

Matthew 22A

- Once again, we're back to the scene two days before Jesus' death where He is being confronted by Pharisees and Sadducees in the temple
 - These men are on a mission to discredit Jesus in front of the crowds or trick Jesus into saying something which they can use to accuse Him
 - Meanwhile, Jesus is on a mission to demonstrate Himself as worthy to be our perfect, spotless Lamb on Passover
 - So Jesus continues outmaneuvering these men and shining the light of scrutiny back upon them
 - Which is a reminder that we can't judge God, nor should we ever try, for He is always above our judgment
 - Now so far Jesus has faced a question of His authority, which He refused to answer on the grounds that His accusers didn't really care anyway
 - They did not know the source of John the Baptist's authority yet they allowed him to minister unchallenged
 - So Jesus said He would do the same
 - Following that first question, Jesus launched into a withering attack on these hypocrites with parable after parable
 - Jesus uses parables to draw the men into a discussion only to turn the tables on them in the end
 - Each time, He publicly humiliates these hypocrites in front of the crowds and they get progressively more determined to kill Jesus
- Let's remember, Jesus is just two days away from His own death, and these men are the ones who will bring that death about by charging Jesus before Pilate
 - They will move against Jesus out of jealousy over His popularity and intense hatred for how He undermines their authority
 - Jesus knows this is coming, and in fact He has foretold it many times, yet isn't it interesting that Jesus is provoking these men?
 - It appears Jesus is working to bring about the circumstances of His own death, which tells you who is truly in charge here

- Jesus is exposing the religious leaders' con game knowing that as He provokes their evil hearts, they will react predictably
 - They will plot against Jesus and have Him killed in the end, thinking they are triumphing
 - In reality, Jesus will be in control of these events from beginning to end, which is what Peter told Israel at Pentecost

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know –

Acts 2:23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

- So as we study the escalating tension, just remember that this is God's plan and it's playing out exactly as God determined
- Next, we move into Chapter 22 today, and the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders continues to escalate as Jesus delivers another parable

Matt. 22:1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying,

Matt. 22:2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

Matt. 22:3 “And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come.

Matt. 22:4 “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.’’’

Matt. 22:5 “But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business,

Matt. 22:6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.

- By now it's obvious that all of these parables focus on the religious leaders
 - The first parable of two sons explained the true heart of these men
 - They were like the second son who gave lip service to the father but in his heart he had no interest in obeying

- The religious leaders were self-serving hypocrites who used religion as a means of personal gain
- The second parable about the vineyard owner explained why the religious leaders rejected Jesus' authority
 - They saw Jesus' claims to Messiah as a threat to the Pharisaic system which brought them great wealth and power
 - In other words, they opposed Jesus, not on religious grounds, but for personal, economic reasons
 - They didn't want Jesus to put a stop to Pharisaic Judaism, which was their goose laying golden eggs
- And now Jesus gives a third parable about a wedding feast, and a wedding is Jesus' favorite way of picturing entering the Kingdom
 - Specifically, this parable is about entering the Kingdom of Heaven and who will enter and who will not
 - It starts with a king with a son who is getting married, and the king makes preparations for the wedding celebration
 - He invests considerable resources in the feast, butchering prized animals and making all necessary preparations
 - And then the time came to invite the guests, and the king chooses who he will invite and sends slaves to call the guests
 - But then the slaves discover the invited guests are indifferent to the opportunity
 - And some respond by abusing and even killing the slaves
 - Now we need to stop at this point because it's important to appreciate the significance in how this parable begins
 - In Jesus' day there was no social occasion more important nor more anticipated than a wedding feast
 - A wedding feast was all about being extravagant, especially if the family possessed the wealth of a king
 - The feast would include multiple oxen, goats and sheep slaughtered... more meat than someone might see in a whole year

- And there was more wine than you could possibly drink (remember Mary's fear that the wedding in Cana might run out)
- And the menu went on and on, as did the music and games and celebration...
- This party didn't just last for hours, *but for days*, sometimes as long as a week of feasting took place
- So if you were invited to the wedding feast of a wealthy family, you didn't just accept the invitation...you bragged about it
 - You wouldn't dare miss that wedding, because it would be the social occasion of the year
 - Simply said, no one turned down a wedding invitation
- So the king's slaves should have expected these people to jump for joy and to receive the invitation gladly
 - Instead, most were indifferent to it...they couldn't bother to even consider it as they went about their daily business
 - And then even more bizarre...some acted in hostility against those who brought them this good news
 - They killed the slaves for bringing them the invitation
 - All these responses were inconceivable, inexplicable, and inexcusable
- These are the circumstances that open Jesus' parable, so as the crowd heard Jesus' story, they probably giggled a little at the foolishness of those guests
 - Yet ironically, that's exactly what they were doing in response to the invitation Jesus and His apostles delivered to Israel
 - The Father in Heaven offered to give Israel the Kingdom in their day, if only they had received the Messiah sent to them
 - His invitations went out by way of His slaves, Jesus' apostles and other disciples, who called Israel to repent and receive the Lord
 - And even before that, John and his disciples had called Israel to repent and prepare to receive the Messiah
 - But they foolishly responded with indifference to Jesus' offer

- Had Israel accepted the invitation, the nation would have received the Kingdom in that day
- And as a result, they would have enjoyed the greatest wedding feast ever known in the history of the world
- The Bible tells us that a great feast will inaugurate the start of the Kingdom
 - The Bible calls that future celebration a wedding feast, but it will make a normal wedding banquet look like a sack lunch
 - Isaiah describes it this way:

Is. 25:6 The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;

A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,
And refined, aged wine.

Is. 25:7 And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,

Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.

Is. 25:8 He will swallow up death for all time,

And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;
For the LORD has spoken.

Is. 25:9 And it will be said in that day,

“Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.”

- When the Lord throws a party, He does it right, and the one that opens the Kingdom will be a party like no other
 - Isaiah says it will be lavish, and the Hebrew word translated lavish is the word for fat...meaning this feast will make you fat
 - It features choice pieces of meat, fine aged wine (which Isaiah repeats twice for emphasis)...only the best will be served
- And even better, this feast will take place at a time when all those invited will be without death and sorrow forevermore

- So in that sense the party never ends! No one wakes up hungover from this party or sad because it's Monday morning
- Isaiah says we will all say behold, this is the God who saves us, the Lord on whom we have waited!
- That feast will mark the first days of a thousand years of Kingdom life, and that opening event is just the tip of the iceberg for what we will experience
 - Paul says the Kingdom is so glorious in all that awaits us there that we simply have no earthly idea how good it will be

1Cor. 2:9 but just as it is written,

**"THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND which HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM."**

- Paul quotes Isaiah 64 saying God has prepared things for those who love Him which humanity can't even imagine
- There will be things we will see that no eyes have never seen, things we will hear that no ears have never heard!
- The things of the Kingdom are things that have never entered into the heart of man, *meaning they have never been imagined*
 - Try this thought experiment...imagine all the wonderful things you could ever want, the best possible life you could ever experience...
 - Then add to that all the good things that every other human being on earth might desire which you didn't even consider...
 - And then take the good things that every person who has ever lived in all of human history might desire...put all that together
 - And you still haven't even begun to imagine how wonderful the Kingdom is going to be...that is your future!
- That's what Israel could have enjoyed in the day Jesus came to them offering them this feast, but they were like those guests in this parable
 - They were indifferent to Jesus' offer, just going about their day, trying to make their way in this world and willing to forfeit a place in the next
 - Now that seems like a ridiculous trade, doesn't it? But there is a reasonable explanation for their strange behavior

- Just look at what *did* get their attention instead of Jesus' invitation...their businesses and farms
 - In other words, they had their eyes on this world rather than on the next
 - They were absorbed in how to keep their businesses afloat, how to find enough labor to harvest their crop
 - They had the same worries and concerns mankind has always confronted since the dawn of time
 - And because they were busy trying to make *this* world Heaven, they missed the opportunity to receive the true Heaven
 - That's why the same people who would never think to turn down a wedding feast did turn down an offer to join the Kingdom feast
 - They knew from experience how great a wedding feast was, so naturally they were eager to accept that kind of invitation
 - But Israel had no faith and understanding of the coming Kingdom, so Jesus' offer didn't seem worth the trouble to accept
 - So they chose what they knew over what they didn't...they chose their regular lives, their businesses and farms over Kingdom life
 - And they chose the religious system the Pharisees gave them over the freedom Jesus offered them
 - They turned down the freedom of grace and the joy of the Kingdom that came by faith
 - And like guests refusing to attend a lavish wedding...it was a crazy, foolish choice
- But people often make crazy choices when we take our eyes off our eternal future and when we don't take time to understand what the Bible says is ours
 - When we stop living with eyes for eternity and let this world drive our thinking, we will always choose things we see over things of faith
 - That's why the Bible defines faith as having a confidence in things unseen
 - And knowing what the Kingdom will be like and what it holds for us is the key to living for that world instead of this one

- When we live for things here and now, the things we see, we're living against our faith
- But when we live with faith, we live for the things we can't see, for the things we know we have waiting in the Kingdom
 - Obviously, we're all facing uncertain times right now
 - Two months ago life was business as usual, and today it's as if we're living through a Hollywood disaster movie
 - People are confined to homes, worried about their jobs and business and watching their retirement funds shrink
 - To say nothing of the worry over spreading disease and death
 - And even after this crisis ends, as we hope it will soon, we wonder what will our world look like when it's over?
 - Consequently, many of our family and friends are fearful about the future...and perhaps you are too
 - But if you're dwelling on these concerns, you've got your eyes in the wrong place...set your eyes on eternity
 - You're at risk of missing what God is doing in this time, of passing by something eternal because you're looking down instead of up
- Paul says it this way

Col. 3:1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Col. 3:2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Col. 3:3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Col. 3:4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

- Paul says set your mind above because your life is hidden in Christ, and I love that line
 - The Lord has prepared a future life for us that we can't see right now, and in fact, we can't even imagine it
 - It's hidden from our view until we leave this world, yet because of our faith in Christ, we know it's assured and coming soon

- So we keep our minds focused on that life, not on this life...
 - Don't be like that generation of Israel that was so weighed down by this world that they missed the next
 - And though no one predicted this particular crisis, we do know that the Bible has told us to be ready for hard times near the end,
 - So things like this are not a surprise, nor do they suggest that God has lost control or that we're forgotten
 - Remember Jesus provoked the religious leaders knowing it would bring about His own death, because that was a good outcome for the world
- Likewise, we know the Lord is moving a plan forward through these events, and that plan is taking us to the Kingdom
 - So we've all read about martyrs and saints persevering in their faith during difficult times
 - We admire them for their witness and perhaps we secretly wonder if we could have done the same for Jesus
 - Well perhaps now is our time to shine in darkness, to be the light of the world for Jesus
 - Just keep your eyes on your life hidden in Christ and as Paul says in Ephesians 5:16, make the most of your time, because the days are evil
- Now back to the parable, we still have that one group at the end that kills the slaves sent with the invitation, and we know who Jesus is speaking about
 - Again Jesus is describing the religious leaders who opposed Jesus
 - These men did more than overlook the Kingdom like the rest of Israel...they actively opposed it
 - By doing so, they showed themselves to be truly evil men, men in the grip of Satan and under his control
 - How ironic that the most outwardly religious men of Jesus' day were actually the farthest from God
 - So Jesus finishes the parable explaining how the Lord will respond to both groups

Matt. 22:7 "But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire.

Matt. 22:8 "Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.'

Matt. 22:9 'Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.'

Matt. 22:10 "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.

- The king was so enraged at the response of his subjects, that he sent armies to destroy the murderers and to set the city afire
 - The Lord fulfilled this prophecy in Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Lord sent the Romans to take the city and destroy it as Daniel foretold
 - The Romans didn't just put an end to the temple and scatter Israel out of her city, they also put an end to Pharisaic Judaism
 - The Pharisees and Sadducees lost their power base and never returned to power again, just as Jesus foretold here
 - Meanwhile, in the parable the king says there must still be a wedding celebration, so it's time to look for new guests
 - Again, the king sends his slaves out, but they can't go to the city again because it's been burned to the ground
 - So instead they go into the highways looking for those who lived outside the city
 - They find as many as they could and invite them to be part of this tremendous feast, the invitation of a lifetime
 - People who lived outside the protection of cities in that day were the lowest groups of society, generally outlaws and destitute
 - So imagine what a ragtag group that must have been!
 - This is not an "A" list of guests, and they weren't even the "B" list
 - Some weren't even good, Jesus says, meaning criminals and vagrants attended the wedding
 - Of course, this ragtag group represents none other than us, the Gentile church

- We were not the original invitees to this feast...the intended guests were the Jewish people, the citizens of the city, Jerusalem
- We are those outside the city, but since the Jewish nation rejected Jesus, the invitation to the wedding came to us
- So now we are those destined to fill the wedding hall, and one day we will enjoy the banquet that Jesus promises us
- In Revelation 19, we can read about that future moment when Jesus returns to rule the earth and the feast to open the Kingdom takes place

Rev. 19:6 Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

Rev. 19:7 "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

Rev. 19:8 It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Rev. 19:9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

- As Jesus descends from Heaven to earth and sets up His Kingdom, notice there will be a marriage supper of the Lamb, a banquet
 - And collectively, we are the Bride, dressed in our wedding clothes, fine linen bright and clean
 - We are the ones who enjoy this great privilege by God's grace, which He made available to us in light of Israel's earlier rejection
- Because God is just and true to His word, Israel will still be represented in the Kingdom
 - But the generation that saw Jesus in this day will be largely missing from that moment
 - Because they were too busy with their world to consider the next
- Jesus ends the parable by pointing out that those who are not properly prepared for this moment will miss it when it comes

Matt. 22:11 "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes,

Matt. 22:12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless.

Matt. 22:13 "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.'

Matt. 22:14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

- The parable ends with a curious moment, as the king discovers someone at the wedding banquet without proper attire
 - In that time, daily clothing was simple and typically dirty and often worn or torn
 - So clothing for a formal occasion was distinguished from daily clothing by being clean and in good repair
 - Remember, these guests came from the highways, so they all would have needed new clothing to attend this wedding
 - Apparently, the king went the extra step of providing new, clean clothes to all he invited so that everyone looked appropriate
- But this man has shown up wearing his daily dirty working clothes, which means he never accepted the invitation when it was offered
 - He decided to join the party on his own, and since he didn't accept the king's invitation, he didn't receive new garments
 - To be without proper dress was a sign of disrespect for the king and his son, the groom
- So the king asks him how he would dare to come in this way, but the man is speechless during the confrontation being without excuse
 - Then the king has this man bound like a criminal, and thrown into outer darkness
 - Now in terms of the parable, the outer darkness would simply mean into the night
 - But we know the parable is speaking of a literal place that is much, much worse
 - As we will study in a later chapter of Matthew, this is a euphemism for eternal punishment

- Which leads us to the final question...why did this man receive such harsh treatment merely for a fashion *faux pax*?
 - Remember back in Revelation 19 we read how the Bride of Jesus had been given fine, clean white clothing to wear?
 - That clean clothing pictures the righteousness of the saints, given to the Bride by the Groom
 - In Galatians, Paul says it this way:

Gal. 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Gal. 3:27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

- To place your faith in Jesus Christ means to have clothed yourself with the righteousness of Jesus
 - That's literally what happens for every person who puts their faith in Jesus, we are wrapped in His righteousness
 - Because we have none of our own...without Jesus' righteousness, we are a dirty, soiled lot of ragtag criminals
- So if we try to show up at the Kingdom wedding feast as we are without Jesus, we will not stand a minute
 - We too would be thrown out, bound as the criminals we are
 - And we will enter eternal punishment for our sins
 - But by placing faith in Jesus, we are clothed in His righteousness, and we will enjoy the feast with Him
- Perhaps you are one of those who always assumed that when you die and you face Jesus, you will talk your way past His judgment and into Heaven
 - Maybe you've joked about it, or maybe you haven't thought much about it
 - Perhaps you just assume it will all work out in the end
 - Let me remind you that no one will judge Jesus, for He will judge everyone
 - And if you think you'll have something to say to Jesus in your defense, then you greatly underestimate the severity of that coming moment

- Like the man in this parable, you will stand before Jesus speechless on that day
 - For you will be in no position to dispute the facts and you will be without excuse for your lifetime of sin
 - Our sin is self-evident before a holy and just, all knowing God
 - Which is exactly why He made His own Son to take on flesh, becoming a man so He can bear your sin on the cross, standing in your place
- Easter is only a few weeks away, and on that day we will celebrate that great sacrifice Jesus made for sinners like me and you
 - But you don't have to wait for Easter to come to know Jesus and receive the free gift of salvation that He offers you by His grace
 - You can do that right now, because you don't want to miss the feast that is coming and the Kingdom that follows