banquet is prepared, come".

And the invited guests... what do they say? 'I have no time for you'. Even worse, they mistreat and murder the king's servants. Try to apply this parable to our today's situation, it is shocking!

Who would dare to reject our Queen's invitation? Who would dare to say that 'I will come', but then to ignore it. Who would dare to attack and kill our Queen's messengers?

It sounds nonsensical. Impossible. Ridiculous. How arrogant and self-righteous, how foolish, and how blind these people must have been?! But you know what Jesus is talking about, right?

He is talking about those many people whom the King of all kings, the Triune God Himself has invited to His Son's wedding feast, and who have said 'yes' in their solemn baptismal and confirmation vows, and who now ignore Him, reject Him, and ridicule His messengers.

Jesus is talking about those many in our community as well, who act exactly this way. Who believe that their daily dealings, their hobbies and other interests, their parties, or their sporting activities are more important than the invitation of God the Father, to come to His Son's wedding feast.

Jesus speaks to all those in our community who consider themselves Christians, and who get angry when someone dares to doubt it, and who get even more angry if you try to invite them to the royal banquet with our Divine King.

Even with our obscure minds we can see how terrifying this sinful dullness is. It is scary, isn't it? And by 'sinful' I don't mean just some inappropriate actions which people have done. It is about our sinful condition, which like thick darkness have blinded them, and they can't even see their situation. They think they are fine.

You are the servants of our Lord and King, and you are sent with the most wonderful invitation, and you are often laughed at in your face. Not much has changed since the time when Jesus told this parable, has it?

And as if the revelation of our sinful condition wasn't scary enough, Jesus tells about the fate of these people. They will receive what they have chosen, the King's wrath and destruction. They will not enter the wedding banquet. Ever.

The reason that Jesus speaks these words to those blind and deaf in their sinful condition is because He cares for everyone, He wants everyone to wake up from this spell of death, and to realize what is at stake, how much is given to them and how much they are about to lose.

Everything that Jesus said, and everything that we say to those around us should be done with one goal in mind, – to bring people from under the power of Satan into the Kingdom of God's Son, from death into eternal life. From this life of complacency and indifference, to joyful and blessed fellowship with the Triune God and His family, the Church.

Before we look at the wonderful and comforting second part of this parable, there is one more thing to be said. There was someone in the wedding banquet, who didn't wear the wedding garment.

What was wrong with this guest? This is how the Church has explained it. Here Jesus speaks about those who think that they can enter the Kingdom of God on their own terms. Who think that they are good enough as they are.

They don't need the wedding garment, they don't need Jesus' righteousness, they believe that they are good and worthy people as they are. How often you hear people saying that they have their own faith. And they say it with pride, as if that was something good and helpful.

Everyone has their own faith. Everyone believes something. So what? How would that help on the Last Day? It is like saying that 'I don't care about what Jesus has done for me and offers me, for I believe I can make it on my own.'

And they may add that they are better than many of those Christians. Better in what way? They may be better in their moral living, but not in their humility before the Lord, and not in their trust in God's grace and mercy. But this is what counts.

Not having the garment also refers to those, who think that it is enough simply to be a part of the Church, without trusting that we are saved only by God's grace, and instead believing that simply being present here will do.

It refers also to those who believe that it is enough that you know some things from the Bible, and that there is no need to strive to live as Jesus' disciples. All such people think they can get into the banquet without wedding garment. "Many are invited, but a few are chosen."

We are already gradually stepping into this second part, in this joyful and comforting part. First thing that I want you to notice in our Lord's mercy and patience. Yes, it is true, the world is hostile to Him and His Son. But that doesn't stop Him.

He keeps sending His messengers. We are His messengers, and our message is wonderful, and everyone needs to hear it. Our Lord is not disheartened by rejection of many, for He knows that all of those whom He has chosen from before the Creation of the world, will enter His wedding banquet.

The next comforting thing is to realize who gets invited. Both, the good and the bad. The good and the bad refers simply to our behaviors, not to our hearts. And this is so shocking and offensive to those 'good' people who reject Jesus.

They look as those bad people who are members of Jesus' Church, at those who don't have much to boast about their goodness in this life, and they get angry, and they get offended.

'Why would God accept them, and not me, for I deserve it more! If so, I don't want to do anything with such God.' The answer is simple, God accepts and welcomes those who don't reject His invitation, that's all. That simple.

These are so comforting words to those of us, who have done their good share of bad things in this life. You are coming into the King's banquet, and it has nothing to do with your goodness or lack of it, it is by God's grace that you are here. It is His gift to you. Undeserved. Unconditional gift. And it's yours.

Now probably the most beautiful part of this parable. All wedding guests will have their wedding garments. Dressed in these garments we all will look beautiful and pure, worthy and perfect to take part in this royal banquet. We will fit in perfectly among the prophets and the apostles and all God's saints.

What are these garments? It is Jesus and His gifts. It is the Holy Spirit. It is God's righteousness and holiness that is given to all who come in God's presence here in His house. It is something that the Triune God puts on us, as we listen to His holy and precious Word and taste His Holy Sacrament.

This is how He Himself puts this garment on us. Once we have it, our Father looks at us and in each one of you He sees His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. He looks at you, and He sees Jesus. And He treats you as He treats His Son.

Concluding I'll tell you a story, as true story that I heard from a fellow pastor. One of his parishioners traveled to India. Their tour group had a young tour guide, who was a practitioner of Hindu religion.

To advertise the spiritual power of his religion, he offered to foretell the future to the members of this group. But how could you trust what he says? What about if he could tell things about your past? This is exactly what he did.

Walking through the buss, as they were traveling, he stopped at each person and told a little bit about their past and then a little bit about their future. When he came to this Christian lady, he just passed her by, as if she wasn't there.

Later she asked him, why didn't he say anything to her. He looked at her and responded: "But you are a Christian. I can't see or tell anything about you." The wedding garment, the robes of Jesus' holiness, the Holy Spirit in us.

This is what God's power really looks like. Even in this age. You are protected already in this life. Evil spirits have no power over you. You belong to Jesus. You are children of God the Father, Jesus is your Lord and shield, and you are under His protection. You belong to Him.

This is what you receive here, in the Lord's house, in His presence. This is what so many reject. And this garment will open you entrance into our King's wedding banquet. In the most wonderful and joyful banquet ever.

What a precious treasure you have been blessed to receive! Brothers and sisters, welcome to the banquet. Amen.