**Sermon: RSVP**

New North Church, Hingham

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11 October 2026

Based on **Isaiah 25:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14**

Some people will tell you that they avoid reading the Old Testament because the God portrayed in those ancient books can be scary and punitive. They prefer the God of love and peace they find in the New Testament.

For a lot of people, God really *is* in the earthquake, but they don't hear the still, small voice calling to them. In truth, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *is* love, and God as embodied by Jesus can be fearsome. God is everything and everywhere all the time in the Bible all at once.

In our first reading today, Isaiah flips that OT-punitive-God thinking on its head. This is a song of praise for God's faithfulness and complete reliability as the people celebrate their deliverance from the apocalyptic judgements of the previous chapter.

The unnamed city in verse two is most likely Babylon. The people acknowledge that it was God who provided them refuge and shelter. The blast of the ruthless was like 'a flood against a wall,' and God subdued it. For this, the people rightly glorify God.

The song becomes a psalm of thanksgiving for a divine feast prepared for them by God. And it is quite a feast: rich food, well-matured wines strained clear. What could be better? This is an eschatological feast, one for the End Times; a Messianic banquet such as the one portrayed in Psalm 23, and sort of like the one Jesus hosted at the Last Supper.

The people also praise God's imminent destruction of the shroud of their spiritual blindness, the mourning veil cast over *all* nations. Death will be swallowed up forever.

This is the God the people have been waiting for to save them. They found that they could trust God when they could trust no one else on earth, and so they rejoiced and were glad, as anyone would be. All except the Moabites 'whose pride keeps the nation outside the community of faith,'[1] as one scholar put it, but that's another story.

For Christians, this reading points forward to Jesus Christ, whose Resurrection revealed God's ultimate victory over death and mourning.

Ever throw a party and no one came? I did, about fifty years ago, an end of season break-up party for my college baseball team.

We had it all set up in my parents' backyard. Food and drink for days. Perfect weather. A few of my girlfriend's friends came by because they wanted to meet the baseball team, but none of the players showed up. So, we stood around and looked at each other for a few hours and then packed it all up and went home.

And I never saw any of those guys again.

The lesson learned: When you accept an invitation, you must show up. Or, as someone once advised me, you have to do what you say you're going to do.

We're used to people not doing what they promise to do. Mostly, it's a joke about politicians. We're surprised when something good comes out of the halls of government. It may be unexpected, but we'll take it.

Back to party planning. Where do you draw the line for who and how many people to invite? You might only have ten chairs, so there's your limiting factor. Or if you have plenty of room, you might wonder, well, do we have to invite *that* guy?

For those with a busy social life, you can't attend every party, and you may grow complacent and start taking the invitations for granted. You can pick and choose.

So, what is going on in Matthew? Jesus told this parable about a Feast, and he aimed it at religious leaders just after he told the parable of the wicked tenants. Next, he will answer some questions about paying taxes to Caesar, marriage, the Great Commandment, and so on.

The metaphorical king in this parable is as far away from the expected NT God of love and peace as you can get. Yet, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to him.

It starts out okay: the king has prepared a lavish wedding banquet for his son and he invited a lot of people to attend. But no one wanted to come to the feast.

Some laughed at the invitation. Some of the other invited guests mistreated and killed the king's servants when they delivered the message, in the same way that the wicked tenants in last week's parable mistreated and killed the landowner's servants.

Up to now, the king had been happily planning the banquet, but these crimes enraged him. Taking time out from the wedding preparations, he sent his troops to destroy the murderers and burn their city. Talk about punitive. This guy is on edge.

Then he shifted gears. He told his servants to tear up the guest list; go out into the streets and invite everyone they could find, *both good and bad;* and fill the wedding hall with guests. And so, they did. Everyone accepted and the new guests all arrived on time.

Here is the part Jesus wants us to think about, and it's almost a separate parable.

All kinds of people responded to the invitation. They may have been tax collectors, lepers, rich or poor, or Jews and Christians lumped together. It didn't matter.

But the king noticed that one guest had not felt the need to change his clothes after accepting the king's invitation; he had not *repented* before he entered the Kingdom.

In response, the king had his *attendants* – not his servants; attendants could be angels – the king had them throw this guest out with no opportunity to return.

He may not have been an isolated case. The parable tells us that though many are invited, few of the chosen 'elect' will be accepted in the final judgement.

A recurring theme in Isaiah foreshadows the hope of a radical new world order, instituted by God. The people had been down so long that everything looked like 'up' to them. They rejoiced at receiving an invitation to a feast. They praised God for their deliverance from Babylon, which now lay in ruins.

Jesus told his parable during a most dangerous week in Jerusalem. The Pharisees are out to get him; everywhere he goes, people test him, hoping he'll slip up. He's a marked man. And he's not hiding; everyone knows where to find him – in the Temple.

Despite all this, he tells a wedding parable that speaks of God's grace. Looking past the forceful language, look at what the king – God – did when the first set of invitations were turned down: he issued a whole new set of invitations to other people. He wanted a hall full of people for the feast.

God will never stop inviting us to join in. Invitations fly out the door every day.

In the Messianic Kingdom, which is what we are really talking about in these two readings, when you unexpectedly receive your invitation and accept it, you *must* show up.

And don't assume God's grace. Before you arrive, dress accordingly. Leave the hoodie, t-shirt, and sweatpants at home. Be respectful; be in awe.

The occasion calls for formal wear and a clean heart.

Amen.

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[1] Brevard S. Childs. *Isaiah*, (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001),183.