

*One of the most saddening of experiences is, to **not** get invited. The feeling of being left out, unloved, not included, can weigh pretty heavy, hey??? Especially when you know that there are lots of others who are invited, but you obviously didn't make the grade.... It's just sad... Even if it's a function that you didn't really **need** to attend, the sadness is still there, because of the rejection. Even for someone of strong character – it can get you down.....*

Well, I've given this message the title "God invites"....

And one thing I **can** guarantee you, is you'll never be made sad, due to lack of invitation from our Heavenly Father, because God invites – that's what He does... He invites those who are near. He invites those who are far. He invites those who are sad. He invites those who are happy. He invites the rich and the poor. The man and the woman. The boy and the girl. The priest and the prisoner... God invites...

You may get hurt, when other people (maybe even Christians) select their friends, and cut you out, but you'll never, ever be neglected by your Heavenly Father.. Because God invites....

Today we're continuing on in the Gospel of Matthew, and once again, Jesus is telling yet **another** parable about how He was being rejected by God's people, and especially by the religious leaders... I told you last week – it's just going to keep on coming – as the pressure builds, and as He heads towards the cross, the rejection of Christ, and what that means, is just going to keep on coming.

And Jesus told a story about a king, who's putting on a wedding feast for his son. And the way things were done in their culture, is they would send out an invite (well in advance of the party), and then when everything was ready, he'd send out his servants again, to personally call on those who were invited, and to say to them "Everything's ready – it's now time to turn up."...

So, the King **sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast,.... but they would not come.**

Now, let me tell you, if your King invites you to something, you'd better jolly well go, because if you don't, that's just as good as treason.... But "No – got other stuff to do – not coming"

Again the King sent other servants, saying, "Look, everything's laid on. The spit roast is done, the punch is cold... The tucker's all prepared. It's party time... Come to the wedding feast..."

But they paid no attention. One went off to his farm. Another went off to his business... They just ignored the King's summons. And worse than that, some of them seized the servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them....

The utmost of disrespect: To mock, or to injure the King's spokesperson, is high treason...

⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Now, remember Jesus was telling this story about Israel – about their fruitless religion, and about their religious leaders. They had rejected the prophets. The most recent one was John the Baptist – he'd just recently been beheaded...

And now they were even rejecting God's own Son, and God was going to judge them, and this is what happened. In AD70 – 30 odd years after Jesus ascended to heaven, there was an uprising against the Romans, but of course they lost. Jerusalem fell. Many died. The temple was burned – those were bitter times in Israel... And it was God's judgment on their fruitless religion... It was God's judgment on their rejection of Christ...

7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

But if God invites, what is an invitational God to do, when His invitations are rejected? Well He sends out some more.

We often have people over for meals – not as often now as what we used to. But we just ring someone and invite them. If they're not available, we ring somebody else and invite them. And if they're not available, we'll ring somebody else and invite them. When Robyn decides she wants visitors for dinner, visitors for dinner we will have.

And God is just like that. God invites and invites again, and keeps **on** inviting, until everyone is invited.

And so, in v8 ***8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not***

worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

God invites, and keeps on inviting. When the Jews rejected Jesus, He just moved onto the gentiles – inviting and inviting and inviting... Everyone has been invited, to receive Christ as their Lord..

So, I want to share with you 4 things from the reading today.

And the first thing I want to share is, Joy.

To some people, Hell is the stick that makes them head toward Christ, as if Christianity is so intolerable, that only something as awful as Hell, could possibly force them to put up with it.

But get this, the King didn't force people to go to a funeral – he invited them to a wedding – he invited them to a party.

The good news isn't so much about “being saved from hell”. The good news, is God Himself.

It is an absolute joy. It's an absolute pleasure to be in relationship with the Lord our God.

You know, when it comes to people, some people are an absolute joy to be around, and others are just darn hard work. Well let me tell you, God is not hard work. Jesus said:

11:28 Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

To be in relationship with God is not hard work. It's a joy. It's a blessing.

And church shouldn't be something we have to force ourselves to go to. Nor should it have to be some kind of weekly entertainment event to keep our attention. Church is where we get together, to share our joy (that we already have) a joy that comes, because of the relationship we have with God, through Jesus Christ.

The joy that you get from church, should not be dependant on the quality of the band, nor should it be dependant on the charisma of the person up the front... The joy that you get at church, isn't something that you get – it's something that you bring with you – it's something you bring to share.

When each one of us have a joy, because of the relationship that we have with Christ, and when we come together, we share this joy with one another. That's where the joy comes from.

Now imagine (getting back to the parable) When the King invited those people to the wedding of His Son - the privilege; the joy; the honour, that it was to get invited to a royal wedding.... But they despised it and threw it all back in His face....

And God invites us. What a joy; What an honour; What a privilege... That the King of the universe, is asking for **your** company...

The second thing I want to share with you, is “All are invited”
verse 8 **Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.**

All are invited – the bad are invited. The good are invited... It doesn't matter what your life history has been. It doesn't matter if you're popular, or unpopular. It doesn't matter whether you have everything together, or if you feel like you're just falling apart, and ready to throw in the towel... God invites you. He invites you just as you are. The Lord desires to have a relationship, with you. Isn't that neat???

And today, we are God's servants. We are the ones responsible for getting the invitations out. And we have to get those invitations to everyone.

Sometimes it takes years for us to pluck up enough courage to tell a good friend about Jesus, or to invite them along to church. Usually we are very selective about who we tell about

Jesus or who we invite to church – we only approach those who we feel will be least offended.

But God's command, is to take the invitations out to the bad and the good. Our job is to invite everyone.

It might be as simple as saying, "Hey look, I've been meaning to ask you for a while, but I wanted to invite you to church to hear about Jesus. I guess I've realised it's not all just religious mumbo-jumbo – it's important and I just don't want others to miss out for the sake of not being invited, so I want to invite you to church."

That might be all it takes. All are invited

Thirdly, many are called, but few are chosen.

We've got 2 dogs – one's old and deaf – She's been around since 2001, so she's 12 ½ years old now. But I remembered something about the way we chose her. So I said to Jake, "Jake, how did we choose Jessie?" And he said, "I can't remember exactly (I was too young), but she sort of chose us."

You see, what happened, is we went to have a look at this litter of pups, and Jake & Ben were both quite little, and this one little pup, left the litter and started chasing them about. And so we chose that one.

And when Jesus said, "**many are called, but few are chosen**" That's exactly what He was describing.

Our job is to invite, but no matter how much we want certain people to give their hearts to God, we can't make them do it. We give them the invitation, and then it's up to them whether they pursue God or not. *We chose the pup who came to us.*

And God invites everyone to come to him, but only some will, and they become the chosen.

Which brings us to the fourth point. The repentant are chosen, while the unrepentant are judged.

verse 11 “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

In Jesus' vocabulary, wedding garments are a sign and a symbol of purity. When Jesus returns, the church (you and I) will be presented to Him as His bride. Pure and spotless.

Now of course, we don't make ourselves pure – God does that. So what's this ‘getting into the wedding feast without wedding garments?’ What's He talking about with this ‘imposter’ if you like, getting in without meeting the dress code?

Well, it all comes down to the question “How am I saved?”

And looking back to last week, we’re actually continuing the theme of repentance. To be saved, we have to repent of our sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You guys get to hear me a lot, and so you get to hear this message over and over again: “Repent of your sins, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” And you might be shocked to hear that, in some churches, you’ll never hear that message.

And there are many people today, who go to church (probably every week), sing the songs, read the liturgy, maybe even pray and ask God for stuff; maybe they’ve even gone up the front to an altar-call and “agreed to receive Christ”... But they’ve never been told to repent. They’ve never come to the realisation that they’re a sinner in need of a saviour. They’ve never been taught that repentance means taking concrete action to prevent one’s-self from re-offending.

Maybe they’ve heard the message of grace, but it has been cheap grace. – grace without cost – grace with no repentance and with no responsibility.

And how tragic would it be, to be under the impression that you’re all good with God, but to remain full of your own self-righteousness and full of your own pride, and unrepentant... - to be unsaved.

verse 13 Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."

Every one of us, are called, but few are chosen.

Are you one of the chosen? To be one of the chosen means we have to agree with God that "I'm actually lost in my sin, and without Him I cannot be saved.

To be chosen means I have to repent of my sin – it means I have to seek to live in righteousness obedience to Christ.... (Sure, sometimes I'll fail in that, and by the grace of God, He forgives us of our failings) Like a child who trips, He picks us up, dusts us off, and sets us on our feet to continue following Him.

And to be chosen means to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- To believe that He is the Son of God.
- To believe that He died to save us from our sins.
- To believe that He rose from the dead, giving us assurance of eternal life.
- It means to believe that Jesus Christ is returning again, to gather His chosen ones to Himself – pure and holy, dressed and ready for the wedding banquet.
- And it means to believe that when Christ returns, He will judge those who were invited, but did not come.

Be chosen.