



Message Transcript

15th October 2023

Finding Contentment in God

Greetings! It's so good to be here, with our church family, as we come together celebrate the 20th Sunday after Pentecost. May I welcome all who are watching via 'live stream' and I pray today's message will be of great encouragement to us all.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We have just listened to, our two passages from the New Testament, from the final paragraphs of Paul's letter to the Philippians and then our gospel reading from St Matthew, about the wedding banquet, which Jesus tells the chief priests and elders is compared to the "**kingdom of heaven.**"

What a puzzling parable we have today, from St. Matthew's Gospel, when compared with St. Luke's version of the story (Luke 14.15-24), especially the wedding guest, who was not wearing a wedding robe.

Firstly, we should note that in both of these narratives, Jesus is talking to the chief priests, elders, the lawyers & the Pharisees. In St. Luke's account you will notice what we could call, a 'less threatening' story about how those originally invited, failed to realize the value of the invitation. May I suggest, when you get time, to read both accounts, you'll notice the distinct difference in tone between Matthew and Luke.

Matthew's version of the story suggests urgency and bitter anger, and it's only in Matthew that the banquet is completely ready and about to go to waste, and that the messengers are mistreated and retribution exacted. And then, we come to this mysterious guest without a wedding garment! He doesn't appear in Luke's Gospel, but adds an element of fear, even for those who have made it to the banquet. We can see that some of the anger in this story begins in the opening verses.

The King is throwing a party for his Son. The wedding banquet of the King's Son is a glorious and spectacular occasion for rejoicing, and most people would do anything to be invited. **Wouldn't we?**

But here we have, people who either don't care about the invitation at all, or else they treat it as a positive nuisance, to the point where they beat up the messenger who brings the invitation!

What should have been an occasion for national rejoicing is now turned abruptly into a messy situation where things start to fall apart.

There is some confusion happening here!

- Surely the people knew that the King's Son was about to get married?
- And due to the lack of response and enthusiasm, there is also grief for the Son.
- Don't his future subjects, care enough about him to want to share in his rejoicing?

By their actions they are implying,

- What's the Son got to do with us?
- He won't make our business run.
- He won't generate an income for us.

By their actions, they reject not just the Son, but also their share in the future nation that the Son represents.

But the other source of anger in the story comes out of the sense of urgency. Twice (verses 4 & 8) the King says that everything is ready!

- It cannot wait, it won't keep, it's now or never.
- Why don't the invited guests realize?
- They will never again get the chance to go to a royal wedding.

The parables, from chapter 21 of the Two Sons and the Wicked Tenants, to this one, are all about the way to which Jesus's audience are passing up their chance to share in the kingdom.

Matthew's Gospel tells us that ⁴⁵*"When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet."* It is clear from the way they react to all three of the stories that the Pharisees understand what is being said, and that it is directed towards them: ***it's just that they don't believe it.*** And then, we come to the man without a wedding robe?

It's not too difficult to feel that this man is being treated unfairly. After all, he didn't know he was going to be invited, and if the rest of the guests were picked off the streets, how well dressed were any of them? You can imagine this poor man sitting there, eating as much as he can, filling his cup steadily, not sure what he's doing there, but determined to make the most of it. Then all of a sudden, there's the King. The man is completely thrown. Perhaps he hadn't even realized where he was. He had just gone along with the crowd, eager for a free feed. He didn't know he was celebrating the Son's banquet.

The King's initial question is quite friendly in tone. All kinds of possible responses might have allowed the man to stay at the banquet.

He could have said, things like:

- 'I could see how urgent it was, and I wanted to make sure I didn't miss it.'
- Or, 'I don't own a wedding gown, but I'd love to borrow one'.

Clearly the issue is not the man's clothing, but rather something else about ***how he presents himself in this ultimate moment.***

We are left without a list of specific criteria that move a person from the list of the many "called," to that of the few "chosen". Instead, he is silent, and loses his chance. We could ask why wasn't this man, overwhelmed with joy and thankfulness at being invited, and hence rejoicing?

So, like the people who rejected the initial invitation, this guest is not interested in his relationship with the King and his Son. He never wanted to meet him, or speak to him, and he doesn't care what the banquet is for. This is Matthew's sombre warning!

Unless we have come to rejoice with the Son, there is nothing for us here.

In conclusion, Chapter 4 of Philippians reminds us:

- God promises to be with us always, and
- God never breaks a promise.
- God helps us to turn our worries into prayers.
- And helps us to be gentle with everyone, knowing and believing that the Lord is always near.

So how can we help but rejoice in the Lord, who loves us, always! As St Paul writes, and we can sing in song from MP 577.

Rejoice in the Lord, always, and again I say Rejoice!

Amen