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Grounders:

What have you done with your invitation to the biggest celebration on earth? In a discussion with the religious, self-righteous leaders of His day, Jesus addressed this question in *The Parable of the Wedding Banquet* (Matt. 22:1-14).

The invitation rejected (Matt. 22:1—7). Jesus began the story by setting the scene. He described a king's invitation to a countrywide wedding celebration for his son. The party would last for several days—probably an entire week. The food would be exquisite. The hired chef was expected to perform at the top of his culinary game. He would have to return his fee plus a penalty if he embarrassed the king. Guests would drink undiluted wine from expensive glassware. Even the invitations were delivered with fanfare. Each guest received his invitation well in advance of the celebration with notice of others who had been invited. Either the day prior to or the day of the festivities, a second invitation was delivered by a messenger who brought a personal summons from the king.

Jesus' story brought a countercultural surprise. The people had rejected the king's first and second invitations with flippant excuses and some with fierce hatred. This was indicative of the Pharisees' response to Jesus. The story's enraged king brought forth death and fire—his most serious penalty for treason or revolt against his kingdom. Jesus' imagery probably referred to the eventual destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD.

What excuse are you using to reject the invitation to the kingdom of God? Is it control of your time, your talent, or your treasures? Is it manifested in an illicit relationship, a click, a drink, a smoke, a toke, a binge, a cut, a pop of a pill, a morsel of gossip, a rollercoaster commitment to a career, or even religion? Whatever the excuse, it flows from a proud heart.

The invitation readdressed (Matt. 22:8-10). The king had deemed the proud rejecters, the privileged few, as undeserving of his invitation (Matt. 22:8). These were Israel's religious, self-righteous leaders and any who had followed them in hardness of heart. Next, the king did something radically uncharacteristic of a monarch in Palestine. He invited everyone to the celebration, both good and bad. He commanded his servants to go to the street corners and invite "*Anyone you find*" (Matt. 22:9-10). Jesus had continually preached this availability of the kingdom of God to all sinners (Matt. 9:12-13).

Are you delivering God's open kingdom invitation to anyone you find? If not, you probably have rejected His invitation to the celebration of His kingdom inaugurated by the coming of His Son.

The invitation RSVP (Matt. 22:11-14). During the celebration, the king observed the guests who had jammed the wedding hall. To his dismay, he had found someone without proper wedding clothes. The king treated him in similar fashion to those who had rejected his invitations by ordering his death sentence.

At first glance, the sentence of the wedding guest who had come directly off the streets seems harsh. However, we have to view Jesus' story through the lens of His day. In Palestine, wedding clothes were customarily provided by the king (Gen. 45:22; Est.



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6:8-0). The man not wearing wedding clothes had been offered clean garments and yet had *proudly rejected* them—an external sign of his internal condition.

Our righteousness is like filthy rags to a holy God, the King. The only acceptable RSVP to the King's invitation to the celebration of His Son is *humility* (Matt. 18:1-4). We must humbly receive the righteous clothing of Christ (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:26-27).

Jesus concluded His parable with one of His most frequent sayings, "*For many are invited, but few are chosen*" (Matt. 22:14). *Many* is translated from the Greek word, *polloi*. This was a common word used as an inclusive expression in Israel. It meant *all*. The King invites all to the celebration of His Son, but He chooses only those who *humble* themselves to the righteous clothing of Christ.

How will you RSVP to the King's invitation? Will you proudly reject it with an excuse pulled from a list of self-absorption or will you humbly receive the righteous clothing of Christ who gave His life for you?

This week, confess your proud excuses for rejecting the King's invitation to His kingdom. Humbly receive the righteous clothing of Christ and invite anyone you find to the King's celebration. It won't be you, but Christ in you, making the invitation.

Inviting,
Mitch