

The God of Invitation (Matthew 22:1-14)

We are not going to focus on Palm Sunday as such this morning - Dave will do that tonight. We are going to focus on what happened on the day after! But it's content is still all part of the Easter story. As Jesus gives us this story we see it explains to us why He came. So as we explore this parable of the king who was preparing a wedding banquet for his son, we find a piece of truth that is relevant to each of us.

So what is this story trying to teach us about God? Have you ever had an invitation to something exciting. Maybe it was a Royal Garden Party. Possibly a special dinner. For most of us it will be a wedding. We are given a card and we have to reply to it. We then go there and party at someone else's expense. This is what Jesus' parable is about.

Invitation

God is a God of invitation. He is a God who desires to know people and have them come and receive all the benefits of being part of His life.

To many, God is distant and out there somewhere. He can't be known and if he could be, He's somehow distant. As we look at the story we find the opposite. The king wanted to know people and was keen to invite them. That is the nature of God. It's not one you hear much of. God is a God of giving because He's a God of love. This particular aspect of God is called grace - unmerited favour. God wants to place His favour on people irrespective of who they are or whatever they have done or been in life.

So God gives an invitation to people today - the same one as He has given down the centuries. God wants to give you a gift of eternal life. It's on offer to all of us. Some of us have accepted it and some haven't.

But the offer is there. I know many people find this fact strange. Eternal life a gift? By that implication it's free. But that is the central truth of the Christian faith - God desires that all people come to know Him and all people accept that relationship as a gift.

The trouble is that we also live in a society where people look with suspicion of anything provided free. If it's free then it must be rubbish! If it's free it must be a scam. It's rather like that advert for Pensions Credit where a pensioner finds a bundle of cash and won't touch it whilst another says "It's yours - take it".

Rejection

Whatever you think of it, that has been God's attitude to people as long as they have existed. He's a God who desires to know people and offers them a gift. Wow! If someone offered me bundles of cash with no strings attached, I would gladly accept it.

God in His grace wants to know everybody and offer eternal life to anybody. He had a special people Israel who He went into relationship with. You'd have thought that they would have been really blessed and loved that relationship. The truth is the opposite and this is what Jesus refers to early in the parable. That invitation, that gift was always there but as we read in the OT, we find that although there were times - golden ages - where they had a good relationship with God, they preferred to do things their way.

This is what Jesus is referring to in this parable when He says:
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 fattened 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.

That's what happened and the ultimate rejection was the way in which they rejected Jesus as well and this parable comes in response to the Pharisees and others trying to test Jesus to try and catch Him out and condemn Him.

The wonderful thing about Jesus' death on the cross was that it was the way by which God offers an invitation to everyone. And that invitation still applies today. God wants you to accept His gift of eternal life. It's free.

Do you know what? People don't want to know about it in most of our towns and villages today? Here's God trying to establish relationship and people not wanting to know? But God made us? He has made us an unconditional offer and we reject it?

It's our choice just as it was theirs. What happened in the parable? The king was angry and destroyed their cities. Israel rejected God down the ages and look what happened to them?

God made you and you have a choice of knowing Him or going your own way. But you'll have to go your own way for eternity because that offer is not going to be open to you forever. God wants you to accept His gift today because He doesn't want you to suffer the eternal consequences of rejecting it.

Acceptance

Everybody who accepted was chosen to come to the wedding feast. An invitation is an invitation. Replying to it means you get to go.

'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 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, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But why does eternal life have to be a free gift? Because we can't earn or deserve it. The reason why God is so distant from us as a race is that we all by nature do things that are offensive to God. They are all known as sins. By sins, we don't mean serious crimes because most of us are pretty respectable citizens of Swaffham. What we mean are those little things. The time we criticise and bad-mouth people. we've all done it. The time when we think the worse of people. The times when we know we should have helped someone. Or worse.

Why should God be worried about these. The trouble is that God is a just God and we were created to have His standards and when we break one part of God's law - God's standards - we break them all. Once we've done that (and we all have) there's no way we can make that back up. That's why God offers us eternal life free - because we can't earn or deserve it. He's a God of love, so that's pretty cool isn't it?

So why can a just God who is offended by even the smallest sin be prepared to let us off? After all, let's say I was caught doing 90mph on the A47 and ended up in court. What if I said "It's a fair cop guv. You've got me banged to rights. I'm sorry. I won't do it again" Do you think I'll be let off? Of course not. I will be fined a lot of money. It's the same with us and God. But I could be let off if someone else paid the fine.

That is what Jesus did on the cross. When he died, he took the penalty for my sins and yours. My sins were laid on Him so now God is able to offer us that gift of eternal life because nothing stands in the way of that relationship but our acceptance.

And that's the issue. We receive the gift of eternal life by trusting in Jesus - that He as paid the price and I am able to go free. The only thing God requires of us is that we recognise that we are sinners and that the only way that we are getting the gift is because He paid the price we couldn't and recognise that now we must live and walk in God's way. We call this repentance - recognising the price paid for what we have done and desiring not to be like that again. And it really is as easy as that to accept the gift of God.

Gatecrasher

Have you ever been to one of those places and you feel that you're incorrectly dressed? For example, you've gone to a restaurant and you've not been wearing a tie. Or maybe when you were at school you brought in the wrong piece of uniform and you got into trouble. This was true in our parable this morning:

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' 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.'

But there was a gatecrasher - he wanted to come to the wedding on His terms not accepting the king's simple requirement to wear wedding clothes. He thought his were good enough. Why should he comply with the king's commands.

Churches tend to be full of a variety of people. Some are Christians, some are not and others are less sure. They want to be in the church but have never really trusted Christ, they've never understood that they need to say sorry for their sins and accept God's invitation. Maybe that's you this morning. If that's the case you're the same as the people who stayed away. God wants you to accept the invitation and come in on His terms, recognising that the only right that we have to be in His people is through what Jesus did on the cross for our sins. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian just as going to McDonalds makes you a hamburger. You need to come into a personal relationship with God through Christ.

Perhaps God has been speaking to you this morning. You know about God's invitation and know that you have never accepted it. Maybe you understand that the reason that God can make this invitation is that He purchased it himself through the death of His Son. All you need to do is accept it.

Prayer of faith:

Father God

I want to know you. I need you. Thank you that you have always loved me. Thank you for sending Jesus for dying on the cross for me. Please forgive me for all the sins I have committed. I accept Your gift of eternal life. I turn from all the things that displease you and to desire to follow You in newness of life.

In Jesus' name

Amen

