Parable 7

**The wedding banquet Matthew 22 v 1 to14**

The context of this parable is important. It comes in the few days between Palm Sunday and Good Friday – what some people call Holy Week. Jesus is teaching in the temple courts of Jerusalem (20:23) – he is engaging with the leaders of Israel (chief priests and elders) who challenge him as to his authority to teach. Jesus shocks them with who will enter the kingdom of which he is the king. (Tax collectors and prostitutes 20:32) Israel’s leaders would have seen themselves as the natural heirs of all their great leaders (King David etc…) so destined for a place in God’s kingdom and probably a good seat.

The tenants of Ch 20:53f are way above themselves and think they have divine right to the kingdom based on their status. Jesus is trying to get the leaders to respond to his invitation to join HIS KINGDOM. But they think they’re safe and secure in their national status.

1. Do we see our own faith as a response to Jesus’ invitation to join his kingdom?

Can we sometimes replace it with belonging to an institution?

Verses 1 to 7 talk about those who rejected the invitation to the wedding. Weddings in 1st century Palestine often lasted for days and people would have been invited from near and far. Some have apparently overlooked the initial invitation and then refuse the king’s personal invitation brought by his servants (v3). The second invitation is gracious – the king need not have sent it.

1. Many people hear the gospel of Jesus these days and reject it. You could talk about your experiences with friends and family who have refused to accept Jesus’ invitation to follow him.

Why do people turn away from the wedding feast which is a picture of the eternal relationship believers experience with Jesus?

Some of the reasons given by the invitees are trivial. They are things which could wait – farming and business. Others actually abuse and kill the king’s messengers. This is a serious insult to the king who severely punished these insubordinate subjects with death and fire. This kind of punishment was only used in cases of the most serious treason and revolt against a king.

1. Isn’t becoming a Christian a personal choice? So why should people be punished by God for rejecting his message?

Should we see rejection of the faith as a slight to God or doubt in a belief system?

Verse 8 marks a sharp shift of emphasis. The privileged few have refused and the undeserving and unworthy are invited. Jesus is making a sharp distinction here between how he sees the current religious leadership of Israel and how it should be. Exhibitionist righteousness is not for followers of Jesus – we’ve seen it before with the parable of the Pharisee and the publican going to pray.

1. Those who know they are personally inadequate and have cast aside their self-reliance and self-worth are fit for the kingdom.

How easy is it to drift into the prevalent attitude of today where people say they don’t need anybody to help them?

Do we actually want to be dependent on God or do we just pay lip service to that idea?

The wedding hall appears to be full of undeserving guests who have responded to the gracious invitation of the king (v10). That should be how we see each other in the community of the church. We are so blessed to have been given the privilege of being part of God’s family.

1. Do we regard church as a place where the Lord of creation has invited us to be part of his family gathering?

Do we ever thank him for the privilege?

Is it easy to drift towards the idea that my church is very lucky to have me? Or even worse that I am indispensable?

The last part of the story is rather strange. One of the guests has turned up in the wrong wedding attire – a little bit like a gent turning up to a wedding today in tee-shirt and shorts. Surely, on the basis of the earlier argument, this person should just be accepted as he is. The drift of verse 12 is that this man is known to the king (he is addressed as ‘friend’) and that probably means he does have a wedding garment – he just hasn’t bothered to put it on.

1. Is this suggesting that we should always be smartly dressed at church to be acceptable to our sisters and brothers?

What does the dress-code suggest about the attitude of this man to the king?

What does this say about how we prepare and conduct ourselves when we come to worship the King of Kings?

The last statement in verse 14 tells us that not all will respond to God’s gracious invitation from the heart. Their faith is shallow and it will wither away in time

1. What does Jesus mean when he says ‘many are called but few are chosen’?

Could it mean that the offer of God’s salvation is open to anyone but not everybody responds?

Could it mean that some who are at the feast will not keep following the Lord? (Compare the parable of the Sower)

Why not finish your group time by thanking God for asking you to be part of his family?

This teaching comes very late in Jesus’ earthly ministry. In days he will be on trial, crucified and risen from the dead. He clearly feels the urgency of telling people the true meaning of being part of God’s kingdom.

Do we have a similar urgency?