‘Many are Called, Few are Chosen’

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0:00] Father, you have spoken. So we pray now that we, your servants, would hear.

! Open our ears and soften our hearts, cities burned, people cast into darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth.
I wonder how you felt, even just at the end of our reading. This is not the kind of parable, is it, that you find illustrated in a children's book?
Even before we have wrestled with it, this parable should be weighing heavily on our hearts. This is serious.
It is a heartfelt warning from Jesus to people who consider themselves part of God's kingdom. All we're going to do this morning is walk through this parable together.
[1:37] We'll see initially that Jesus presents us with two ways to one destination before he lands on the whole parable's purpose at the end.

And as we come to see these two ways to one destination, it is worth saying, isn't it, it's worth being really clear at the outset, this destination is not good.
In this parable, we will see that we have a king who is generous, who is patient, who is kind, but is brought to a righteous anger, which has extremely sobering consequences.
So let us just begin going through this together, seeing first of all the consequences that await those who publicly rebel against the king's rule in verses 1 to 7.
A public rebellion. Jesus is still primarily engaging with Pharisees here, as he has been for the previous chapter, but he immediately highlights in verse 2, doesn't he, that this is a kingdom parable.
[2:53] So he is doing more here than just highlighting the folly of the Pharisees. This is a picture of God's kingdom. And the kingdom of heaven, he says, is like a king giving a wedding feast to his son.

Now, most weddings are pretty grand occasions, aren't they? And so they should be. Weddings are worth celebrating. Weddings are grand occasions, and royal palaces are grand places.
An invite to either is quite exciting, isn't it? Here we have them both coming together. It is a royal wedding.
So surely, surely, right, those invited are going to rejoice in the great privilege when the invite comes to the door. Of course they will, right? Who wouldn't be delighted to be invited to the wedding of the king's son?
Well, the day of the wedding feast comes round, and the king sends out his servants to call everyone who's invited to come to the banquet.
[4:08] But what happens at the end of verse 3? They would not come. But the brevity, I think, is part of what makes this so shocking.

that the king has sent out his invites, and a few days later, a letter comes to the palace postbox that the envelope's peeled open, and inside is just a single tatty piece of paper with the word, no, written in bold, permanent marker.
There is no family emergency. There's no kind of apologies for not being able to make it. It's not that those invited could not come.
It's that they would not come. It's a point-blank refusal of a king's invite to his son's wedding. But here already, we start to see the generosity and the patience of the king.
Verse 4, an invite was generous in itself, but now he sent other servants. He doesn't give up on them. The first invite's been thrown back in his face, but now he reaches out to them again, saying, everything's on the table.

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[5:28] Go and tell them, I have prepared the feasts. It's the finest cuts of meat. It's the freshest fruit, the best baking, but the most delicious desserts.

Tell them that I have prepared it all for them. So come. Come and enjoy the feasts.
This king is not calling his subjects to fight a war for him. He is calling them to enjoy a feast he has prepared for them.
But, verse 5, they paid no attention. The second invitation comes through the letterbox, and it's got the royal seal on it, but without even opening it, they crush it and chuck it straight in the recycling bin.
Because, we find out, because these privileged invitees, they wanted to do their own thing, their own way instead.
[6:42] One went to their farm, another to his business. But they're not just rejecting the wedding, are they? They're rejecting the hosts. just imagine inviting someone to your wedding and they simply reply, I'm not coming because I do Pilates on a Friday.

If you care about someone at all, you make space for them, don't you? And the more important the occasion, the more you are willing to move. the king's son is getting married.
But these guests pay no attention because they need to mow the lawn. Their priorities define their attitude to the king, don't they?
And it is the king that they are blanking. We live, don't we, in a constitutional monarchy where the king, he reigns, but he doesn't quite rule.
So we might be even just a tiny bit desensitized to just how egregious this behavior is. In Jesus' day, there were no kind of ceremonial kings.
[8:00] A king reigned and ruled, absolutely. So rejecting the king's call is not just a little bit rude or impersonant.

It is rebellious. We need to get back to work. It is rebellion dressed as routine.
But others, others went a step further still in verse six. Some, took the king's servants, treated them shamefully, and murdered them.
Now they are engaged in treason, right? They are spitting in the king's face who has prepared a great feast for them to enjoy. family. If you were here last week, I hope you're hearing the parallels with the parable of the tenants at the end of chapter one.
This is, isn't it, the people directly in the crosshairs here, first and foremost, are the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus' day, who took no heed of God's messengers, who refused to rejoice in the coming of his son, because they wanted to do religion their way.
[9:26] And when the king's son came to host a feast, they didn't like that he threatened their routine, and so they rebelled. And that soon in Matthew's gospel manifests itself, doesn't it, in a very public rebellion.

They condemn Jesus to death and ensure the Son of God is nailed to a cross. God called them to a sumptuous feast.
Come and enjoy what I have prepared for you. And they responded by crucifying his son.
And so the generous and patient king, well, he's provoked to anger. Of course he is. If you organized a wedding, and the 80-pound meal was kind of served to your 120 guests, but not one of them arrived because they were busy watching the group stages of the Club World Cup, you'd be right to be angry, wouldn't you?
If a young child has a birthday party and invites all their classmates, but on the day they are sitting at the table all alone, looking sadly at their birthday cake, because they were bullied at school and no one wanted to be seen with them.
[11:09] We'd be rightly upset, wouldn't we? That is not okay. Even in the relative smallness of our own lived experience, we feel anger at spurned invitations.

God's sins. But nothing, nothing compares to the rejection of God's own son. And so the king who had sent his servants in his generosity now sends his troops in his righteous anger.
the king who called them justly punishes those who rebel. The murderers are destroyed and their city is burned.
These are solemn words, but this is the fate that awaits those who publicly oppose Jesus.
Who deliberately and openly reject his generous and patient call and rebel against his rule, the king's anger burns hotly and justly against them.

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[12:32] The Pharisees are in the crosshairs here in verses 1-7. I think we can probably say on the periphery are people who do publicly reject Jesus and to all of them.

The warning is very, very serious, isn't it? But that is not where this parable ends. Because not only are we warned against public rebellion, we are also, in verses 8-13, warned against private rejection.
The wedding feast, in verse 8, it remains ready on the table. And the king is not about to let it go to waste. So he instructs his servants once more, this time sending them out into the country, to the open roads, to just bring in as many as they can find.
No one is to be left out. The servants go and gather everyone, whoever they come across on the road, they bring them in the good and the bad, so that joyfully, the wedding hall is filled.
Places it is alive with the sound of music and dancing, the food is amazing, the guests are having a great time. Having been rejected by the people he came to first, the generous, patient God goes out to all the people, to everyone, to the ends of the earth, and brings people from all walks of life into his kingdom.
[14:02] freedom. That's a great place to end, isn't it? We've heard the solemn warning, but now we have the good news.

The gates are thrown wide open, the good and the bad are called to come in, happily ever after. But Jesus doesn't end there.
verse 10 might be the ending to this story that we want, but it's not the ending we need. The servants gather the guests in, the wedding hall is filled.
But then the king comes in to see who is at the table, and someone catches his eye. He sees a man who has no wedding garments.
someone has come in, but they're not properly dressed. And I notice, I think it's interesting, no one else seems to notice or seems to be aware of the misfits.
[15:16] The rebellion earlier was very public. This individual seems to be doing their best to fit him with the crowd. out. But God is not blinded, and so he goes, the king goes to him and asks, verse 12, friend, friend, how did you get in without a wedding garment?

But the man is speechless. He has no answer. And again, the consequences are solemn and severe.
No wedding garment cast out into the outer darkness. Now, it's a parable.
This is not kind of a disproportionate reaction to someone who forgot their tie. God does not condemn people who aren't suitably dressed. The wedding garment clearly stands for something.
some commentators suggest that the garment is a picture of the righteousness of Christ, so that we must come to God clothed in Christ's righteousness.
[16:33] Now, that is absolutely true. We must come clothed only in Christ's righteousness, but I don't think it fits with the context here.

Not of this passage, or even the whole book. Others, I think, really helpfully suggest that the wedding garments are the fruit of repentance that we've been thinking about over the last chapter. Most clearly, isn't it, that is repentance and prayer. I think that is really helpful and certainly part of the picture, but I think most basically that the wedding garments are a picture of the wedding guest's heart posture towards the king.
Because what would it say to a bride and groom if you rocked up to their wedding day in your dressing ground or your swimming trunks?
It's a complete lack of respect, isn't it? It shows no honor to the couple. It's saying, I don't care that this day is supposed to be about you.
[17:48] All I care about is coming on my own terms, doing things my way. Instead of coming to honor the king and his son, I'm going to come in however I please.

But when the king asks him what he is doing, he doesn't have an answer. notice what is going on here.
We need to make sure we don't miss the character of the king here. He was generous in his preparations. He was patient in his invitations. Now I think we see his graciousness even in his confrontation.
He does not kick the man out as soon as he sees him. No, he comes to him. He speaks to him warmly. Friend, he says.

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Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? I think the fact the king comes kindly to him suggests that there is a good answer that this man could have given.
[19:01] But perhaps we could even say repentance and prayer. I'm so sorry. would you please give me what I do not have but so desperately need.

But instead the man is speechless. Because he is caught red-handed as an imposter. And he knows it.
He is exposed as soon as the king asks him a question. Remember when Jesus was in the temple at the start of chapter 21 back in verse 25?
Jesus asks the Pharisees a question. But they can't give him an answer. But we're going to see it three more times in the rest of chapter 22.
Jesus asks the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Pharisees again, question after question after question, and they cannot answer. And the problem is not their lack of knowledge, but the posture of their heart towards the king.
[20:11] In each instant, Jesus asks them a question, and they are speechless, speechless, speechless. And so I think this is the uncomfortable truth Jesus is beginning to bring home to us this morning.

those same hearts that were present in the Pharisees of Jesus day, they are still going to be present in the kingdom of heaven, even after the doors have been swung open to the world.
But there might not be Pharisees publicly rebelling in the wedding hall, but there are still some hearts that have the very same root, problem. Whether in public rebellion and trying to kick the king out, or private rejection and trying to hide amongst the crowd, any hearts I think that has this kind of posture towards the king, where the questions are not curious but accused to you, where religion is wanting to be done on one's own terms, they are both.
Cast from the king's presence into a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And it is this second group isn't it, or a person that gets a little deeper under our skin because he is saying, Jesus is saying here, isn't he?
There are those who are mingling around with the genuine wedding guests, men, and but when the king looks at them, he sees exactly how they are coming, exactly what they have on, and they will face the just consequences.
[22:00] That is what Jesus says here. This is what the kingdom of heaven may be compared to. There are and always will be people who are hiding in the banquet hall, but whose hearts are far from God, who seem to have entered the kingdom, but who have in fact come in on their own terms, and do not bow before the king.

And so here is the crucial question, the life or death question, and really the one and only application this morning, do you bow before the king?
And this is where, I mean it's not really a surprise, is it, but I think this is where we see that Jesus is just the best teacher, especially when it comes to the hardest lessons. How can I know, how can you know whether you are bowing before the king?
I think you will find the answer to that question in your response to the last eight words of this parable, which sums up the whole parable. For many are called, but few are chosen.
things are chosen. If you want to know where that's come from, just look through the parable. It is all there. What we have seen so far is that Jesus has warned us, hasn't he, through public and private rejections of him and his son against a certain heart posture towards God.
[23:39] But now at the end of the parable, Jesus shows us that all the while throughout the parable he has been setting up the perfect question to test our hearts on that very same point.

Do our hearts buy before the king when his ways are not our ways? Or do we seek to come with our own religion?
Let's just take a couple of minutes to see how Jesus is asking that question. But we've already seen that many are called by the king. but did you notice did you notice who accepts the invitation?
Some are called in verse 3 and they said no. Others are called in verse 9 and 10 and they said well they didn't actually say anything did they?
They are passive. They do not come they are gathered. The king's servants simply take them in.
[24:57] Many are called a few are chosen. I think what Jesus is doing here is intentionally presenting us with a truth about God's rule that we cannot fully comprehend so that we can see how our hearts respond.

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Jesus boldly brings in the doctrine of election and it is something that is taught clearly right through scripture from Abraham and Moses to Jesus and Paul. It is clearly there and right throughout it sits alongside the free offer of the gospel and human responsibility to respond to that gospel.
We are responsible for responding to the gospel while God also teaches us that the only ones who will come are those whom he has chosen from before the beginning of time.
and those who God does not choose will justly be held accountable for their grievous sin.
Now these are very very deep waters and that is kind of the point but let me just briefly say that if you are here this morning and you have not yet come to Jesus.
[26:29] The point of this parable is not to say kind of please sit in the waiting area until your name is called. No you are to come now.

We've heard that same call from Jesus' lips through this gospel haven't we? Come to me. Come to me. God might well be in the process of gathering you in this morning.
But if and Lord willing when you do come you will stand with every other Christian and look back at that moment that you put your faith and trust in Jesus and realize that it was all God.
So do come. I beg you come and pray that God would bring you in. But the purpose of this parable is not a call to those on the outside.
It is a warning to all those who consider themselves to be on the inside. we are responsible for responding to the gospel.
[27:33] Those who do not come in repentance and faith will face judgment for the rejection of the king but only those who God chooses will come in. Does that make sense?

Are you able to join all the dots in your heads? I hope the answer is no. Not really.
When we are confronted with something as difficult as this, when the king acts in a way that we cannot wrap our heads around, judgment, what do you do?
What does your heart do? When Jesus utters something that leaves you confounded, confused, perhaps even a little upset.
And I think, let's be clear, feeling a little confused, perhaps even upset, I don't think that is inappropriate or unacceptable. It's what we then do with that that makes all the difference.
[28:49] Edna read for us earlier from Romans chapter 9, where the apostle Paul is dealing with exactly this issue. And he anticipates, he fully expects his audience to have discomfort, questions.

He asks, is there then injustice on God's part? Because that is exactly what we naturally think, isn't it? That doesn't seem fair. Paul goes on to write, you will say, why does he still find fault for who can resist his will?
Those are the questions we have, right? Of course we do. The questions themselves are natural because when the depths of God's ways go deeper than our minds can dive, of course we have unanswered questions.
But what do we do with those questions? What do they cause our hearts to do? There are two options.
Option one, like the Pharisees, like the rebellious guests and the inappropriately dressed man, we come to God with hearts that are not humble before him.
[30:06] Jesus didn't answer the Pharisees' question, verse 27, so they set themselves against him. They came with their idea of what things should look like and expected Jesus to fit into their molds.

When it comes to verse 14, some people will hear what the Bible teaches so very clearly, but because they think their sense of justice is greater than God, they will decide that God should do things differently.
Save everyone indiscriminately, give everyone the ability to respond freely. There's a heart that comes and says, we don't think you've got this quite right, God.
We've got a better plan. What about this instead? that might feel quite far from the Pharisees crucifying Jesus, but that roots for both of them is a heart that comes before God and his son, expecting him to do things your way.
That is option one. That is a posture towards the king that results in his anger being kindled. Option two is to bow.
[31:34] Bow because God is God and we are not. Because he is king and we are his people.

As Joe said a couple of weeks ago, that does not mean don't ask any questions. It's good to explore the way God works, to understand him as best as we can. But we must do so knowing that while we

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seek to plumb the depths, we will never get anywhere near the bottom.
So we must be ready when our finite minds reach their limit, when we cannot comprehend God's ways, we must be ready to bow before him.
Confessing, as we sung earlier from Isaiah 55, that your thoughts are not our thoughts and your ways are not our ways. That is exactly where we see the apostle Paul go in Romans.
He warns us not to question God, for who are we to question our maker? Even the great apostle Paul did not pretend to be able to get his head around this mystery, but instead, instead of causing him to doubt, it caused him to worship.
[32:53] At the end of that section of Romans, having dwelt for some time on this very truth, Paul simply takes a step back. bowes before God and says, Oh, Oh, the death of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways. May that be how we come before the king, not pretending to understand his unsearchable ways, nor doubting his goodness or justice because we don't understand his ways, but bowing before him with a humble heart.
if we can bow and put our trust wholly in Jesus, if we can bow before him and trust in his salvation, in his justice, in his goodness, in his grace, if you can bow to this king, then know that you are his and because he has chosen you, he will never let you go.
He will never let you go. But I think we just need to end by sitting for just a moment in the seriousness of this parable.
Whether or not you bow before the king, it is a matter of life and death. nothing matters more in this world than the posture of your heart towards Jesus.
[34:54] Is he your king? Do you believe him? Do you trust him? Will you have him as your king?

let us pray that we would have him as just that. father, your wisdom and your knowledge are so, so deep.
Your judgments are unsearchable, your ways are inscrutable. So we do not pretend to understand everything fully, but we do rejoice in this, that we do know that you sent your one and only son, Jesus Christ, that we might come and bow before him.
Lord, humble our hearts, that we might not question you as the Pharisees did, not seek to come on our own terms, but humbly and gladly be brought in by the king to enjoy the feast that you have prepared out of your goodness.
In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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