

Wedding Avoiders & Crashers (22:1-14)

Turn with me, if you have a bible, to **Matthew 22**. And as you're getting there, I've got a question for you: what's the **best wedding you've ever attended?** We are now rapidly approaching—if not already in—wedding season. Some of us have approximately fourteen of them to be at over the summer. So some of you might say “the one I don't have to go to: that's the best wedding.” But I want you to think about the ones you *have* been to: what was the *best*, most *enjoyable* one? For me, it was the wedding of a good friend of mine. He married into a pretty wealthy family. Like Fortune 500-level wealthy. And since the bride's family generally pays for the wedding, this wedding was like nothing I've ever seen.

They didn't just have **food, they had foods**. You got to pick the *genre* of food you wanted. Southern Comfort food. Tex Mex. Asian Fusion. You could go to different parts of the banquet hall, and get different *categories* of food. It was like a fancy food court, except it was all free. There was a **bartender** that they had flown in from California because the family thought he was really talented. They *flew in* a bartender. I didn't even know you could *do* that. And I gotta say, they were correct in their decision to fly him in. Because he made an Old Fashioned that was pretty close to perfect. For **dessert**, there was this ornate-looking *trough* that ran across one side of the room—about thirty feet long. And it had what appeared to be hundreds of gourmet cake pops “planted” in it. And they were all planted in *real grass*. They had *real grass* for *fake candy plants*! It was the most Willy Wonka thing I've ever seen.

This wedding was an **absolutely unforgettable** experience. It was amazing in every way. To the point that their wedding was over a *decade* ago, and still, occasionally, I will catch myself *daydreaming* about that wedding. I find myself wishing I could be back at *that* wedding once again. No offense to you if I'm coming to your wedding this summer—I'm sure your wedding will be amazing; but I don't know that you're going to be able to *top* that wedding. And I'm not even sure you should *try*. It was absolutely incredible experience.

But **sometimes, too**, I think about *that* wedding when I read **in the Scriptures**, repeatedly, that **eternity will be something like a wedding banquet**. And something you should know about wedding banquets back in the day is that they were *massive* celebrations. Most weddings actually spanned across multiple *days*, often an entire *week*: a full *week* of eating and drinking and dancing and celebrating. Weddings were a *big deal* in their culture—even more than in ours. Some cultures today still *do* weddings like this. And **that is the imagery God uses** to describe what eternity with him will be like. And **this morning, we're going to look at one of those very passages. A place in the**

Scriptures where Jesus compares the new heavens and new earth to a massive wedding feast. So as we talk through it, I want you to have *that picture* in your head. Make sense?

Okay. So **just as recap**, Jesus and his disciples have been at the temple, where Jesus has been teaching, as well as engaging in some direct *confrontation* with the temple *establishment*: the chief priests, elders, and the teachers of the law. They do not like what Jesus is saying and doing as of late, and *Jesus* does not like what *they've* made out of the temple and people's faith. So the feeling is somewhat mutual. But **all of that sets the stage** for Jesus to tell them yet *another* parable. *This* one is about a *king* who invites people to a wedding, and their responses to it. So look with me in Matthew 22, beginning in v. 1:

1 Jesus spoke to them again in parables ("them" being the religious leaders), **saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.**

Okay, so here's **the way it would work** in the ancient world. When your son was engaged to be married, you would send out a formal wedding announcement telling everyone about the engagement, and letting them know that a wedding was forthcoming. But because weddings were such a massive thing to prepare for, you wouldn't yet know exactly *when* the wedding would be. **So the first invitation was kind of like a "save the date," but without the date.** It would let people know that a wedding was going to happen in the near future, and that another invitation was coming.

We're also told that this **isn't just any wedding**; it's a wedding for the *king's* son. *All* weddings were a big deal in the ancient world, but *this* one would've been on another level. I mean just think about it. The king has nearly *unlimited* resources at his disposal. He and the family are going to spare no expense in the celebration they're about to put on. I would imagine something like the wedding I mentioned just a few minutes ago, except exponentially bigger and better. This wedding is likely going to encompass the entire *city*. A town's whole population, eating and drinking and celebrating for an entire week. *Massive ordeal*.

If you *lived* in the city, **you would not want to miss** this wedding. And because it was a wedding for the *king's* son, it would've been unthinkable to turn down the invitation. Missing the wedding would come across as a direct snub to the king and the king's family. Plus, what legitimate excuses could you even have? **"I've got to work."** **But the entire city has shut down for the wedding—who exactly are you buying from selling to?**

“Well I’ve got better things to do.” *It’s a wedding put on by the wealthiest family in town and they’ve invited you—no offense, but I guarantee you do not have better things to do.* There aren’t many legitimate reasons to miss a celebration like this.

Which is why what we read in v. 3 **seems so baffling**. It says the king sent out his representatives to tell people the party was ready, “...but [people] *refused* to come.” A similar parable in the gospel of Luke says they actually made various excuses for *why* they couldn’t come. *One person said I’ve bought a field and have to go see it. Another one said I bought some oxen and have to go try them out. Another said I’ve just gotten married, so I can’t be there.*¹ Now you should know that **each of these excuses would have been obviously bogus in the ancient world: no one would buy a field without seeing it first. No one would buy oxen without knowing if they were any good. And even getting married—okay, bring your wife to the party! She’s gonna love it! Free date night!** The point is that the people invited to the party are finding reason after superficial reason to excuse themselves from attending.

So **then**, v. 4:

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.’

So *this* time, the king goes into **sales pitch mode**. He even tries to entice them with details on the *menu*: “hey, did I mention we’re serving *steak*? Like the whole cow? Did I mention how *fat* the cows are? And I don’t know what *ox* tastes like, but I’d bet it’s pretty good. The king says, “here’s what you’re missing out on—you *sure* you don’t want to come enjoy it all with us?” (And just as a side note here: I’d just like to point out here that *evidently to Jesus himself, a party is not a party unless it involves steak. I think that’s a good operating principle, and I think we should all be obedient to Jesus in that area of our life. Just saying. If he really is Lord, we need to listen to him here.* But then, look at the response to this *second* attempt by the king, v. 5:

5 “But they *paid no attention* and went off—one to his field, another to his *business*.

That **phrase “they paid no attention”** could be more *literally* translated, “they did not *care*.”² **They were completely disinterested in the invitation.** So listen: *here, Jesus shows us even more about the heart posture of these invited guests. It’s not just that*

¹ See Luke 14:16-24

² See Craig Blomberg’s *Matthew*, p. 327.

they've got a lot going on and *can't* be there; it's that they don't *want* to be there. **They could not care less about the king, or his son, or the wedding they've been invited to.** They turn up their noses at all of it. And *some* of them even go a step further than that—look at v. 6:

6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.

What an **absolutely bizarre** response to receiving a wedding invitation: *murdering* the people delivering the invitation?? What type of person does that? **But this is also very reminiscent** of the parable Jesus told right *before* this one, where a landowner kept sending representatives to his vineyard, and the tenants of his vineyard kept beating and killing them as a result. Last week, we talked about how that is actually a *nod* to the Old Testament *prophets*—people God sent to the nation of Israel to call them to repentance. **And not only did Israel not *repent*; they often *turned on* the prophets *calling* them to repentance.** **The invitees don't want to come to the party, and they're evidently angry about being invited in the first place.**

So **as bizarre of a response as that is** in the context of the story, **it's bizarre because Jesus is trying to show these religious leaders something about themselves.** He's saying, 'do you see how *absurd* your posture is? **The God of the universe is inviting you to a celebration where everybody eats, everybody has a good time, and everybody gets forgiven and freed from their sin. And not only are you disinterested in showing up, you're *angry* that someone would invite you to such a thing. Such that you are silencing and eliminating the people I sent to invite you to it.'** This is the very *core* of the problem Jesus has with the religious leaders.

But because they've not only *rejected* his invitation, but now beaten and *killed* the people he sent to invite them—the **tone of the story now shifts**. Verse 7:

7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Now, I would guess that that response by the king probably makes at least **some of us a bit uncomfortable**, especially when we know that the king represents *God* in the story. But at the same time, we need to understand that anyone listening to the story would've thought it to be an entirely *logical* response. **In the ancient world, kings were expected to respond to *force* with *force*. They were even *more* expected to respond to *unwarranted force this way*.** Remember: he has just invited people to a wedding for his son where he is going to bankroll their partying for a *week*, and they have responded by *murdering* the

people he sent. Anyone hearing this part of the story wouldn't have been *shocked* at all at the king's response. They probably would've nodded in *affirmation*.

Plus, let's **not forget that this is a parable**. The whole thing is figurative. So the point *isn't* that God wants to murder someone or set anything on fire. The point is that he will respond *justly* to *injustice*. Especially injustice against those who represent *him*. He's issuing judgment on the depraved and unprompted, *murderous* posture of the people he invited to the party. That's the idea at work here. Verse 8:

8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not *deserve* to come. 9 So (notice this next part) *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, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

Okay, whatever you do: **do not miss how beautiful a picture of the heart of God this part of the story is**. People that thought they were too *good* for the party refused to come. But one thing you should know about God is that he is going to *have* his party. The celebration *is* going to happen, one way or another. So he sends out his representatives with instructions to invite *anyone* and *everyone*. Anybody who wants to come. Those on the street corners. All the various corners of society. He wants everybody who wants to come, there.

I love that it says the king invites **"the good as well as the bad."** *You, upstanding citizen who works really hard and has a difficult time ever letting loose: there's a week-long party happening and I want you to be there. You guys, robbing that person in the alleyway: stop robbing that person, and also come enjoy some Old Fashions. I flew in a bartender. Also, the drinks are free, so no need to rob people. // This is the type of king God is: a king who insists on having a party. And a king who wants everyone to be there, regardless of who they are or what they've done or what type of person they are. And this king is not going to let a handful of wedding avoiders stop the celebration of the century; it will happen just the same. His wedding venue will be full.*

Okay, so **for just a second here**, real personally, **I do need to ask you**: *is this how you see God?* Like when you picture God in your mind, does he *look* and *sound* like *this*? Is he the type of person who is *desperate* to celebrate, and wants as many people there to enjoy the celebration as possible? **Some of us have been sold a version of God who would never behave like this. In our minds, God doesn't even like parties in the first place, much less insist on throwing one. Can you see your vision of God doing something like this?** I would submit to you that if *not*, we may need to realign our vision

of God with what we find in the Scriptures. Jesus says some *difficult* things here in a second about the people invited to the wedding—but let’s not rush *past* and miss *this*. **God is a king who is throwing the party of the century, and he wants as many people there for it as possible. That’s who God is, according to the Scriptures.**

...And honestly, this parable would be **a lot easier to teach** if it ended there. But it *doesn’t* end there. Look with me at v. 11:

11 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ 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.’ 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Man that’s a rough ending to a story, is it not? I don’t think Disney is buying the rights to this one anytime soon. The king enters the party where he has invited anyone and everyone, and spots someone there without “wedding clothes on.” And in response, he has that person kicked out of the party, into the “darkness,” where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Which, everywhere else Jesus uses it, is a description of hell: eternity separated from God. That’s *intense*, right? So **what do we make of this part** of the story? Is God just a real stickler for the dress code? Is he just out here tricking people into attending a party so that he can then give them the boot for not wearing the right thing once they’re in? What in the *world* is this part of the parable about?

Well, at least in the context of the *parable*, it’s **difficult to know for sure** the dynamics at play. **Some biblical scholars** have noted that in a situation like *this* in the ancient world, a king would often *provide* wedding clothes for those who didn’t have the means to afford them. And if this man wasn’t *wearing* those clothes, that would mean he *refused* what he was offered. It *also* could be that the king actually *lowered* the expectations of a dress code to accommodate for the types of people who ended up attending. In *that* case, it would mean that this man *chose* to wear something deliberately insulting to the king and the nature of the party. Truthfully, it’s difficult to know *exactly* what the situation was that Jesus was imagining.

But **whatever the details** are, one thing *is* clear: **the man in the story has no explanation for why he isn’t dressed differently.** Did you see that? In the passage, Jesus says that the man was “speechless” when he was asked about it. In other words, he offers no *defense*, no reason for why he’s dressed the way he is. **If he wore the only thing he had, he could’ve said that. If he couldn’t afford anything better, he could’ve said**

that. If he didn't know what the dress code was, he could've said *that*. But instead, he says nothing at all. He seems to know exactly what the problem is; he was just hoping no one would notice, that it wouldn't matter. **He has arrived at the wedding, but he has tried to enter on his own terms.** He is attempting to enjoy all the *benefits* of the party, but without any of the expectations. And because of *that*, he gets the boot.

So, we might ask, **what is the significance** of this story **for our day** and age? We might put it like this. This is a parable about two different types of people. One we might call **wedding avoiders**, and another we might call **wedding crashers**. One type of person who will do everything they can to *avoid attending* the party, and another who *attends* the party, but on their own terms and for their own purposes. **I want us to talk about each of those types of people for a bit and see if we draw out some connections to how they show up today.** First, let's talk about...

Wedding Avoiders

Here's how I might **define** people in *this* category. **Wedding avoiders** are **people too disinterested and preoccupied to participate in God's kingdom.** They are people that the king *invites to the wedding, but who simply aren't interested in being there.* And in the story, they offer some **superficial reasons** for this. For one person it's *work*, another one has just made a big *purchase* he needs to tend to. As we mentioned, Luke actually has someone offer a *third* excuse: that he just got married.³ *Family*, in other words, is *his* reason for not attending the party.

And I **don't think it's any coincidence** that *today*, when I hear people talk about why they don't have time for kingdom-oriented things in their life, the reasons they often give are similar: **work, life, and family.** When I ask some people why they haven't **plugged into a local church**, they'll often say things like "**work** is just so busy; it takes so much out of me." Or "well, I'm only going to be here for a year or two before my job sends me somewhere else, so there's really no *use* in plugging into a church." When I hear people talk about why they **can't live on mission**, building relationships with their coworkers and neighbors and friends that don't know Jesus, they'll often say that *life* in general is just too busy for that sort of thing. When people have a hard time **prioritizing regular time with other followers of Jesus** in something like a LifeGroup, one of the more common reasons I hear given is that of *family*. They'll say things like, "well we just want to make sure we prioritize family time."

Now **those things**—work, life, family—to be clear, **are not bad things.** I would argue they're *good things*. But **when those things are used as ongoing reasons for not**

³ Luke 14:20

participating in God's kingdom, that becomes somewhat problematic. There are seasons where those types of things do *limit* how much of your energy and attention can be focused on kingdom things. For instance, quite a few people in our church have recently had a baby, or are about to have one. When you have a baby, that's going to eat up a lot of your time, attention and energy for a little while. That's very understandable. For some of us, there are seasons where our jobs are especially demanding—my parents, for instance, are accountants. Which means there are about four months out of every year, leading up to April 15, that they don't have a lot of extra bandwidth to go around. *That's* understandable. There are going to be seasons where there are *limitations* on your time, effort and attention.

But to me, **the concerning thing is** when we **perpetually** have some reason for non-participation in the kingdom. So when you're *young* and *single*, it's that you really want to use that time to travel or go do fun things with your friends. *Then*, when you're *married*, it's that you really want to focus on your relationship with your spouse. *Then*, when you first have young *kids*, it's that it's really important for your kids to stay on their *schedule*. *Then*, when your kids are *older*, it's that you want to make sure they have all the *extra-curricular opportunities* they can possibly have. And then when your kids are *out* of the house, you want to travel *again*. And then, when you *retire*, it's that you really want to use that time to *relax*. And **before you know it, it's the end of your life, and at every stage, you've excused yourself from active participation in the kingdom.**

And **remember** in the parable, **it wasn't that** these people really *wanted* to be at the party, and just were struggling to make it there. It was actually that they were *disinterested* in attending in the first place. Which led to them offering *excuse* after *excuse* as to *why* they wouldn't be there. I think that distinction is so important for us to realize. There are some of us in the room that have an earnest *desire* to more actively participate in kingdom things, and we're just struggling right now, in the season we're in, to do it. I don't think *that's* who Jesus is critiquing in the parable.

I think **he's critiquing** those of us who are **secretly kind of glad to have excuses**. Because if we were completely honest, we're **just not all that interested** in kingdom participation in the first place. We're just not all that *interested* in plugging into a local church. We're not all that *interested* in building relationships with people that don't know Jesus. We're not all that *interested* in sacrificing *any* family time to prioritize other followers of Jesus. If we were completely *transparent* about it, we'd just rather *not* do any of those things. **Which means the excuses we offer aren't so much legitimate reasons as they are cover for our general lack of desire. It's really that we just aren't all that interested in the party in the first place. That** is the posture of wedding avoiders.

But *then*, in the story, there are *also*...

Wedding Crashers

Here's how I would define **wedding crashers**. Wedding *crashers* are **people drawn to the benefits of the kingdom, but not the costs**. So remember the posture of the man at the end of the story: he was *at* the party. A party, evidently, sounded *great* to him. Presumably, he was having a great *time* at the party. **But—and here's the kicker—he insisted on being there on his own terms**. In his own way. He did not want to *adjust* anything about his own life in order to be there, not even his outfit. He didn't want to yield to any particular *expectations* the king had of him while he was there. He just wanted to enjoy the benefits of being at the party.

And these people exist in present day as well. There are **people I know** that are actually incredibly *drawn* to the *benefits* of life in God's kingdom. They *love* that they can show up here on Sunday and **hear songs** that encourage them and set their minds on Jesus. They *love* that they can **hear teachings** that help them *grow* in their understanding of Jesus. They *love* that they can **be a part of a community** that *welcomes* them, and *checks in* with them, and *sacrifices* for them, and *serves* them. And makes them feel *loved*. They are big fans of *all* of that. They'll **even talk regularly about how amazing** all of those things are, and how *thankful* they are for all of that.

But, they want all of that on their *own terms*. They want the ability to keep it all at arm's length. **They only want it insofar as they don't have to yield to any expectations of them while they're there**. "Jesus, I'd love to be there at the party...but if it's cool with you, I'm gonna do it the way *I* want to do it." "I **love how invested** other people are in *my* life, but don't ask me to adjust my daily rhythms to invest in *other* people's lives, that feels like it will be a little draining." "I **love how vulnerably** other people share in LifeGroup, but *I'm* not going to share—I'm just a very private person." "I **love** how *other* followers of Jesus are so consistently **building relationships with non-believers**, but *I'm* not going to do that—I'm too introverted for that."

A couple weeks ago, **Eric** talked about how *sometimes*, it's like we want a "kingdom, but without a king." **We'd love to experience the joys and benefits of the party Jesus throws, but we're not exactly big fans of the king throwing the party**. We don't love how *kingly* he thinks he is. We don't love how he walks around like he *owns* the place, almost like it's *his* party or something. I think that is precisely the type of person Jesus is addressing here at the end of the parable: **those who want to enjoy the benefits of**

the kingdom, but without the king—and anything he might ask of them along the way.

And listen: I'll acknowledge that this is a *tough sell*. In part, it's tough because most of us in the room probably grew up in *America*. We grew up hearing a lot about the individual *rights* we have. The *freedoms*. We are disciplined to believe we should have the *freedom* to do *what we want, when we want, how we want* to do it. *Endless* opportunity with *minimal* demands: to many people, that's the American way. And really, it *has* been since the very beginning. The Brits asked us to pay taxes and we responded by throwing their tea in the harbor. That's what *we* thought of their silly *demands*. So even *today*, it's almost like every time someone makes a demand on our time, effort, energy, or money, we can just see King George's face before our eyes. We think to ourselves, "I must start a revolution *against* this!" / **But listen: the kingdom of God operates differently than other kingdoms; even than the kingdom of America.**

And here's *what we often forget* (or maybe don't *realize* in the first place). Think with me about all those *benefits* that so many of us enjoy about the kingdom of God. Think about the *people who love us, care for us, help us* when we're hurting. Think about the *environments* where we can be welcomed and encouraged and prayed over. Think of the *settings* where we get to be honest about our imperfections and failures and sufferings. Think about *all* of that: do you know how all of those things came to *exist* in the first place? Wasn't it **because a group of people decided to come to the king's party, on his terms?** Because people *were* willing to make sacrifices to *their* time, schedule, effort, and energy? Because people *did* make it a priority to be present, even when they didn't inherently *want* to be present? **The reason we get to reap the benefits of the kingdom, is because other people are willing to put in the work God prompted them to put in.** Because they *were willing* to have demands *made of them* by the king.

But at the same time, I'll *let you in on a little secret* about all that: **most of those people don't think about the things they're doing as demands at all. They see them as privileges.** They think of them as *pure joy*. One of my *favorite* parables Jesus tells is also one of his *shortest*. It's actually just one verse. *Matthew 13, v. 44*:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

So, a *question for you about this parable*: were there *requirements* for that guy to purchase the field with the treasure in it? Were there things he had to *do*, in order to

purchase it? *According to the passage, yes.* Pretty *significant* demands, in fact. It says he “sold all he had,” in order to buy the *field*. *I’ve never sold everything I have, but I would imagine there are quite a few sacrifices and logistical details to sort out to do something like that.* So technically, yes—there were *demands*. Selling all you have probably requires some time and effort and energy to do. There were *requirements* for him to be able to do what he did.

But **second question:** do you think he *thought* of them as *demands*? Do you think he was thinking to himself, “*ughhhh...I can’t believe I have to sell everything to buy this field! This obnoxious treasure is so demanding of me and my time and effort and resources—I hate this!*”? Do you think that was his mindset? I would bet *not*, right? In fact, the passage says that “in his *joy*, he went and sold everything he had.” That doesn’t sound like drudgery to *me*. That doesn’t sound like begrudging submission. **In fact, it sounds like he realized that what he was giving up paled in comparison to what he was gaining.** So it was a no-brainer. Those were simply logistical details to be sorted out so he could *gain* so much more.

Okay. In my *experience*, **the difference between** either a wedding *avoider* or a wedding *crasher*, and a follower of Jesus, is what I just described. A wedding *avoider* doesn’t even think the field is worth a second look. “Nah, not interested. Sorry. Not for me.” A wedding *crasher* is interested in the *benefits* of the field, but not any of the cost to get it. **But a follower of Jesus sees that there’s treasure in that field. And that that treasure is more than worth any logistical details that need to be sorted out to purchase it—it’s not even a debate.** And so yes, they do the necessary work of realigning their priorities, and their time, and their schedule, and their effort and energy. But every bit of that feels a lot more like *joy* than it does drudgery. It feels a lot more like *gain* than it does *loss*. Because there is *treasure* in that field.

Okay, let me **peel back one more layer** for you as we close. Scholars have actually pointed out that ***that parable, about the treasure in the field, may not only be about what we do for the kingdom. It may also be about what Jesus did for us.*** The book of Hebrews tells us that “for the *joy* set before *him*, *Jesus* endured the cross.”⁴ Jesus gave everything *he* had, including his own life, to purchase the field. Jesus does not call us to anything that he is not willing to do himself. So here, he turns and says to us: “join *me* in giving up everything for the sake of the kingdom. It’s worth it.” So this morning, we’re going to go to the tables and celebrate all of that. We’re going to take the bread and the cup, and remember just how much Jesus gave up for us, and ask for his help in learning how to follow in those footsteps. Let’s pray.

⁴ Hebrews 12:2

