

OFFERED TO ALL?

Matthew 22:1-14

All of us have received invitations to participate in an activity of some sort. It could be attending a graduation of a relative or the child of a close friend. There are invitations to weddings, showers, birthday parties, retirement celebrations, welcoming receptions, and the list goes on and on. There are some activities that you would like to do, many that you feel obligated to do, and others that you would never do. There are a variety of reasons why we might have a particular response to such an invitation. It shouldn't be difficult to turn down an invitation but it is. We feel that because someone has asked us, we have to say "yes." We feel we have been put on the spot, put in a situation which gives us no choice.

What is the implication of having received an invitation? In a word the implication is "acceptance." The acceptance could be related to the fact that we are part of a particular group such as being members of a particular family or those who are members of a social club or those who live in a certain neighborhood. If we were doing the inviting, we invite someone from a sense of obligation to invite a particular person because of the importance of that person or perhaps as a debt we think we owe to reciprocate regarding an invitation we had received.

What is the implication of turning down an invitation? In a word the implication is "rejection." The rejection may be related to the event itself (we don't appreciate or agree with what is being done), there may be a conflict with something that has a higher priority, it could be that the person invited is not comfortable in crowds, or the rejection could be related to not knowing or even disliking the person issuing the invitation.

What are consequences of accepting an invitation? On the plus side, we might enjoy the event, we might learn something, or we might benefit in a variety of ways. We might even find favor with the host of the event. The downside could be that we might be bored by what was happening, we might be offended, or it might wind up costing us by being scammed or the event could affect our reputation.

What are consequences of rejecting an invitation? We might find some satisfaction in showing disdain for the person who invited us or for the event itself. We might avoid having to interact with people with whom we don't have anything in common. We might accomplish something beneficial from the alternate activity which conflicted with the invited event. The downside could include missing out on the good food and fellowship. Another downside to refusing to participate is that we could miss the only opportunity to be part of a new community that had great benefits.

The Invited – 22:1-7

¹ Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. ³ "And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. ⁴ "Again he sent out other slaves saying, "Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are *all* butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast." ⁵ "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, ⁶ and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ "But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. Matthew 22:1-7 (NASB95)

This was the third of three parables Jesus told in the presence of the Jewish leaders in response to their challenge of "by whose authority" did Jesus cleanse the temple after He rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey and then the next day taught in the temple. The first was the "parable of the two sons" who were instructed by their father to work in his vineyard. The second was the parable of the "unfaithful tenants of a vineyard" that had been planted by a

landowner. This third parable is typically called the “Parable of the Wedding Feast.”

All three of these parables give a clear message that those who had been entrusted with God’s provision and message of salvation had ignored, mishandled, and misused the Word of God for their own benefit. The first parable showed their disdain for the Father, the second parable had a clear message regarding their disdain and abuse of the Son, and this third parable showed their rejection of the Holy Spirit.

The sequence of the three parables was apparently deliberate in that it followed the sequence of rejection of the leaders and rulers of Israel historically (past, present, and future). The first parable related to the past and the second tied the past with the present and focused on the present and immediate future in the killing of the Son. In the third parable, the Son is alive, has a bride (the church) and people are being invited to the feast. This would put the time line of this parable in the future, specifically, following the resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the invitation going out to the Jews from those in whom the Spirit was dwelling.

This parable starts out with an emphasis on the invitation. The passage literally says that the slaves of the King went out and “called the called.” The “called” or “those who were bidden” would obviously be the people of Israel since they were those who were called of God or His Chosen People. The prophets of old had given God’s invitation to the Jewish people. The double invitation was customary among the wealthy when they entertained others. The first invitation was given some time in advance, as it is still done, and when the feast was ready, a servant was dispatched with an announcement of the fact that everything was ready.

An example of this practice is found in the story of Esther who invited Ahasuerus and Haman to a feast, and when it was ready, the king’s chamberlains were sent to notify Haman. It would make sense that the second invitation would only go out to those who had accepted or agreed to the first invitation. In the case of Israel, they realized and took pride in the knowledge that they were God’s Chosen people or the “called.” They had heard John the Baptist and heard the teaching and witnessed the miracles of Jesus that had identified Him as the Son. They could not have missed the message that preparations were under way for something significant to happen. Even though they had a special relationship and witnessed all that had happened, they choose to reject the second invitation which would have honored the King. Some were occupied with their own interest and business and had no time for the King and others showed malicious behavior toward the servants of the Kings that grew out of their hatred of the King.

Putting these actions in terms of what happened in Jerusalem after Pentecost, the leaders and rulers simply ignored the church at first and then began to persecute and kill those who were serving God through the church. The extreme action of the King against those who carried out such evil could point to what happened in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

Warren Wiersbe wrote about this series of rejections by the Jews. Starting with their rejection of the teaching of John the Baptist, they had, in effect, rejected God Who sent John. John was the last of the Old Testament prophets whom God had sent to Israel. Even while this was happening, there was the ongoing ministry of the Son of God and they rejected Him by arresting and crucifying Him. For this they were forgiven because of their ignorance. Remember that Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” However, God sent other witnesses who were empowered by the Holy Spirit and there were miracles that gave proof that God was at work in and through them. Then they rejected this ministry of the Holy Spirit and before his death, Stephen told them what they were doing in Acts 7:51 where he said “You do always resist the Holy Spirit.” Following the stoning of Stephen and the increased

overt persecution of the church, God's patience was coming to an end the message of salvation was then given to the Gentiles beginning with Samaria.

The Gathered – 22:8-10

⁸“Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.’ ⁹‘Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find *there*, invite to the wedding feast.’ ¹⁰“Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. Matthew 22:8-10 (NASB95)

We hold to the doctrine that no one is worthy of salvation since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death and yet God provided a way to make salvation available to us. Here we see God performing the “impossible” by changing our status before Him from unworthy to worthy. Apparently, those mentioned in verse eight were not able to be converted from being unworthy to being worthy. What could possibly be the reason for this? The answer is that they had rejected every opportunity to be included in the gracious provision that God was providing. This is likely what is referred to as the “sin against the Holy Spirit.” Anyone who continues to reject the only means of salvation that is available will remain in the status of being “unworthy.” It is a choice that people make.

In interpreting parables, we are told that we are to look for the main message and not read a lot into the specifics. You might get the impression that all of the initially invited people turned down the invitation; however, we know from the historical accounts that some of the Jews did believe and those who were being added to the church in the time following the coming of the Holy Spirit were, in fact, Jews. The majority of these were not particularly religious and some were considered to be outcast from the elite society. While this parable does not specifically state it, we recognize that those who accepted the invitation to the feast are those who are also identified as the “bride.”

In verse nine, the instructions to go into the main highways and invite whoever they found to the wedding feast is somewhat like the Great Commission that Jesus gave before His ascension. There were no distinctions made based on the person's background or behavior as to who was invited. We could easily relate this to the words of Jesus in John 3:16 where He used the term “whosoever.” This is how grace operates; there is no precondition that would exclude a person from receiving an invitation to the wedding.

The Unprepared – 22:11-14

¹¹“But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. ¹³“Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴“For many are called, but few *are* chosen.” Matthew 22:11-14 (NASB95)

It was Augustine who suggested that wedding clothes were provided by the host in such situations. (Some question the historical foundation for that idea.) There are Scriptural accounts of wealthy persons providing clean garments as a gift to people. One account with which most of us are familiar is the fact that Joseph gave his brothers new clothes as they left to return to Canaan to bring their families back to Egypt. The idea that the host provided the guests with appropriate clothing comes from practical considerations that those who were “out and about” in their normal activities would not have had time to return home and change their clothing. If those who were invited were very poor, they would not have even owned garments suitable for a wedding.

The question raised by the king was essentially “why are you here or how did you get in

without wearing the properly clothing?” One possibility is that he came into the area by another door or climbed over a wall as a thief might do. Another possibility was that he was provided the garment and thought that his own clothing was perfectly fine and did not bother to put on the wedding garment. Up until this point in the parable, the focus of the story was on the national responsibility of Israel to respond to God’s salvation. Those in leadership were obviously hostile to what God was doing and there would be national consequences or judgment.

With this focus on a single individual we see that each of us has a responsibility (individually) to respond to the gracious invitation from the king to participate in the gift offered by the king. The proper response is to recognize that we are not there at the wedding feast on our own merit but we are there because of the generosity and bounty of the king.

The “many called, but few chosen” observation of Jesus applied to the Israelites and still applies to the present day world in which we live. If we hear the invitation (the call) but refuse to respond (that is “choose”) and come by the way of the cross, then we cannot be the “chosen.” Notice the role of the participants in this drama presented in the parable. The king issued the “call” but it was the nation or the individuals who needed to make the “choice” whether to accept and properly respond to the invitation. God in His sovereignty has provided all that is needed and in His grace has made it available to all who will accept; however, unless we “choose to accept” and become those who are counted among “the chosen,” then we cannot benefit from His grace.