

October 12, 2014 The Banquet Feast

If you have attended a wedding reception this year, please raise your hand.

I have been to four wedding receptions in the last four weeks.

Do you like wedding receptions?

I do...and let me tell you why.

I like the good food, the drinks, the music.

I especially like all the personal touches.

In these last four weeks, I have seen...

A six-week old calf named buckethead...star wars light sabers...the couples' favorite books...pictures of previous generations...and so much more.

The beauty of flowers and clothes and candles and...

But that's not what really delights.

What makes weddings so special is...

The love...

The commitment...I take you to be my wife...I promise...

And it is a commitment for all of life.

The finding of a soul mate so that life is not lived alone...

The beginning of something new...

Multi-generations of family coming together...

Renewing old friendships and community relationships...

A milestone, a highlight, one of the most significant days in their life, and you get to share in it.

Wedding banquets are wonderful!

I can understand why Jesus told a story about a wedding reception.

Everyone would understand the joy that would be present.

The king's son, the prince, is getting married. Yes!

The chefs have been slaving for days in the kitchen.

The food is going to be grand. Yes!

The bars are stocked to the brim and the drinks will be overflowing. Yes!

The music is cued up and it will be glorious.

We will dance the night away. Yes!

And at the deepest level, it will be a celebration of love and joy and commitment and relationship and community. Yes!

When Jesus told the story, that's not what happened at this wedding.

Huh? What went wrong?

The servants had delivered the "Save the Date" cards.

The formal invitations had been sent.

But when it was time for the banquet, the guests, verse five tells us, "made light of it and went away."

Did you hear that? They "made light of it and went away."

They were preoccupied with their work, their farm, their business.

They dismissed it as unworthy of their time.

They even beat up the servants who were bringing the invitations.

They made light of it and went away.

And the king was mad.

We know to whom this story was addressed.

Jesus spoke this parable to the religious leaders in the temple.

Those people are the "them" in verse one, where we read:

"Once more Jesus spoke to **them** in parables."

This is the third of three parables that Jesus spoke against them.

All three stories make the same point.

The leaders were not seeing what God was doing in Jesus.

The leaders were more interested in being a part of the kingdom of Rome, rather than the kingdom of God.

The leaders honored the God of the past...but not the God of the present.

That explains all the angry language in the story.

That explains the king's wrath in the parable.

As far as I can tell, none of us here are the chief priests in the Jerusalem Temple.

If you are, please raise your hand. Just as I thought.

So we can dismiss this story as irrelevant. Right? Of course not.

So I wonder...

Since we are not the religious leaders of the temple, what does this story have to do with you and me?

What makes this not a history lesson...or a gory tale...but rather Scripture for us?

There are such strong words of judgment in the story.

How do they apply to us?

And where is there grace in this story for our journey of faith today?

Let me tell you what I hear...

I believe this story has several significant things to say for your life of faith.
I'll start with the joy of a wedding feast.

The very best things you experience in weddings today
are precisely the dimensions of life God wants for you.

As I refresh your memory, tell me if any of these experiences of life are contrary
to what you believe about God...

Love...Joy...Commitment to another...new life...family...friendships...community.
All of that is gift. All of that is grace. All of that is godly.

All of that is good news. All of that is abundant life.

All of these things are the best of what God wants for you...

I'm absolutely convinced of it.

When you know these things, how blessed you are!

There is even more grace in Jesus' story of the wedding banquet.

Notice how, in verse two, Jesus used the wedding banquet story to explain "the
kingdom of heaven."

Right from the very get-go, Jesus wants to tell this story in service to God's
kingdom.

Because that's what matters:

God's reign, God's rule, God's presence, God's glory.

That is what is being offered to you.

That is what God wants for you.

To live with God...in this world...and the next.

And if you still can't see it, there is even more grace in Jesus' story of the wedding
banquet. Notice:

Vs. 3: He sent his slaves to call those invited

Vs. 4: Again, he sent other slaves to say, Come to the wedding banquet

Vs. 9: Go in the main streets and invite everyone

Vs. 10: They gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding
hall was filled with guests

Vs. 14: For many are called

This wedding banquet, this kingdom thing, is an open invitation.

It is inclusive, not exclusive.

It is meant for you...and all people.

The doors are open.

The feast is ready.

This story, in spite of all the words of judgment, is steeped in grace.

But I'm not letting you off the hook.

There is law in this story.

The pervasive words of judgment are relevant for your life.

For me, it's all captured in verse 5: "They made light of it and went away."

I see this in me...I see this in you.

To make light of it...means you have other priorities...you hold other things as more important.

To make light of it...means you don't see the relevance of God's kingdom in your everyday living.

To make light of it...means you buy into our culture's values of: lake places, shopping trips, recreation, expensive toys, personal comfort, self-centeredness, rather than in God's values of love and compassion and service.

If you can put words to the primary sin of our lives, I would choose these words from verse 5: "They made light of it and went away."

That's why we are talking about generosity these days.

That's why we print the marks of discipleship on the front cover of every newsletter: worship, prayer, reading the Bible, giving, service, inviting.

That's why we actively emphasize service in the community.

We want to be people who DON'T make light of God's ways, but claim it as our way of life.

We want to grow into it, expanding and increasing our faithfulness and walk with God.

We do so because we have seen the grace of God.

We have experienced first-hand the life-giving nature of living in relationship with God.

We have heard the invitation to God's banquet.

And we say YES.