

“So the Wedding Hall Was Filled With Guests”

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1 Samuel 2:1-10

And Hannah prayed and said, “My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. “There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. **Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.** The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and on them he has set the world. **“He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.”**

Matthew 22:1-14

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³and sent his servants^[a] to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ ⁵But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸**Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ ¹⁰And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.**

¹¹“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, **‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”**

Here is the big idea for this morning: **God sees our hearts and judges rightly, so we cannot trust our appearance, our strength, or our righteousness; we must trust the King.** Our reading from today says, “Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed ... He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed”.

We are very good at judging by appearances. In school I liked to read before, after, and during classes. I would read on my way to each period, I would sit alone at lunch so I could read. People then assumed I was super smart and would ask for my notes or help on a test. Then we would find out together that I was actually not very smart. Later when I was old enough for jobs people told me they assumed I was some type of way because of my tattoos, piercings, and bad habits, so when they found out I was a Christian they were a little surprised. And all through my life I have heard all kinds of rumors and gossip that went around about me; some of them were blatant lies, others were based in half truths that would spiral out of control. I don't want to know what people's judgments were based on those rumors. We are very good at judging by appearances.

We see someone's success, their position, their reputation, their involvement in church, their morality, their confidence, or simply the way they carry themselves, and we make assumptions about what's going on inside. We don't know what God is doing in their heart. We don't know their faith, their struggles, their dependence on God, or what He is producing in them.

That's the problem with judging by appearances: we see what is visible, but God sees what is underneath. That's exactly what Hannah says in 1 Samuel 2:3: “*The LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.*” Hannah is reminding us that God doesn't evaluate people's actions the way we do. You can get away with hiding things from people. You can live a double life as a Christian who remains in sin in front of people. You can pretend everything is fine inside of your soul and your mind in front of people.

What Does God See?

Hannah has experienced something personally—God has lifted her from humiliation and barrenness—and now she's seeing a much bigger truth about God. Hannah shows us what happens when God weighs things differently than we do. Praise God he weighs things differently than we do. I have never been closer to God than I am now, and I know there is a great deal more I still have to grow in understanding and faith. I look back to when I was going on mission trips every year and bible study 2 times a week, and going to bible college, and how far I truly was from God, without even knowing it - after this season of growth for me I joke that I don't even

know if I knew Jesus before, because everything seems so new to me. I thought all kinds of things as a young Christian, and acted all types of ways, and my life was double-sided. If you judged me by my outward actions and appearance while I was at church you would have never guessed how much I was struggling with my faith back then - and conversely, if you judged my actions outside of church you could absolutely see my struggle, because I wasn't producing any fruit.

Hannah shows us a series of reversal of expectations. The mighty are brought down, the weak are strengthened, the hungry are filled, the barren becomes fruitful, the lowly are raised up, and the proud are humbled. What looks like strength to us may be weakness before God, and what looks insignificant to us may be precious in His sight. God humbled my pride and ignorance and brought me closer to himself. God fills my hunger for righteousness. God makes me fruitful when I am humble in His Spirit.

But Hannah's point isn't simply that God sometimes changes people's circumstances. God didn't just automatically turn me into a more humble person overnight. He whittled my pride away through conversation and circumstance. Hannah's deeper point is that God sees reality more clearly than we do. She also isn't saying, "God is good because He helps humble people", it's more that God possesses perfect knowledge and therefore evaluates human actions rightly. He correctly judged my actions as a christian 10 years ago as someone who was claiming the Lord's name in vain. And now he judges my soul in light of his righteousness. **The point of these images is to show that any ties or dependence you have on this world or yourself does nothing for you. These images show that humility and reliance on God for strength and provision is ultimately what God is bringing all of us towards claiming.**

And that's why Jesus' parable in Matthew 22 is so striking. Because Jesus tells us about a King who invites people to a wedding feast—and the people we would expect to come don't come. The people we wouldn't expect to be there are brought in. And then, even among those guests, the King sees something that everyone else apparently missed. God humbles the proud and exalts the humble. Two people can do exactly the same outward thing while having completely different hearts.

“By him actions are weighed.” **It doesn't say God ignores actions. God evaluates actions according to what is actually going on in the person. God doesn't *merely* look at our outward actions, but neither does He ignore them. He weighs our actions because He sees the heart behind them. He evaluated my heavy involvement in church and missions in light of my prideful heart. To answer the question ‘what does God see’, the answer is he sees our hearts and the actions that heart produces.**

Who Does God Invite?

In the parable: The king represents God, the son represents Christ, and the wedding feast represents the kingdom and its consummation. The servants represent God's messengers, sent to invite His chosen people; a people chosen to bring His light to the world so that all may know God. The people despised those leaders so, they killed the prophets, and God destroyed and scattered Israel. Now God sent word out to the gentiles through people like John the Baptist and Jesus and the disciples, again so that his light might be shown to all the world. And the Wedding Hall was filled with guests!

The king sends invitations. And the shocking thing isn't initially that people refuse. It's who refuses. These are people who were invited. They have a place. They have some relationship to the king's invitation. But when the invitation actually comes, they don't want it.

Why? Jesus says: "One went off to his farm, another to his business." They aren't necessarily doing obviously evil things. On the outside they're doing ordinary things. Farm. Business. Work. Life. And yet those ordinary things become more important than the King's invitation in their hearts.

Here is the great reversal again. The king says: "Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find." And suddenly the hall is filled with people who weren't the obvious candidates.

How Will *You* Respond?

Jesus doesn't end the story with: "Everyone came, so everything worked out." No.

The king walks into the wedding hall. And he sees someone without a wedding garment and throws him out, why? Because the garment (which could be interpreted as God's righteousness) was missing. A king would give his guests appropriate garments or there would be a dress code at the very least. This man appeared at the wedding, having been invited, without having accepted proper attire - he has not responded to the King on the King's terms. Whatever precisely the wedding garment represents, I think it represents God's righteousness, the point is that merely being present in the wedding hall isn't enough.

And the king asks: "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" And the man is speechless. He has no defense. He can't say: "But I was invited!" He can't say: "But I came to church!" He can't say: "But I knew about the king!" He can't say: "But look at all the good things I've done!"

Put both passages together and the challenge becomes: What does the King see when He looks at me? Am I missing my wedding garment? And I should quickly say that that's where the gospel becomes so beautiful. We cannot provide the righteousness that makes us worthy of the feast. We need the King to provide what we cannot provide for ourselves.

Jesus gives us two truths here: the invitation goes out broadly, and yet not everyone who receives the invitation responds rightly. Scripture calls us to take both truths seriously. **God graciously calls, and we are responsible for how we respond to that call.**

Jesus describes the place where the man is thrown as a place of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Jesus wants us to feel the seriousness of being separated from the King. This isn't a casual invitation with no consequences for rejecting it.

So the issue isn't, "Am I invited?" The question is, "How have I responded to the King?" God's grace is freely offered, but it is never something we should treat casually.

God humbled Himself, suffered, was rejected, and then was exalted. God calls us to humility because it is part of his character - the kingdom of God will be filled with people who reflect His character because it is filled with people who have accepted his righteousness to cover them. The God Hannah praises is the God Jesus reveals—the God who brings down the proud, raises the lowly, judges rightly, and establishes His anointed King. The King who invites us to the feast is the very King who humbled Himself for us. **So don't ask, "Am I humble enough?" instead it should be, "Am I trusting the King?" Because he has done enough!**

This isn't a sermon about becoming so humble that God will accept us. It's about recognizing that God's kingdom operates according to His standards, not ours, and therefore we must stop trusting ourselves and trust the King to cover us in his righteousness. God spent the whole Old Testament showing Israel and hammering into their heads that He was God, he was good, all they had to do was accept it, and in turn they would start to behave correctly, and benefit from his blessings. In the New Testament Jesus spent his ministry claiming that he was God and offering people forgiveness for the sins they committed against each other and God. He spent his ministry telling people that if they could just accept that he was God, no strings attached, that they would begin to behave correctly and benefit from his blessings. Our problem isn't that we aren't humble, it is that we cannot possibly be humble without even accepting the fact that God is God and he is good and we have a really hard time behaving correctly without his guidance.

You might wonder why I teach any of this on a Sunday morning, it seems I am preaching to the choir here - you're here to be fed by the Spirit this morning, so odds are you have accepted God's righteousness. But then you would be missing a deeper point. **That is that to accept God's**

righteousness is to surrender your own expectations, strengths, and abilities to God. When we enter power struggles with God in our minds and hearts the question we need to ask to evaluate ourselves is, “what is keeping me from trusting God’s sovereignty?”

Human strength cannot secure our standing before God. We need the King to provide the proper attire for us. The good news is that the King is not asking us to make ourselves worthy of the feast. He has prepared the feast. He has sent the invitation. He has provided what we could never provide for ourselves. So we don't boast about our strength, our morality, our church attendance, our reputation, or our good works. We come empty-handed. We come trusting the King and His Son. Trust that he has done enough!