**GOD’S KINGDOM PARTY**

**(Matthew 22:1-14)**

 By and large, most people like a good party—a birthday party, a watch party, a Super Bowl party, a class party, an office party. We also like dinners, banquets, and feasts. If you were to roll all those into one, that is what you would get when the Jews of the NT celebrated a wedding. They were large, raucous affairs lasting three to seven days. The wine flowed freely; there was dancing, eating, and celebrating.

 Back in February, my wife and I attended my nephew’s wedding which was in North OKC, and then we went to the wedding reception that was held in downtown OKC at the top of the Chase Tower, the 34th floor, which is also known as the Petroleum Club. This wasn’t a Jewish wedding, but there was a lot of celebrating going on—eating, drinking, dancing, and visiting. It was a party—a big one, an expensive one, and a memorable one.

 As I read the NT, it occurs to me that God likes parties. Last week, I referenced what we call the parable of the prodigal son. I said the story isn’t so much about the two sons as it is a story about the father who represents God. When his younger son comes home, the father throws a party that included music, dancing and eating. They were celebrating because his son who was dead is now alive; his son who was lost is now found.

 There are numerous metaphors for the Kingdom of God in the NT. Some are **agricultural metaphors.** The Kingdom is portrayed as a sower going out to sow seed or a field of wheat mixed with weeds. Some are **domestic metaphors** in which the Kingdom is pictured as a cook baking bread and mixing in some yeast. Some are **monetary metaphors** wherein the kingdom is compared to a hidden treasure or a priceless pearl.

 In today’s passage, the Kingdom is likened to a wedding feast—a party. Look at the story—Matthew 22:1-14. We are going to compare the party in this story to the spiritual party of God’s Kingdom. We are going to note something God has done, something God is doing, and something God will do.

1. **IN HIS JOY, GOD HAS MADE PREPARATION FOR THE PARTY.**

 Scripture tells us that God has a Son who is likened to a Groom. The Groom’s Bride is said to be the Church. Jesus paid the Bride price to win the honor of marrying His Bride. The price was His suffering, the shedding of His blood, and His death. Scripture affirms that we have been bought with a price. When Jesus comes back, He will wed His Bride.

 In Revelation 19, just before Jesus is shown coming back as the conquering King, we find these words sung by a heavenly throng:

“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
    the Almighty reigns.
**7**Let us rejoice and exult
    and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
    and his Bride has made herself ready;
**8**it was granted her to clothe herself
    with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

 In the next verse, John adds, “And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God.’”

 God has truly declared that there will be a marriage supper of the Lamb, that is, a Wedding Feast. It will be a Feast to end all feasts, a party to end all parties. It will make my nephew’s wedding reception look like a little girl’s pretend tea party. It will be a bash and a blowout like we have never before seen.

 When you prepare a party, it takes time. If you are hosting a birthday party, you have to clean the house, buy and put up the decorations, blow up the balloons, make the food, buy the cake, and arrange the candles. That takes time. That takes preparation. If you are doing it for your child or your grandchild, it is a labor of love and a source of joy.

 Out of love for His Son, and in His great joy, God has made preparation for a great wedding feast in Jesus’ honor.

 Have you ever stopped to think that God is a joyous God? God is happy. Many make the mistake of envisioning God as being grumpy, stern, harsh, impassionate, and wearing a perpetual frown. That is not our God. Our God is joyous, cheerful, happy. We serve a smiling God.

 God, definitely, is the life of the party because without Him, there is no life, and there is no party.

 If you need more biblical proof that our God is a joyful God, it is found right here in Matthew, and it is found in another story that Jesus told. He told it later in the same day as He told the story we are looking at this morning. It is found in Matthew 25. Look at v. 21 and v. 23.

 When I moved to Stillwater, my barber was a member of the church I pastored. He was called Whisperin’ Richard. He got that name because he talked in barely over a whisper. I never asked him why he spoke in such a low tone. Maybe he did that because it forced you to pay attention. Richard was a repository of wisdom, stories, and local knowledge. If you failed to pay attention, you just must might miss something important, something you would like to pass on.

 Richard’s place of business was the Varsity Barber Shop just around the corner from Hideaway Pizza (the best pizza place in Oklahoma) and right across from the Fire Station that sat on the southeast corner of the campus.

 While he was my barber, Richard surpassed having cut hair for well-over 100 semesters at his shop on the corner of the OSU campus. He cut the hair of athletes. He cut the hair of coaches. He and Eddie Sutton were best of friends and had been friends since their student days at OSU.

 I have since heard this statement many times from many sources, but the first time I heard it was from Richard Danel. As I was sitting in his barber chair, he probably punched me in the arm. He did that a lot. I never asked him why he did that, but again, he probably did that to get my attention. He leaned down closer to my ear, and in his whispering voice he said, “If mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.”

 Have you heard that? Have you lived that?

 Years later, I was talking with another longtime resident of Stillwater who was a husband, father, and grandfather. He said to me, “When I’m not happy, nobody cares.”

 Fellas, haven’t you found that to be true? When you aren’t happy, nothing changes at home; nothing changes at work; no one tries to fix your feelings. But when mama ain’t happy, a sudden chill descends upon the entire household.

 Whisperin’ Richard taught me that.

 In his treatment of this story, Robert Farrar Capon wrote, “God wills above all to celebrate . . . because when God is happy, everybody should be happy.” Because God is happy, everybody can be happy.

 Draw close to God. His joy is contagious, far more contagious than this COVID-19. Draw close to Him, He will infect us with His joy and will use us to carry that joy.

1. **IN HIS GRACE, GOD IS SENDING INVITATIONS TO THE PARTY.**

In the ancient world, when a wedding feast was to be had, the host would send out an initial invitation. It was like a save-the-date card. You would have a general idea of when the party would take place. Then, once all the preparations had been made, and the feast was to commence, the host would send out his servants to give you an immediate invitation. The invitees would drop whatever they were doing, and they would head to the host’s home which was usually the location of the party.

 In the story Jesus told, the guest list had already been made, the initial invitation had already been sent, and now that the preparation was complete, the servants of the King go out and deliver the news, “It is time to come.” Look at the unexpected response of the invitees at the end of v. 3: “But they would not come.”

 This was odd. Everyone the King had invited stood Him up. The King thinks, “Maybe they just don’t understand what they are passing up;” so, He sends out yet another invitation. Look at v. 4.

 The original invitees let life intervene. One had some chores to do at his farm. Another had to take care of some business. And then, in a strange twist, some of the invitees got violent; they mistreated, and even killed some of the servants who had just shared with them the good news that it was time to join the party.

 Capon wrote, “Score a sad point, therefore for the unhappy truth that the world is full of fools who won’t believe a good thing when they hear it.”

 That is why when you attempt to share the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, that some will turn a deaf ear, some will shew you away, and in some places of our world, some will pass laws against what you are doing, arrest you, persecute you, and kill you.

 The King’s response in v. 7 seems over the top and an overreaction. The Jewish person reading this account after A.D. 70 would see this as a clever way of Jesus prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem because that is exactly what happened. The city of Jerusalem was totally destroyed; the temple was razed, and countless people lost their lives.

 We see the grace of the King in v. 8 and following. The Father didn’t cancel the party. He just revised the guest list. Again, I like the way Capon put it: “Jesus now has the King proceed to what for him is plan B, but for God what has been plan A all along.”

 Look at v. 10. The Kingdom party is not just for good people. It is for all people, and that includes those whom we think are bad people.

 The beautiful people, the A-listers, the stars, the well-connected passed up the King’s gracious invitation; so, the King filled his banquet hall with what Capon called “the working poor, the walking wounded, the bag ladies, the prostitutes, and the derelicts drinking Muscatel in doorways.” Why were they there enjoying the feast? They were there because they said “yes” to the King’s gracious invitation.

 Now, the Devil is going to invite you to a party, too. He is going to make all kinds of promises. Know this, while the party might start off well and while you might think you are having a good time, he’s going to stiff you with the bill. It will end with you having the worst hangover you ever had, one that won’t go away, and neither will the regret.

 Say *no* to the Devil. Say *no* to the world. Say *yes* do Jesus.

 We have looked at preparation and invitations. Let me say a word about examination.

1. **IN HIS JUSTICE, GOD WILL CONDUCT AN EXAMINIMATION OF THE**

 **PARTIERS.**

 Look at vv. 11-14. Upon a first reading you may wonder, why would this attender be faulted with not having the proper attire? He didn’t get up that morning with the intention of going to a wedding, and besides, he was practically dragged there. Then, you wonder, “How did anyone else just happen to have wedding clothes with them when they were ushered in to the wedding hall?”

 The 4th Century theologian Augustine explained that it was the responsibility of the host to provide each guest an appropriate, wedding garment. The fault of the man who was kicked out of the feast was that he refused to accept what was freely offered to him.

 As Christians, we believe that we are outfitted with the robes of Christ’s righteousness. That and that alone is what makes us fit for the Kingdom of God.

 God loves you, and because He loves you, He will accept you as you are. But God loves you too much to let you stay as you are. He wants you to change. Because He wants you to change, He says, “Here is My Son, Jesus. Put Him on. Try Him on for size. See how He feels. Amazingly, whenever someone puts on Jesus, He fits just right, and He grows as we grow. As far as God is concerned, Jesus is never out of style and He never wears out.

 The story literally teaches that for those who will not receive Jesus, there is hell to pay. Don’t pay that price when Jesus has paid the price for you to know the joy and the abundance of His Kingdom.

 The passage ends with a statement upon which Jesus chose not to elaborate, so neither will I. The first part is easy enough, “For many are called.” The gospel call goes out wherever the gospel is preached, and it is Jesus’ will that it goes throughout the world. People are called to accept Jesus, but not everyone does.

 Jesus says, “few are chosen.” Does that mean that those who accept the call are deemed the chosen? Or does that mean that only those who chosen will accept the call? Jesus didn’t say; so, I’ll let you wrestle with that yourself.

 In his book, *The Kingdom of God Is a Party*, Tony Campolo told of an experience he had late one night in Hawaii. I am simply going to read what he wrote:

 Up a side street I found a little place that was still open. I went in, took a seat on one of the stools at the counter, and waited to be served. This was one of those sleazy places that deserves the name, “greasy spoon.”

 . . . The fat guy behind the counter came over and asked me, “What d’ya want?”

 I said I wanted a cup of coffee and a donut . . .

 As I sat there munching on my donut and sipping my coffee at 3:30 in the morning, the door of the diner suddenly swung open and, to my discomfort, in marched eight or nine provocative and boisterous prostitutes.

 It was a small place, and they sat on either side of me. Their talk was loud and crude. I felt completely out of place and was just about to make my getaway when I overheard the woman beside me say, “Tomorrow’s my birthday. I’m going to be 39.”

 Her “friend” responded in a nasty tone, “So what do you want from me? A birthday party? What do you want? Ya want me to get you a cake and sing ‘Happy Birthday’?”

 “Come on,” said the woman sitting next to me. “Why do you have to be so mean? I was just telling you, that’s all . . . I mean, why should you give me a birthday party? I’ve never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?”

 When I heard that, I made a decision. I sat and waited until the women had left. Then I called over the fat guy behind the counter, and I asked him, “Do they come in here every night?”

 “Yeah!” he answered.

 “The one right next to me, does she come here every night?”

 “Yeah!” he said. “That’s Agnes. Yeah, she comes in here every night. Why d’ya wanta know?”

 “Because I heard her say that tomorrow is her birthday. What do you say you and I do something about that? What do you think about us throwing a birthday party for her—right here—tomorrow night?”

 A cute smile slowly crossed his chubby cheeks, and he answered with measured delight, “That's great! I like it! That’s a great idea!” Calling to his wife, who did the cooking in the back room, he shouted, “Hey! Come out here! This guy’s got a great idea. Tomorrow’s Agnes's birthday. This guy wants us to go in with him and throw a birthday party for her—right here—tomorrow night!”

 His wife came out of the back room all bright and smiley. She said, “That's wonderful! You know Agnes is one of those people who is really nice and kind, and nobody does anything nice and kind for her.”

 “Look,” I told them, “if it’s okay with you, I’ll get back here tomorrow morning about 2:30 and decorate the place. I’ll even get a birthday cake!”

 “No way,” said Harry (that was his name). “The birthday cake’s my thing. I’ll make the cake.”

 At 2:30 the next morning, I was back at the diner. I had picked up some crepe-paper decorations at the store and had made a sign out of big pieces of cardboard that read, “Happy Birthday, Agnes!” I decorated the diner from one end to the other. I had that diner looking good.

 [Harry and his wife] must have gotten the word out on the street, because by 3:15 every prostitute in Honolulu was in the place. It was wall-to-wall prostitutes and me!

 At 3:30 on the dot, the door of the diner swung open, and in came Agnes and her friend. I had everybody ready (after all, I was kind of the M.C. of the affair) and when they came in, we all screamed, “Happy birthday!”

 Never have I seen a person so flabbergasted, so stunned, so shaken. Her mouth fell open. Her legs seemed to buckle a bit. Her friend grabbed her arm to steady her. As she was led to sit on one of the stools along the counter, we all sang “Happy Birthday” to her. As we came to the end of [the song] her eyes moistened. Then, when the birthday cake with all the candles on it was carried out, she lost it and just openly cried.

 Harry gruffly mumbled, “Blow out the candles, Agnes! Come on! Blow out the candles! If you don’t blow out the candles, I’m gonna hafta blow out the candles.” And, after an endless few seconds, he did. Then he handed her a knife and told her, “Cut the cake, Agnes. Yo, Agnes, we all want some cake.”

 Agnes looked down at the cake. Then without taking her eyes off it, she slowly and softly said, “Look, Harry, is it all right with you if I, I mean is it okay if I kind of, what I want to ask you is, is it O.K. if I keep the cake a little while? I mean, is it all right if we don’t eat it right away?”

 Harry shrugged and answered, “Sure! It’s O.K. If you want to keep the cake, keep the cake. Take it home, if you want to.”

 “Can I?” she asked. Then, looking at me, she said, “I live just down the street a couple of doors. I want to take the cake home, okay? I’ll be right back. Honest!”

 She got off the stool, picked up the cake, and carrying it like it was the Holy Grail, walked slowly toward the door. As we all just stood there motionless, she left.

 When the door closed, there was a stunned silence in the place. Not knowing what else to do, I broke the silence by saying, “What do you say we pray?”

 Looking back on it now, it seems more than strange for a sociologist to be leading a prayer meeting with a bunch of prostitutes in a diner in Honolulu at 3:30 in the morning. But then it just felt like the right thing to do. I prayed for Agnes. I prayed for her salvation. I prayed that her life would be changed and that God would be good to her.

 When I finished, Harry leaned over the counter and with a trace of hostility in his voice, he said, “Hey! You never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to?” In one of those moments when just the right words came, I answered, “I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning.”

 Harry waited a moment and then almost sneered as he answered, “No you don’t. There’s no church like that. If there was, I’d join it. I’d join a church like that!”

 Wouldn’t we all? Wouldn’t we all like to join a church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning?

 Well, that’s the kind of church that Jesus came to create!

 Jesus is coming back. His Father is going to throw Him a wedding party, and God is inviting you to be there, not as a guest, but as the Bride. That means the party is for you, too. Don’t miss out on the party. Come to Christ, today. If you have already done that, let God send you out as His servant to invite others to come to the party.