

Hangin' Out With Jesus: The Extravagant Generosity of God

Matthew 22:1-14

Good morning, men! Let's go ahead and do a shout out today, and that goes to a new group that's formed called RPM. That stands for Reaching the Population of Men (for Christ). This is a group that meets at GraceWay Church, Baltimore, MD and the leader is Pastor Chuck Brooks. They meet weekly using the video Bible Study. So would you join me in giving a rousing welcome to RPM? One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're glad to have you with us!

One of our members has passed away this week, Don Bonesteel. This is a picture of Don at a fourth of July picnic last year. I didn't realize Don was such a chick magnet! Good for you, Don! Don is an original founding member of the Bible Study, for 27 years, his son Robert is with us, and I just wanted to give a tribute to Don this morning. Don was a table leader for many years. He was our blubbering giant. Whenever we had leader meetings and we'd start talking about Jesus, Don would start blubbering. Whenever he would talk about someone or somebody else would talk about someone who was going through a hard time, he would just start blubbering. A very soft, sensitive guy; a big giant of a man. I knew him from business, he actually was my account manager for the advertising agency that I worked with when I had Morley Properties, then he became part of the Bible Study.

Every now and then you have somebody in your life that does something very memorable. When we began this Bible Study, we started in the bar at the Vila Nova, which is no longer there. We started in the bar, which was great if you had been out late. You could sleep over and be there for the early morning Bible Study! When they demolished the building, it was Don Bonesteel who was driving by and picked up a concrete block. He had it mounted, and had those of us who were part of the original group sign this etching and presented this as a gift. It has his name on there, as well as Fred Grant, Jim Walden, Dave Outlaw, Dave Holdbrook, Ed Browning, Ken Moore, Rick Hornbeck and Jim Cunningham. Every now and then you meet a guy like Don Bonesteel, and because he was a founding member, a table leader, and a lover of so many of us, I just thought it would be appropriate to give him a moment of tribute. Let's have a little prayer for the comfort of his family.

Our Father in heaven, we just pray that you would comfort Don's children, Robert and Carolyn, and all of their family on the loss of this beloved brother. He died quietly and peacefully on Monday. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Of course Don has entered his eternal rest, so congratulations to you for that, Don. I have been checking, but as yet know nothing about the memorial service. When we get the information we'll send out an email for those of you who are on the weekly email.

The series is *Hanging Out With Jesus*. It's Tuesday in the passion week, the week when Jesus is crucified. Tuesday is encounters with religious leaders day. All day long Jesus is going through a series of encounters with religious leaders who are asking him questions, who are pressing him. So one of the things he's doing is that he's telling some parables. He's telling three parables in a row here. Only two of them are in the gospel of Matthew. Today the one that we're going to look at is the parable of the wedding feast and it's only in the gospel of Matthew. What this parable so profoundly illustrates is the extravagant generosity of God and that's the title of the message today. The purpose I want to accomplish with you today is that I want to show you how to talk about this generosity with other people in a way that helps you connect with them more effectively.

A Lavishly Universal Offer

The first thing we want to look at is the text, a lavishly universal offer of the gospel. Matthew 22 starting at verse 1:

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son (this idea of a banquet is a very Old Testament idea. It's a very powerful metaphor for the union with God in heaven. Verse 3). He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come (so you had one group of people that rejected this offer to come to the banquet).

"Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet (so you see this invitation is given and rejected. Another invitation is given...).

"But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business (so some just rejected it, others didn't have time for it, they had other interests). The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them (so there was this hostility, some were hostile. So some just rejected it, some were too busy, and some were actually hostile. Then it says in verse 7). The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city,

This is a paradox, but there's a historical context for this particular paradox. The people at the time is the nation of Israel. Today this applies to the church, the body of Christ, those of us who have faith in

Jesus. God is constantly sending his servants and issuing this invitation. What's going on here is that there is this king and he's invited those who don't deserve to come. He's invited people who don't deserve to be at his banquet and there is an extreme amount of patience exhibited here. We know from history that Jesus died 30-ish AD. We know the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem 40 years later. Even though it's a spiritual metaphor in a historical way, you can see the patience of God being exhibited because even though Jesus is announcing the destruction of the city, it still is another 40 years before that takes place. Verse 8:

“Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come (or they were not worthy). So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find' (everyone you find. I offered my salvation to the nation of Israel. They've rejected it, so go and invite everybody in the world now. All the Jews, they're still invited. All the Gentiles, all the Muslims, all the Buddhists, all the Confucians, all the Hindus, whomever. Invite them all). So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

So look what's happened here. The King has issued this invitation. Nobody that got it deserved the invitation, but the invitation is still open, even to those who rejected it, even to those who were not interested in it, even to those who had been hostile to him, even to bad people and good people, the offer remains open, this invitation to come to this banquet. What is the wedding banquet? That is a metaphor for entering into heaven. Throughout the text, throughout the Bible, this banquet is our arrival to be with God for all of eternity.

That's a little about the text and these five types of people; the people who rejected, the people who were uninterested, the people who were hostile, the good, and the bad. Just now, I would encourage you to think of who you know like that. Do you know someone like that, or maybe you are that person who has rejected Christianity, has rejected being part of the banquet. Maybe you know someone who is just too busy, they have other interests. They're out working their farm or working their business and they're too busy, too worldly, too preoccupied. Even if they made a profession of faith, they're just too busy. Maybe you have someone in your life, hopefully not you, who's hostile. You're part of this movement, this anti-God movement. Maybe you're an immoral person, or you know somebody involved in immorality. They're a bad person, they're a greedy person, they're sexually immoral, whatever they are. Maybe you know somebody who is a good person who has not embraced Christ. They might even be religious, but they view their lives as the highest value in being a moral person. Maybe their involvement in religion is an outlet for doing good deeds because they're a good person and they want to do good deeds. Maybe they're involved as a means of looking for the social or emotional needs to be met, but they never have really accepted the invitation to be part of this eternal life.

Jesus is making an offer to all of these people, an invitation to come to Christ, to become part of the kingdom of God. Why is he doing that? He's doing that because of his absolute love. Everything God

does is founded and rooted in his love for us, but because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, he makes us alive in Christ. This is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and gave his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. What's going on in this text is that Jesus is making this incredible offer to anybody. It's an invitation that even if it's rejected, even if you have rejected this offer multiple times, the offer still stands until the door gets closed on that final day. Once the door is shut, then it stays shut, but until then no matter what you've done, no matter what the person you are wanting to talk to Jesus about has done, nothing excludes them. Nothing can exclude them! It's so important to understand this because there are people who have done heinous things, but they are not excluded from the possibility of repenting of those sins and embracing Jesus in faith.

Let's read the final piece of this text. Verse 11:

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.

What would the wedding clothes be? People have debated that over the years. Some say it's the external things, it's baptism, it's making a verbal profession of faith. Some say it's the internal things, the humble repentance and faith in Jesus. I personally would go with the second but you make up your own mind. For example 1 Samuel 16:7 says in the selection of the next king to replace Saul, the text says man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart. In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus said many will say on that day Lord, Lord, but I'll say I didn't know you. But Lord we cast out demons in your name, we did all these external things. Yeah, but you didn't do the will of God. What was the will of God? It was to repent of your sins and to put your faith in Jesus. So I would suggest that putting on the wedding garment or wedding clothes is humbly having Godly sorrow for your sins and then asking Jesus to forgive you and give you eternal life. That's it.

If that's true or even if it's not true it says the man was speechless. He was dumbfounded! How many people do you know who are going through the motions of religion? They are part of the visible church, those who do make the external professions, who take the baptisms and communion but they don't have the internal conversion of the heart. They have the behavior but not the belief. How many people do we know like this? This is scary, because if you, me, somebody doesn't help them to understand, guess what? Some day they'll be standing there speechless. Actually, they're not going to be speechless, they're going to say that I can't believe Pat didn't tell me that! They're going to say I can't believe Bill, after all these years we walked together, never told me that! At that moment, he's going to be speechless, but once he starts thinking about it he's going to be really ticked off at you. Or me. Or both us. Verse 13:

Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

I think it's worth noting here that it's just this one person who has rejected the wedding garment. I don't like talking about hell. Does anybody like talking about hell? Some people actually like talking about hell! Especially the people with the prophetic inclinations among us. I don't. I'm an evangelist by heart. I'd rather tell you about how much Jesus loves you, but I told Patsy yesterday I feel uncomfortable talking about hell. But you know what, even if you don't believe it's true, even if you feel uncomfortable, even if you don't like the idea, even if you think God got it mixed up and had a wrong idea, that doesn't eliminate the truth of it. It's from beginning to end, the Bible talks about a place of separation from God, eternal separation from God.

Now, what's the role of the prophet? Jesus was a prophet, everyone thought he was a prophet and he was a lot more than that. The role of the prophet is always the same, it is to pronounce the pending doom and judgment as an incentive for people to turn to God or back to God. The objective of these prophetic announcements is never anger, nor to cast a final spell upon people of doom; the purpose is always to get people to see the error of their ways.

I watched a show last night called *Beyond Scared Straight* on the A&E channel. It's a series, and I liked it enough that I put it on DVR to record it again next week. What they're doing, and most of you are probably familiar with the program, is they take the young juveniles who are on the front end of getting into trouble. It might be smoking pot, getting caught with cocaine at school, hit and run, and they take them into these maximum security prisons. Then they, under the supervision of the guards, let the inmates scare them half to death! Every single one of these young men in the show I watched last night, they were full of themselves. They were cocky, they were smirking, thinking oh this is going to be fun! They were proud, they thought they knew what was going to happen. They thought oh these guys in there are going to like me! Then when they got in there, these guys with faces covered in tattoos got right up in their faces and said things I can't say in a Christian Bible Study. Over the period of the day you saw this hubris melt away, and they pressed these boys so hard that several of them started to weep. They were getting scared! But you know what was interesting to me? It was a terrible terrible place, it was hell. That prison was hell, and nobody wanted to be there. The prisoners didn't want to be there, and by the end of the day the young boys who thought it wouldn't be so bad, I guarantee you they didn't want to be there either.

Some people will respond to the love of God. Some people need to have the fear of God put in them. I believe the Holy Spirit will give you wisdom. He gave me wisdom. The man who used to do the mortgages for my real estate deals was not a believer. Many of us in the community had shared Christ over and over with Bill Frost. Some of you remember Bill. Bill always rejected the Gospel. He was always nice because he wanted to do business with you, but he wasn't interested in Jesus. One day, finally,

after having shared my faith and asking him questions about his faith, I had this impression that I should tell him about the parable where Jesus talks about the man over in hell and the man over here, Lazarus. He wanted to have Lazarus go and tell his family and he said, no they won't listen anyway. Then he asked him just to dip his finger in water and touch the tip of his tongue with it. I read that to Bill, and he was visibly shaken. A few months later, he died, and one of our members told the story at his funeral that he had received Jesus and become part of a church. I have no idea how that happened, but I do know that sometimes people need to be scared straight. That's why these prophetic kind of announcements are in here. Hell is in there not because it is something he wants to send a lot of people to. It said that the banquet hall was filled, that's what God wants to do. The only reason that these prophetic announcements of doom and gloom are in there is to get people to get scared straight. It's very helpful to me, and I hope it's very helpful to you, to understand that God is not doing all these things because he's angry like we would be angry. We see people rejecting him, we see people doing evil things, and we're angry at them. We want to tell them you're going to hell and we want them to go to there because they deserve to go there! But when God says you're going to hell, he never really wants you to go there. Do you understand that? When God says to somebody if you do that you're going to go to hell, he never really wants that! That's what a prophetic word is about, not to condemn, but to get them to turn around, turn to God and back to God. You get that?

So here's the Big Idea today. You're the one! You're the one that has been given the trust, the opportunity, the privilege of giving out these invitations. **Jesus wants you to make sure everyone knows they're invited.** However you go about making the invitation. You're the one that he is tapping to make sure that everybody understands that they're invited, and no matter what they've done, they can be forgiven. That's the deal!

Our Response To Such Extravagance

So what is our response to this extravagance? On a personal level, if you for any reason have not put on the wedding garment, then go ahead and do that now, do that today. Tell Jesus that you are so sorry for the way you've been living your life. Tell Jesus that you put your faith in him to forgive your sins, not in anything you're going to do to make yourself good enough, but just because of his gracious desire to save you. To have you be one of the people who fills up the banquet hall, that's all there is to it! Repentance and faith!

If you're part of the visible church, understand that that's important, but the invisible church is made of those people who have said they're sorry for their sins and put their faith in Jesus, and that's all that's required. Now you will of course want to do a lot more than that, because you're so grateful for what Jesus is doing, but that's all that's required. You don't want to be left speechless, guys. Nobody wants to be left speechless. But the Big Idea for today is that he wants you then to make sure that everybody else knows they're invited too! He really puts this on us, men are his method.

How To Talk About God's Generosity

So how can we talk about God's generosity with others? Well the first thing is that this information, this teaching, should deeply affect our attitude and motivation. Because we know that if somebody thinks they've put on Christ but they haven't really put on Christ, they are in deep danger. That should change our attitude, because we know that this invitation, no matter what anybody has done, the invitation is an open invitation that remains open until the person dies. Because of that we should have a very different attitude about it. Because we understand that when God says you're going to go to hell, he doesn't really want you to go to hell, then you should really not want them to go to hell either! It should affect our attitude about people, and then our motivation. Because we know the invitation is always open and all somebody has to do is simply be sorry for their sins and put their faith in Jesus! Because we know this and how much God wants to reach out to even the most hostile people, he wants to fill the banquet hall, then our motivation should be that since it's so liberally applied, we should be trying to apply this with the same openness.

Do you understand that in this text Jesus basically is saying I want everybody to know? I want good people to know, I want bad people to know, I want responders and non-responders to know, I want the hostile people to know, I want those people who are too busy in their business to know. I want everybody to know! Street people with dirty habits, I want everybody to know! So we should be deeply motivated, not only because that's what he wants but because we also know that when we talk about Jesus that the banquet hall is going to fill up. It is filling up now! It is very full now! Christianity is already the largest religion in the world because it's the most inclusive religion in the world! We welcome sinners, all of you come! Jesus is reinforcing this this morning!

Now many are called but few are chosen. We don't know who the elect are. We don't know who will say yes and who will say no. There's a lot of discussion on what it means when they say elect. What it means is that everyone who says yes to Jesus, they're part of the elect. Why they get elect, that's where the big debate is, but the point is that if somebody says yes to Jesus, then they're chosen! Whether it's by free will or sovereignty, God or some unique operation of the two of them, that's who the chosen are. Invite everyone, because they might be among the elect and you just don't know. That's why we want to issue the invitation to everyone.

There are multiple approaches. People embrace Christianity for just as many reasons as they reject it. There's not just one reason that people embrace Christianity, there's not just one reason why people reject it. They may embrace it because they are afraid of dying, they have true moral guilt, they're lonely, they feel an emptiness, or their own morality has betrayed them. There are many different reasons that people will be interested in this invitation, and so use multiple approaches. You might use books. I use books a lot, handing them out is kind of a non-threatening way to approach people in a

pseudo-Christian culture. You could invite them to the Bible Study, invite them to your church, getting training so that you'll know how to share your faith with people can help. I'll tell you, though, it's so easy, the question I've asked people for years and never had anybody not answer: Where are you on your spiritual journey? Hey Bill, good to meet you. You do your small talk, then ask are you a spiritual guy? Where are you at on your spiritual journey? Just ask people that and they want to talk about it. Everybody wants to talk about it, because it's the most innate part of who we are! We're spiritual beings created by God! So everybody wants to do this, so do that.

I'll tell you how important this is, because Jesus wants to make sure it's you who let's everybody know that they're invited. You're the one! So here's what we're going to do, and this is completely voluntary. This is a grace based Bible Study. From now on for six weeks we're going to be put a fine jar on the table where you pay your \$3 to come in. For every week that goes by that you don't talk to somebody about where they're at on their spiritual journey, you'll be fined \$1. For the next six weeks it's a \$1 fine! I mean if you can go a whole week without talking to somebody about their spiritual journey, forget \$1, it's \$100! But for this little experiment, it's \$1. Now this is completely voluntary, if you want to participate in this, go ahead. I'll tell you something else, if you invited somebody to come to this Bible Study, then you're covered that week, so you're going to get a \$3 discount. He's bucking for two weeks! I'll tell you what, smart guy, if you get someone in their 20's or 30's to come, you're good for two weeks. Put that down! If it's an old fart like you it's only one week! Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our dearest father, Lord, this parable is rich. I just know how it recalibrated me this week, and I pray it would recalibrate all of us, that all of us would see that this is an open invitation. The purpose of telling this is to inspire us to turn to you Jesus, and we thank you for that and this extravagant generosity that you offer us. We pray also that you would help each of us figure out how you would want us to respond. We pray all of that in Jesus' name, amen!