



## **Matthew 22:1–14**

22 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fat-

tened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ 5 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11 “But when the king came

in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. 13 “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.’ 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

## **Reflection**

(Today’s reflection is given by Craig Tubman)

I love a good warning. Some classics come to mind like, from the halls of Roman an-

tiquity and immortalised through Shakespeare's pen: 'Beware the Ides of March!' On our cigarette packets we now have clear and stark warnings like: 'Smoking causes lung cancer' and 'Smoking harms your unborn children' or 'Smoking causes blindness.'

Everywhere we look there are warnings – from road signs to beach flags to the voice on the train station asking you to mind the gap – warnings are everywhere.

The reason for this is pretty simple, we live in a dangerous world. We are mortal, we are limited, we are flesh and blood and we must seek to protect ourselves. And of course the greater the threat, the greater the warning.

The start of Matthew chapter 22 drops us smack bang in the middle of a warning by Jesus. At the start of this chapter we read,

‘Jesus spoke to them again in parables’.

Who is the ‘them’ that Jesus tells this parable to? We get the answer from the previous chapter in verse 23 – it’s the chief priests and elders of the people in the temple courts. As we step back and see the bigger picture, it is clear that the clearing of the temple, the cursing of the fig tree, the three parables that Jesus tells are all given to be a plain-as-day warning to these religious men.

And the warning is this: you are going to hell. Now it doesn’t take a theologian to

notice that this is a deeply confronting message! What happened to gentle Jesus, meek and mild you might be asking?

The truth is, there is no other person in the entire bible, Old Testament or New, that talks about hell as much as Jesus and this is not because he has unresolved anger issues but surprisingly the opposite, because he has a deep and relentless love for us. Warnings exist because there is danger. The louder the warning the greater the danger and the more you love someone the louder you'll shout.

Jesus is now shouting pretty loud through signs and parables because the danger is very real. Let's look at this parable.

A king prepares a wedding banquet for his

Son. In the context here we can assume that this is a reference to God the Father & God the Son. Notice the banquet is good, in fact, it's great! It's extravagant and it's over the top – oxen and fattened cattle (that's plural) have been prepared. This is a party that is worth being at.

But the people who get the first invite – God's people, the Israelites , not only reject the invite but attack the servants who deliver the invitation! Similar to the parable Jesus has just told in chapter 22 this is most probably a reference to the way Israel's religious leaders and kings treated the prophets of the Old Testament – they came with warnings, calls of repentance and words of hope but most were rejected, some were killed. And in this parable, the king's wrath at such a response is most

probably a reference to the exile that Israel were driven into by the Babylonians.

But this banquet, this good thing from God, these invitations are still live, and so the servants go out and invite anyone and everyone into the party. The very ones who you wouldn't expect to get an invite – the good and the bad – are invited into the celebration. Those who you would expect to be there are not, the unexpected are and even some who accept the invite are thrown out because they aren't properly dressed.

And there at the end of the parable is the sharp end of Jesus' warning. What's it like if you aren't in the banquet? Jesus describes it as,



‘the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’.

That’s some serious stuff. So who is the warning addressing? Surprisingly, all of us.

Firstly it addresses the religious who don’t think they have any need for Jesus. The most obvious direction of this parable is to the men who are standing in front of Jesus listening to him! The warning to them is clear, the fulfilment of what you have been teaching has arrived, but if you reject him, if you turn down the invite, you are in grave, grave danger.

Secondly, this parable addresses those who associate with Jesus but don’t take him seriously (that is, the ones who aren’t appropriately dressed). Could this be Je-

Jesus' warning to those who waved palm branches and cried hosanna at his arrival into Jerusalem, some of whom in three days' time will be crying 'Crucify him!' before Pontius Pilate?

Could it be Jesus' warning for us today as well? It seems that to enjoy the banquet, to enter God's coming kingdom is not just about saying you believe in Jesus but rather it is about being clothed in him. That is, identifying with him, being seen as his disciple in the words you say, the actions you do, the heart out of which you live your life.

The question for you and I listening to Jesus today is this – are we wearing the right clothes? Are you dressed for the heavenly banquet?

The call to be a follower of Jesus is a call to start living now the way we will be living in eternity – at the great banquet. It means living this life now with God’s kingdom setting our agenda, our priorities, our passions. And if you remember anything about God’s kingdom from Jesus’ teaching, you’ll remember that it’s upside down! The last are first, the first are last. Pride is condemned, humility is glorified. Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the peace makers, blessed are those who are pure in heart.

These are the clothes that Jesus’ followers wear. And as Jesus says in Matthew 7, ‘by their fruit you’ll know them.’ Here he says with the same heart, ‘by their clothes

you'll know them.'

## **Think and Pray**

It's easy to live a life that name drops Jesus but is at its core always seeking to be first, is driven by pride, and is hungering and thirsting for status and security. This is common in today's world but it does not resemble in any way the good and eternal banquet that Jesus has invited us into.

God has a most wonderful banquet prepared for those who accept his Son Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Take some time today to remind yourself of the good things God has for you in Christ. Hear the very real warnings from Jesus to grab onto his invite with two hands. And

think about the clothes you're wearing. Is your life now going to fit in at God's heavenly banquet? If not, in which areas do you need to seek serious change?

Pray about the things. The party is glorious, the invite has been given, the warning is real.