

A Wedding Invitation

Weddings are joyful occasions. They are a celebration of love, romance, hope, and expectancy. We receive an invitation to a wedding and we look forward to helping the couple celebrate through our attendance. Many times, we are invited to attend weddings of family members or friends whom we have known for some time. We may have watched one or the other of the couple grow from childhood to adulthood and now we get to wish them well as they begin a new and exciting chapter of their life.

The union of a man and a woman has existed since shortly after the creation. God looked upon the newly created earth and observed: **“It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18 NASB)**

All other created beings were created out of the ground with the exception of woman. She was created out of the man (his rib). Once she was created, God pronounced the union between man and woman as He designed it.

For this reason, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24 NASB)

The pattern of this union is found throughout the Bible. God looks for a similar union with His creation. Over and over in the Bible, we see when God’s children turned away from Him they are compared to those guilty of marital infidelity. In Jeremiah the third chapter, God tells Jeremiah how both Israel and Judah had committed adultery by turning away from God.

God says, “If a husband divorces his wife and she goes from him and belongs to another man, will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted? But you are a harlot with many lovers; yet you turn to Me,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 3:1 NASB)

The picture of infidelity is shown. The wife leaves the husband for another man and then wants to return. The same analogy is continued when showing that the northern kingdom (Israel) had, through pursuing idols, played the part of a harlot and paid the price. Now, Judah is following the same path.

Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, “Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. I thought, ‘After she has done all these things, she will return to Me’; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 3:6-10 NASB)

We certainly see, from these and other passages, the relationship between God and his creation is depicted as a marriage relationship.

The image of a wedding feast is used by Jesus to present the joyous occasion of Jesus returning for His church in Revelation the 19th chapter.

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.” 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.

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.” (Revelation 19:7-9 NASB)

What a blessing it will be to be invited and to attend that wedding feast. In our Litany of Praise, this morning, Isaiah was looking toward this same feast. Only the best food and wine will be served.

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. (Isaiah 25:6 NASB)

With the image of a wedding celebration that marks our spiritual marriage to God, let's look at this wedding feast as Jesus pictures it in Matthew the 22nd chapter. Jesus gives another perspective.

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. (Matthew 22:1-2 NASB)

This is clearly speaking of God extending an invitation to the celebration of the wedding of Jesus. Jesus is frequently referred to as the king's son.

And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. 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." (Matthew 22:3-4 NASB)

The invited guest had been invited in advance and then notified when the feast was ready, but at that time these guests persistently refuse. The king not only graciously repeats his invitation but describes the feast's greatness in order to provide an incentive to attend it. Large wedding feasts went on for days in the ancient times. However, those invited stay away for mundane and selfish reasons. They slight the king; whose invitation is both an honor and a command.

But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. (Matthew 22:5-7 NASB)

The violent reaction and mistreatment of the king's slaves seems to parallel the previous parable about the vineyards (Matthew 21:38-41). The king retaliates against those who have not only refused the invitation but dealt violently with the king's representatives.

Now, the king extends the invitation to the wedding feast to those who were not considered as worthy when the first invitations were sent. It is a broad appeal.

Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find *there*, invite to the wedding feast." 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 NASB)

Obviously, the situation has gone beyond that at normal wedding feast. Those who were invited refused and even violently acted against the king. So, the king sends his servant to the forks of the roads, where they would find many people. They extend the king's invitation to all and succeed in drawing in all kinds of people, "both good and bad." They depended on their works of the Law for their salvation.

The appeal of the gospel is that our "good works" are not the basis for our salvation. That is the promise of the Messiah, the Messiah saves people from their sins.

“But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. 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.’ (Matthew 22:11-13 NASB)

Our invitation is not based on our being good or bad, there is an appropriate attire for this wedding feast. The guest without a special garment, though invited, did not prepare acceptably for the feast. His speechlessness proves he knows he is guilty, even though the king gently calls him "friend". Thus, though the invitation is very broad, it does not follow that all who respond positively actually remain for the banquet. Some are cast out.

In His sermon on the mount, Jesus told the crowd some will be excluded from heaven.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ (Matthew 7:21-23 NASB)

Within the passage from the parable, we may ask ourselves how are we to be dressed so that we are acceptable. I offer this suggestion found in Galatians the 3rd chapter.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:26-29 NASB)

For us to be received not be rejected at this wedding feast, we need to be clothed in Jesus the Christ.

The children of Israel thought that their special relationship with God ensured an everlasting fellowship. Their slot at the wedding feast was secured based on their status. Yet. Jesus tells them their rejection would cost them.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! (Matthew 23:37-38 NASB)

We all have been invited to the wedding feast. God has assured us that we will only be served the best of everything. Our place is not based on our works. We are only required to be clothed in Christ.