



“Spiritual Spectators”

– the art of non-participatory Christianity

Matthew 22:1-14

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Matthew 22:1-14 *And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3 "and sent out*

his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. 4 "Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' 5 "But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. 6 "And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. 7 "But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. 8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 'Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' 10 "So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 "So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

At this point in the “Life and Times of Jesus” we see a notable increase in the rejection of Christ. Despite His message of love, redemption, and restoration, people were rejecting him and even *persecuting* Him with increasing regularity. The masses, as from the beginning, continued to come to Christ in great numbers. But those who believed themselves to have already ‘arrived’ at that magical yet arbitrary spiritual level, refused this Jesus and wanted Him quieted for the sake of the illusion of holy standing before God.

Jesus again paints a picture: one that was specifically designed for His listeners in that day. In this account Jesus tells the story of a king who had, at the wedding feast of his son, invited guests to join in the festivities and to celebrate with him. I wonder if you can imagine for a moment, actually receiving such an invitation. Few of us would in reality miss such an opportunity! And yet, we do indeed so often reject just such an invitation and participation all the time.

What happened here? Why did these people reject such an opportunity? One can, as the people who were invited did, come up with all sorts of reasons. But what did they all have in common? Was it not the fact that they all felt that the event... the invitation and the participation, was not of great value? They did not see the importance. They did not see such as more important and more fulfilling than whatever their personal alternative was.

The story rings just as current and pertinent today. For this parable is played out in our world... *even our spiritual world*, on a daily basis! Just as real is the oft reaction to the invitation, which is and WAS the persecution of the messenger, sometimes violently. While nobody has yet made an attempt on my life, the truth is a lot of folks react with the same incredulous disdain and bristled indignation at the invitation to that feast today. The same excuses ring out and the same familiar resignations are given as to why we cannot participate.

I am forever amazed at people's reaction to the invitation. Not just from the secular world but from the "church" world as well. *"Why does the pastor just keep pounding this issue?"* Hmmm...well apparently, since I am just following along chronologically with the scriptural account of Jesus' life and teaching, Jesus was relentlessly "pounding home" this issue long before I ever came around and got on the train!

Somewhere along the line we have gotten the idea that once I had that salvation "day of reckoning" that the war was over and that it was time to hit the beach for a long rest. Yet nothing could be further from the truth! In fact, at that point the battles have actually just begun and the journey has just started! We have been "reborn" to a new life, a new path, with new adventures, and new destinations. 1John 3:1 says *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"* Matthew 7:11 tells us how He loves to give good gifts to his children, and 1 Corinthians 2:9 says that *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."*

Those of us who don't adhere to that idea instead looked at the life of faith as if it was a hill to climb. So we climbed and climbed. We served, we learned, we gave. While such may not on the surface look incorrect, the problem stems from our belief that the hill has a top where we can rest and maybe build a house and pursue some of the worldly stuff we always wanted.

Now don't misunderstand what I am saying or for that matter what Christ is saying. This is not some sort of prohibition against hobbies, enjoying life, or having possessions. But it is also not permission to take a pass on the King's feast in lieu of any pursuit of the world *whatsoever*. That's what these folks did. And like us I bet they too would have rejected the overall premise of missing the king's feast, but they themselves individually felt they had a very real excuse for not attending. After all, *others will attend... there will be plenty of people there... no one will miss me. I have to work. I'm going to be on vacation. I've got a family obligation. I have a game...a class...a bill. I'll go next time...I'll attend next Sunday...I'll join next year.*

Scripture clearly and poignantly calls for us to 'have no other gods before Him.' And generally, 2017 gods aren't little wooden statues we set up in a shrine someplace. No, they tend today to be much shinier, much more physically pleasing, and certainly more expensive! And they are *hungry* gods for sure! They can consume time and money like a lion! We of course, cling to God's nature of grace as our license to stand down from actual participation in the king's banquet. Yet the king in our story had His limits, as did the 'king-of-kings' in 70 AD when He allowed the Roman emperor Titus and his army to burn Jerusalem to the ground, including the temple. 1.1 million people died in the siege.

But even without our participation, the King will not have an empty hall. Both then and now He has reached out to the "highways" of the world and invited all who would come to join Him. Even today, every alley, backroom, and distant corner of the world is being combed for all who will join the marriage supper of the lamb. And those who were first to be invited were excluded, and factually met a terrible end. How can we expect that the timeless God who "never changes" has somehow changed His M.O. and now deals with humanity differently?

I often step back from the ministry to view what is "on the table" and I am amazed. Those who at one time were living in obscure misery and sin, and are today on the front lines of ministry and the adventure that such metes out. And then there are those who at one time seemed to have it all...*the natural talent, the gifting, the open door*, who squandered it all and are languishing now in their pride and their hard hearts. But then, God is always looking for the *available* not so much the *able*, for He takes care of the equipping and the opportunity!

Despite the multitude of rejections, we are assured that the wedding hall will always be filled with His guests.

INDIANAPOLIS, IN — After calling off her wedding a week before the ceremony, a woman in Indianapolis found herself on the hook for a \$30,000 event at the Ritz Charles in Carmel, Indiana. So she decided to turn her personal heartbreak into an act of kindness, throwing a glitzy shindig at the Ritz for nearly 200 homeless people. Families poured into the glamorous Ritz Charles ballroom Saturday night for a meal of bourbon-glazed meatballs, goat cheese bruschetta, chicken with artichokes and Chardonnay cream sauce followed by wedding cake, according to the Indianapolis Star. According to the newspaper, Sarah Cummins, a 25-year-old pharmacy student at Purdue University and her fiancé had been planning their dream wedding for two years, but when Cummins called it off, they realized their contract was nonrefundable. "It was really devastating," Cummins told the newspaper. "I called everyone, canceled, apologized, cried, called vendors, cried some more and then I started feeling really sick about just throwing away all the food I ordered for the reception." That's when she reached out to local homeless shelters to put together a special night for the area's homeless population. With the help of shelter officials, she arranged a bus to shuttle families from the shelters to the Ritz Charles.

Officials at the Ritz Charles had never seen anything like it. Occasionally weddings are canceled at the venue, and couples all have different ways of dealing with it. "Some people throw parties, some completely walk away, but none have ever done anything this charitable," Maddie LaDow the Ritz Charles' event planner told the Indianapolis Star. Cummins' act of charity proved contagious, and several local businesses donated suits and dresses, according to NBC. Charlie Allen, who lives at the homeless mission wore a donated jacket to the dinner. "I didn't have a sport coat," he explained to NBC. "I think I look pretty nice in it." For her part, Cummins deflects any praise for her generosity. "I will at least have some kind of happy memory to pull from," she told the Indianapolis Star.

The reality is, many of us simply are satisfied and pacified to be mere watchers. I call it "Spiritual Voyeurism." Those who never participate beyond what they perceive as obligation, and thus never know anything beyond God's 'common grace' for humanity. Our culture is so often one of *observation*. We *watch* sports, but rarely participate. We watch reality shows, but never experience that reality. We read books, watch movies, facebook, send emails, online date, and play video games. We just rarely *engage* the world 'hands on.'

Throughout the world there are these competitions called "Tough Mudder." These are for people who want to get into the game and get dirty. I drove by the competition grounds one day at the local games and wondered what in the world was going on. It looked like a crazy scene, and the one thing I didn't see was bleachers. This wasn't a place for 'watchers.' In the TV series "Fringe" there were these time traveling people from the future who would travel back in time to be at great historical events. They were called the "watchers." They never altered anything...they just 'watched.' Is that where our world is going? Is this our future? Is this the future of the church?

It makes me so sad to see these spiritual 'watchers.' The joy and fulfillment that they miss out on. Photos of the wedding is enough for them, they don't need to attend. Years ago, I went to a big concert with Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan, and Tom Petty all together. Sitting in the stands wasn't good enough for us, so we jumped the wall and got down with the deadheads and danced. Watching never did it for me. On the 4th of July, the leadership went out the campground and boiled 60 pounds of crawfish and sweetcorn. 60 pounds of live crawfish shipped in from Louisiana! We did it, *because we could*. Jesus saved you to *participate* in the kingdom. He wants to interact with you and show you His glory up close and personal. He has invited us to the feast, so what do you say we go and eat till we drop? Some of you are so into the kingdom I'm convinced you will run ten steps into eternity before you even know you're dead. Some of you will arrive at the gate with a clicker in your hand...

Now maybe you're sitting there thinking "*hey, I participate!*" You serve your obligatory Covenant Member service time and attend after service fellowships. And that is enough. But is it? Is that all God wanted for you as his precious child? Or did He dream of great things for you His redeemed kid?

There was this man at the end of Jesus' story that came to the banquet, but it appears he gave it very little thought, or he believed he was fine just as he was. He was satisfied to "come as he was." He didn't see the need to dress the part. He didn't think he needed to *prepare*. He didn't need to invest in proper attire, or invest the time necessary to attend with respect and dignity. And so, even though he showed up, the king tossed him out and he did so with "great prejudice." So apparently, just 'showing up' doesn't count for much with the King! He actually wants his guests to be fully invested in the feast and to attend with the passion such a feast deserves.

There can be no missing His point here in verse 13. It is not that some have somehow worked diligently to meet the standard, but were rejected through some sort of grading system. Tradition tells us that the clothes worn to a wedding feast were provided by the groom. Indeed they are! This was only a matter of *not* wearing what was provided by the Lord! It was not an *error*, or a *shortcoming*. It was not that this individual did not *know* that he was to dress for the wedding! It can only mean that in his prideful heart, he believed himself to be *satisfactory*. He believed himself to be righteous enough and clean enough to come to this wedding. In his natural state, that could never be. His pride cost him eternity.

This man had failed to prepare and ready himself for his attendance. This is what Jesus had been trying to warn us of repeatedly, and now He declares the end of those who play the religious game and fail to truly embrace all that is expected of those who say "yes" to such an invitation. Paul the apostle...on his departure, stated "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*" (2Ti 4:7) He went on to say "*Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.*" Ahhh...what a party! I expect to have stories to tell you guys over and over like the old man I am...as the years of eternity pass unnoticed and we remember... "*we were there.*" We shared the faith and ran the field, and got dirty and bruised doing it! We danced to the music, shared the faith, and broke bread together.

We didn't just watch, we *participated*. How will you finish this journey? Will you regret that you didn't embrace the life He wanted to give you? Isaiah 61:10-11 says "*I am overwhelmed with joy in the LORD my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness. I am like a bridegroom in his wedding suit or a bride with her jewels. The Sovereign LORD will show his justice to the nations of the world. Everyone will praise him! His righteousness will be like a garden in early spring, with plants springing up everywhere.*"

Your invitation is here today. What will you do with it? "*Many are called, but few are chosen...*"