

“CALLED AND CHOSEN”

Matthew 22:1-14

Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

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INTRODUCTION:

Today, we have another parable told by Jesus.

His parables are remarkable because they grab our attention
engage our imaginations
and challenge our assumptions.

The power of His parables comes from the invitation
to reexamine some of our convictions –
some of our beliefs about eternal matters.

That’s why some of His parables are unsettling rather than reassuring.

The parable of the wedding feast is one of the unsettling ones.

It is a parable many preachers prefer to avoid
because it deals with the tough subject of predestination
and because of the judgement implied in the parable.

THE PARABLE

The story itself is very simple.

A marriage has been arranged for the king's son,
and the initial invitations were sent out in advance of the feast
so that all on the guest list could make plans to attend.

Because of the distances and slow modes of travel
plans needed to be made long in advance.

However, those invited, though honored by the invitation,
declined to attend the wedding, citing varied excuses.

The graciousness of the king is demonstrated in the second invitation.

Not only is there a *second* invitation,
but there is a menu is included in hopes that what is offered
will be attractive enough to change the minds
of those who have refused.

Unfortunately, the invitees paid little heed to it,
they are caught up in their own activities and ventures.

The mundane excuses they offer are a terrible slight to the king.

What should be seen as an honor,
to be invited to the wedding of his son and a time of special joy
is seen and treated as an imposition.

By their actions, they demonstrated
how little they cared for the king and his son.

In fact, they saw themselves as sufficient unto themselves
with their farms and shops; they felt they had need of nothing.

Not only did they refuse,
but they showed their contempt towards the king
In the way they treated the king's servants,
Even to the extent of killing some.

After the second invitation, the king was furious,
to the point that he mustered his forces to avenge his servants
and to answer the disrespect shown to him.

After venting his anger against those who refused the invitation,
the king issued a third invitation.

This time with a different guest list –
changed from the specially invited to the everyday person,
some of which were good while others were bad.

This is one of the impressive reversals that Jesus is so famous for.

Jesus indicated that those worthy of the invitation

and whom you would expect to be invited have declined.

Those who never dreamed they could be part of a magnificent feast

are the very ones who *are* included.

The custom in those days was for the one hosting the wedding feast

to provide garments for the wedding guests;

simple, nondescript robes that all attendees wore.

In this way, rank or station was covered by the robes

and everyone at the feast could mingle as equals.

When the king entered the wedding hall,

he noticed that one guest clearly stood out from all the others

because he was not wearing a wedding garment.

Having the man brought forward, the king asked:

“Friend, why are you not wearing a wedding garment,

even though one was provided for you?”

His lack of a wedding garment was another example
of extreme disrespect for both the king and his son.

His reply was that he was without excuse.

It was not just that he lacked a wedding garment,
but that he did not wear one on purpose.

He had defiantly refused to put one on.

The king reacts swiftly and harshly:

“Bind him hand and foot, take him away,
and cast him into outer darkness;
there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,”

The judgement is not against the man’s lack of a wedding garment,
but that he did not intend to wear one.

He desired the honor of attending the wedding feast,
but he did not want to follow the custom of the king.

He wanted to do things his own way.

His lack of proper dress revealed his inner rebellion.

THE KING AND THE KINGDOM

Jesus began this parable by saying:

“The kingdom of heaven is like this . . .”

So this parable is meant to give us some insight
to what the kingdom of heaven is like.

One thing to notice is the kingdom is already here,
invitations have been sent out, and are being refused.

Theologians refer to the kingdom of heaven as being
here already – but not yet.

The allegory here is very clear
the king (God) has invited folks (Israel) to attend the banquet
and they have provisionally accepted the invitation.

Until the day comes and the messengers are sent out (the prophets)
who are ignored and the people are now refusing to actually attend.

In order to make sure those invited have received the invitation,

the king issued a second invitation - which is also refused.

The king then responds in a very harsh way –

 killing those who refused and burning their cities.

The conclusion, of course, is obvious and is stated by Jesus –

 Many were invited, but refused to come

 for whatever conjured up reason.

The fate of those who refused is to be rejected from the kingdom.

Jesus ends his story by summarizing the parable's meaning:

 “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14).

APPLICATION

And that statement has caused an untold number of debates.

The confusion centers on the subjects of God's calling and predestination.

If it is true that believers are predestined by God,

 then how can many be called and few chosen, as Jesus preached?

Why would God call someone and not choose him or her?

Why does God not just choose everyone?

And if we are predestined, then we cannot fail, right?

Let's look at what it means to be "called" and "chosen"

THE CALLED

Using the parable as our pattern to understand "called" and "chosen",

the "call" is the invitation of God through his servants -

prophets in the Old Testament, ministers in the New.

This call bids hearers to repent

and believe the good news the servants proclaim.

Free will, makes it possible to refuse the invitation, as many Jews did.

Jesus teaches that those who refuse the call

will be held responsible for that refusal.

It is also possible to respond to this call in a non-saving way.

The man without the wedding garment

presumably responded to the invitation

but his refusal to wear the garment – the gift of salvation -

proves he doesn't belong at the feast,

and he is justly banished.

Like the many people who were invited to the king's banquet,

many have the opportunity to hear the gospel.

In this sense, they have been "called" to the Kingdom of God,

called and invited to experience a personal relationship with Christ.

Like the king in Jesus' parable,

God invites as many as are willing to come eat at His table

and to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

THE CHOSEN

Those who are said to be "chosen"

are those who respond to the call and receive Christ in faith.

The Greek word for "chosen" may be translated, the "elect".

Those who were “called” are those who were invited to the feast;

Those who are “chosen” are those who have responded to the call.

In the parable, there is a wedding guest

who declined to wear the robe as the other guests,

and in so doing, he eliminated himself from being chosen.

What Jesus is saying is that tragically,

not everyone who is welcomed and called

to enter into God’s Kingdom will do so.

Although the invitation is an open one,

not all people will accept that invitation.

By the sacrificial death of Jesus,

the invitation has been issued to the world –

put your faith in Jesus, repent, be forgiven

and you will be among the chosen.

It is the Holy Spirit which calls us into this deeper relationship.

It is up to us to either accept it or not.

CONCLUSION

Now, a word of caution:

This parable does not mean that God calls a lot of people,
picks over them, and keeps only a favored few.

The parable demonstrates that God calls everyone
and gives them the opportunity – the choice - to respond;
but to be chosen, we must respond to the call,
using the power God gave us for that purpose.

If we try to figure out who is included among the “many”
and who is included among the “few,”
we’ve missed the point of the parable.

First of all, God will do the choosing –
God will choose whomever God wishes to choose.

Second, this isn’t about other people suffering a dire fate,
it’s a warning that tells us how to avoid it ourselves.

The parable is not a tool to coerce other people into accepting the gospel,
it is a helpful warning for us to live up to our calling.

It is NEVER a slight thing to refuse the invitation of God;

God will hold those who refuse that summons

responsible for their choice on Judgment Day.

There is also a more elusive warning contained in the parable.

Jesus wants us to realize there is a subtle way to refuse the summons.

One may pay lip service to God's call

but never truly embrace Jesus as offered in that call.

Even this refusal subjects us to God's just judgment.

Calvin pointed out that we have no power in ourselves

to change our rebellious hearts –

only God can do that through the Holy Spirit.

The good news is God is pleased to change rebellious hearts

by the invincible power of his Spirit.

If we have responded to the external call in repentance and faith,
it is only because God has first been at work in us
to turn us to himself in Christ.

Salvation is truly by grace alone.

This truth is unsettling, but Jesus unsettles us for a reason.

He wants us to find salvation and life in him alone,
by grace alone.

And only in Christ may we find an everlasting, unshakeable foundation.

This parable, then, convicts us and spurs us on to action in two ways:

Firstly, it makes it clear to us that we should always be looking

for opportunities to share God's Word with others

and to continue to disciple them

and lead them not only to respond to God's call,

but to have a heart-changing encounter with Jesus.

Secondly, it should inspire gratitude in our hearts

through the Holy Spirit, we have been given the grace

to respond effectively to God's call

and can count ourselves as chosen children of God.

It is critical to understand

this is instruction and warning for those

who have accepted the gospel;

it is not a description of the fate that awaits

someone who has not accepted Jesus.

It is certainly not an occasion for Christians to boast of their salvation.

The moral, for us, is a warning of the dire consequences

of accepting the invitation and then not following through.

As Peter said in 1 Peter 2:9:

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him
who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”