

Don't Miss the Invitation

Exodus 32:1–14b & Matthew 22:1–14

Have you ever noticed that when people get impatient with God, we can come up with some pretty strange ideas? In Exodus 32, Moses has gone up the mountain to meet with God, and the Israelites are left waiting. They wait...and wait...and wait. Apparently, patience wasn't exactly their spiritual gift! Before long, they decide Moses isn't coming back, so they gather up their gold, melt it down, and make themselves a golden calf. Then they begin worshipping it. Now, just think about that for a minute. These are the same people who had watched God bring them out of Egypt. They had seen the Red Sea parted, experienced God's power, and watched God provide for them in the wilderness. Yet when God didn't seem to be moving quickly enough, they decided to find something else to put their trust in. I suppose we could say they wanted a God they could see, touch, and control. Unfortunately, we haven't completely outgrown that tendency.

Then we come to Matthew 22, where Jesus tells us about a king who prepares a wedding banquet for his son. The invitations go out, the food is ready, and the table is set. But the people who were invited don't come. They make excuses. One has a field to take care of, another has business to attend to, and others simply aren't interested. So the king sends his servants out into the streets and invites everybody they can find. The banquet that was intended for a particular group becomes an invitation extended to everyone.

At first, these two stories may seem like they don't have much in common. One is about a golden calf, and the other is about a wedding banquet. One group is worshipping the wrong thing, while the other group is too busy to show up for the right thing. But underneath both stories is the same problem: **people have forgotten who God is and allowed something else to become more important.** The Israelites replace God with something shiny that they can control. The people in Jesus' parable replace the king's invitation with their work, possessions, and busy lives. Different circumstances, but the same human tendency.

And if we're honest, we can do exactly the same thing. We may not melt down our jewelry and build a golden calf in the church parking lot—although I'm sure somebody would eventually find a way to put a church committee around it! But we all have things that can become more important to us than God. It might be money, possessions, our careers, our plans, our worries, or simply our desire to be in control. Sometimes our golden calf is nothing more than our own schedule. We can become so busy taking care of everything else that we don't have much time left for God.

That's why these two Scriptures belong together so beautifully. Exodus reminds us what happens when we **turn away from God and put our trust in something else.** Matthew reminds us what happens when we are **so distracted by everything else that we ignore God's invitation.** In both stories, God is calling people back.

And here's the encouraging part: God doesn't give up on them. In Exodus, Moses intercedes for the people. He pleads with God to remember the covenant and show mercy. And in Matthew,

when the original guests refuse the invitation, the king doesn't simply close the doors and say, "Fine, then!" Instead, the invitation goes out even farther. The servants are sent into the streets to invite everyone they can find. The table is still being prepared, and there is still room.

That is good news for us. God's invitation is not just for people who have everything figured out. It is for people who have made mistakes. It is for people who have wandered away. It is for people who have become distracted, discouraged, or simply too busy. God's invitation is for people who sometimes get things wrong—and, if we're honest, that includes all of us.

So perhaps the question these Scriptures ask us this week is simple: **What has become more important to us than God?** What golden calf have we been polishing? What excuse have we been using to avoid God's invitation? What has filled our lives so completely that we've forgotten to make room for the One who gave us those lives in the first place?

The good news is that it isn't too late. We can put down the golden calf. We can stop making excuses. We can slow down long enough to hear God's voice again. The table is still set. The invitation is still being offered. And God's grace is still reaching for us.

So let's remember who invited us. Let's put our trust back where it belongs. Let's make room for God in our schedules, our homes, our hearts, and our lives. Because God has prepared a table, God has extended the invitation, and by God's amazing grace, **there is still a place for us.**

And whatever we do, let's not be so busy polishing the golden calf that we miss the banquet!

-Pastor Thad