

**THE BIG ONE, I MEAN “THE BIG ONE”  
Matthew 22:1-14**

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RSVP. The initials of a French phrase, “*Repondez, s’il vous plait,*” which means, “Please respond. Let me know if you’re going to be able to make it to the party.” When someone plans a party, makes preparations and asks for a reply so they will have a solid head count, they are less than amused when you or I disrespect their request for a reply.

**For example, in the *Tallahassee Democrat*, someone writes in to Miss Manners:**

**Dear Miss Manners: What would you do if you receive minimal “RSVP’s” to an upcoming party you were hosting? It seems pretty rude not to even respond to an invite, but do you track everyone down?**

**Dear Reader: Unfortunately, you have to, unless you want a lot of leftovers or a lot of hungry guests. If it were Miss Manners, she would hang onto the list of people who needed prodding. It will serve as an invaluable reminder, for the next party, of whom not to invite. (12/1/02)**

Put bluntly, Miss Manners says that if someone ignores your RSVP, then they don’t get an invite next time you throw a party. Their rudeness has disqualified them from the list of proper guests. No response. No invite.

Responding seems all the more important when the event is a wedding. Jesus tells parables in this section of Matthew’s gospel. He starts out in verse 2 by saying, “The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.” Of course, it is clear that the king is God. The Son, probably Christ.

Weddings are no small occasion, no small affair. They take a tremendous amount of planning as any bride or any bride’s mother who has recently undertaken a task of this enormity will tell you. The average wedding in America, according to [costofwedding.com](http://costofwedding.com), costs \$25,764.

Attire and accessories.  
Hair service.  
Make-up service.  
Manicure and pedicure.  
Band or DJ.  
Musicians and soloist.  
Gifts and favors.  
Invitations and postage.  
Ceremony programs.

Rings.  
Photography and video.  
Venue rental.  
Reception food.  
Cake.

Of course, some weddings are far more elaborate and more expensive.

Prince Charles and Diana – \$110 million! (in today's dollars)  
Prince Harry and Megan Markle – \$45 million.  
Prince William and Kate Middleton – \$34 million.  
Chelsea Clinton and Marc Mezinsky – \$5 million.  
([www.bursinessinsider.com](http://www.bursinessinsider.com))

But what if – what if after all the planning and all the reservations and all the preparation – what if no one had shown up at the wedding?

That's what happens in our story that Jesus tells. The king sent out slaves "to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and, notice, 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.'" But they paid no attention and went their own way, one to his own farm and another to his business. And the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them."

**The cooks have cooked for days. Jars and jars of wine are opened to breathe. Olive oil-filled lamps are lit. The palace is cleaned, scrubbed and decorated. And not one guest makes even an appearance. "Be my guest," he pleaded, and no one showed. The food is spoiling. The wine cannot be resealed. The king's good mood has turned to a foul one. ("Be My Guest," *Homiletics*, Oct. 2002)**

There can be little doubt that the invited who refused to come represent the ancient Israelites, the people of God. They were invited first to the banquet, and they refused to respond. They refused to RSVP.

The idea of a banquet as the kingdom of God is an ancient one, to be sure. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the day of redemption as the day when "the Lord will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines" on God's holy mountain (Isaiah 25:6). This wedding is the great messianic banquet of scripture, when all creation is healed and God and humanity feast together. You remember in Luke's gospel the symbol of God's joy when the lost son, the prodigal son, comes safely home? There is the throwing of a feast, the killing of a fatted calf. Or in the Book of the Revelation, the great feast of the redeemed humanity at the end of time is compared to a wedding, a marriage feast of the Lamb of God.

So by every biblical evidence, God likes to throw a party, and He likes to invite everyone. The Jews were invited first, and they refused to come. In His long-suffering nature, He sends other

slaves, saying, “Come on. Everything is ready. Everything is prepared. The food is spoiling; get to the party.”

“Come,” he says (verse 4). “Come to the wedding feast.” But they paid no attention (verse 6). They made their excuses. Some to the rural areas and others to the city. One to the farm, another to his business. And some even killed the king’s slaves, like the ancient Israelites who killed the prophets that God had sent to warn them.

The king is less than amused. He sent armies to destroy those who rejected him – a foreshadowing, perhaps, of the Romans destruction of Jerusalem. And then he said, “Those who are invited are not worthy. Now go into the highways (verse 9), and as many as you find there invite to the wedding feast.”

## **I. The invitation is much too serious to ignore.**

In preparation for this sermon, I read about wedding ceremonies and customs around the world. One of the things I discovered about Indonesian weddings is this: attendance is very important. The more the merrier. Every relative, every acquaintance, every colleague and business partner would be invited to a wedding.

Have you ever gotten a wedding invitation and had to read it about six times and make three phone calls to friends before you ever figured out who was inviting you to the wedding? That’s the way it is in Indonesia. Everybody is invited. In fact, even if you don’t receive an invitation you can show up with a friend, and it’s A-OK. Indonesians are honored by your attendance at a wedding. Attending shows that you care. On the other hand, not responding to the invitation or not attending the wedding can cause a significant insult and slight which will cause problems in your future relationships in Indonesia.

When you get an Indonesian wedding invitation, it’s a serious matter.

And so it is with the invitation to come to the Kingdom’s banquet, to come to the wedding feast prepared by God for His Son. It’s much too important for you to ignore.

Yet, just as surely as I preach the gospel this morning, there are some in this room, within the sound of my voice, who, although hearing the invitation to come and partake of the gospel, to sit at the banquet of the king, will refuse the invitation. You will snub God’s invitation. You’ll walk away cold-heartedly ignoring the great invitation that the gospel places at your feet today. For some listening by way of television, you’ve heard the gospel preached many, many times. God has sent and re-sent his slaves and servants of the gospel to invite you to His messianic banquet, to come and take your seat at the table of eternal life. And each and every time, you refuse to respond to the invitation of God.

The first thing I want you to see is that this invitation is too important to refuse. For to refuse the invitation to take your place at the banquet is to be left out of the kingdom of God forever.

## **II. Everyone is invited.**

He told them to go into the highways and the byways and invite everybody. Not just the good, but “invite everybody, whoever you find out there.” In verse 10, notice they came, both the good and the evil. And the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.

**Kathleen Gooley was engaged to be married, but the groom backed out of her wedding at the last moment, leaving her with a \$4,500 reception bill. The jilted bride decided to have a party anyway – for the area’s poor. She sent notices to nearby shelters inviting 150 homeless people to her reception. Busloads of homeless men, women and children arrived at the decorated catering hall. Many hadn’t had a warm meal in weeks. Ms. Gooley, who attended the reception dressed in black with a corsage pinned to her blouse, laughed, ate, and danced saying that in spite of her misfortune of not getting married, she wanted to have a party – to turn something negative into something positive. (www.mindspring.com/~jackson2/www/sermons/04-13-97.htm)**

[For the very first time the Hilton had the most unlikely guests. The homeless and hungry danced the night away. This time, they were included, too.]

This woman reminds us that while we often cannot choose our circumstances, we can choose our responses. As someone once said, “In life, pain is necessary, misery is optional.”

God’s purposes will be accomplished with or without you, with or without me. There will be a person at every seat on the day of the banquet of the Messiah, on the day of the coming of the kingdom of God. And everyone is invited. There was nothing for the guests to do. Their receiving an invitation was not dependent upon them. Everything had been made ready. There was nothing they needed to do to make themselves worthy for the banquet.

**It’s a bunch of nobodies who end up taking the seats – commoners, townsfolk, plain Janes and regular Joes. But the wedding hall is filled. The blind, the beggar, the lame, the merchant, the widow, the orphan, the lonely, the mean, the abused, the abusers, the sickly, the strong, the poor, the hungry, the farmers, the tax gatherers, the fishermen, the homemakers and the hookers, the good and the bad – all come and all have a merry time of it. (“Be My Guest,” *Homiletics*, Oct. 2002)**

The amazing thing about the ministry of Jesus was He loved the unlovable, He touched the untouchable, He invited all.

### **III. You have to be real in order to keep a seat with the Savior.**

When the king came to look over the dinner guests, he saw there was a man not dressed in wedding attire. He said to him, “Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?” And the man was speechless. The king said to his servants, “Bind him, hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness, into the place where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Look at him over there. He's standing by the punch bowl, eating the finger foods like everyone else. But he's sticking out like a sore thumb. All the other guests are dressed in black tie. And there he is in his Saturday grubbies – some khaki pants that are frayed at the bottom, Topsiders with no socks, and an undersized T-shirt with yellow arm pits. The king is less than amused by his improperly attired guest.

“Friend,” he says.

Now in Matthew's gospel, friend is not a good word. If anyone is called “friend,” it means they are not a friend of God. In Matthew 20:13 we find the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. The one who is complaining is called friend. “Friend, I'm doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me to work for a denarius?” In Matthew 26:50, Jesus says to Judas, “Friend, do what you have come for.”

It's interesting to me that Judas is called “friend” in this gospel and the improperly attired guest is called “friend.” As Judas mingled among the followers of Jesus as a betrayer, this man came to the banquet, though he was just as unworthy and unreal as was Judas among the disciples. He was a “friend” at this wedding party like Judas was a “friend” among the disciples. It's a term of distance.

The man makes no excuses, and he is tossed out from the party into eternal punishment. **Spurgeon said, “This man without the wedding garment is the type of those who pretend to be Christians, but do not honor the Lord Jesus, nor his atoning sacrifice, nor his holy Word.”**

The garment is an often used image for one's righteousness. Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians all speak of the garment in a metaphorical way. And particularly the image is used of moral worthiness (Revelation 3:4, 5). In Revelation 19:8, the fine linen represents the righteous deeds of the saints. God's summons requires a changed life that results in fruit (3:8) and a righteousness that surpasses conventional norms of behavior (5:20).

So there is a dress code. The invitation is a free one, but you'd better know what to wear. You'd better have on your garments of salvation and the righteousness of Christ. Rags of our own self-importance, self-righteousness and self-conceit will get you bounced out of the party as quickly as this guy was tossed from the banquet.

Today, through the word of the gospel, Jesus has invited you to a banquet. RSVP. Will you come? It's an invitation that is way too important to ignore. This is one invitation that better not get lost in the shuffle of junk mail. You'd better respond, and you'd better respond with haste. God says, “You, the good and the bad, everyone come to the banquet, the wedding feast of my Son.”

What will you do with your invitation? RSVP.