

## Heaven's Secrets: Invitation

It is not unusual for 5-year old boys to have a different idea about their friends than do their parents. Imagine you are asking Johnny for the list of his friends to invite to his birthday party, and you tell him he may invite his five favorite friends. Johnny says, "I want Billy at my party." Your brain freezes on the image of the time Billy essentially tore up your house, leaving you and Johnny to clean up after the storm. "Well, honey, I think Billy is busy that day. How about some other friends?", you fib, meaning, 'There is no way I am letting bad Billy attend this party!'

Party invitations are hard things for us to deal with, really from two perspectives. First, of course, there is the making up of the invitation list. What you want to do is be able to use some guidelines: we need people who will get along, and we cannot have someone who is going to insist on talking about 'that' all night, and on and on it goes, until you have what you hope is the perfect list for the perfect party. But, of course for your daughter's wedding you have to invite crazy Uncle Louie, no matter that he makes your daughter shudder in fear of embarrassment when he breaks into one of his off-color stories in his loud voice.

The second thing that makes party invitations hard is not coming up with an acceptable guest list; it is when you have to figure out how to get out of going to the party with people you just don't like to spend 3 hours with in a closed room. How do you politely tell your boss that you cannot make it because your spouse really doesn't like to be cornered by her boring husband's tenth telling of his kite-flying trip to Canada?

I read about this one cool app that some guy developed called "I got a thing." 'You know', the author begins, 'Your friend is moving Saturday. Are you free to help? The real answer is yes. The honest answer is no, because you're a human being and not a forklift. And also because you guys aren't really that close. If only you had something else planned so it would be easier to say no.

"Got This Thing" is just that. The Web app uses your phone's location to populate your Google calendar with local stuff that's happening, pulled from public event information on (the internet). Click on the "Get Busy" button and in an instant—your blank schedule turns into a confetti of things to do.'

In Jesus' story about the king who is throwing a great wedding banquet the guests didn't bother trying to populate their calendars with excuses. They just said 'no'. The king has invited all of his guests and no one shows up. I don't know

if they had the RSVP system back then, or maybe like today is it kind of an optional social custom, but in any event, the king doesn't get discouraged. He invites them a second time. He gives them the menu: 'beef and oxen', yum. And all of the fixins. I once saw a friend eat a buffalo burger. He did not look so good later that night. Not sure I am heading to the oxen serving table. Jesus might use a different food example today. Regardless, everything is ready, time to show up.

But they didn't go out 'I their got a thing' app. Nope. They just ignored the King and went back to work. In fact, some of them were so upset at the persistence of the servant doing the inviting that they beat him up and killed him. That did not turn out well for those folks. The king was not amused.

What's going on in this strange parable? Well, the king is of course God. The first set of servants doing the inviting are the prophets we read about in the Old Testament. The second set of servants are Jesus and his disciples. The people who are invited are the Jewish people and their religious leaders who not only ignore the invitations; they turn around and murder Jesus.

This story is easier to hear when we think it only applies to ancient Jewish religious leaders. It is much more difficult to hear once we understand it might

apply to us too. As in, how have you responded to the King's invitation to the Wedding Feast, to celebrate the marriage of Jesus and Christ's Church?

You see God wants to invite everyone, even bad Billy, the renegade fifty-year-old who was scaring poor Johnny's mother even when he was just five. That's what the king in the story does next. He sends his servants out to the street corners to invite everyone they can find, both the good and the bad, to fill up the wedding hall.

That would be like us saying, you know, with all the room we have here, let's go to Fountain Park Motel and bring them an invitation. How do you think that would go over? I guess it would depend on what's on the menu, right? Would they believe it is a free meal, a 'really good and good for you' feast?

We are the third set of servants, the Church of Jesus Christ, sent to bring the invitation of King Jesus to the street corners, inviting everyone we can find, even Billy the Bully. This is what we mean when we pray 'Your Kingdom come.'  
(HC)

Are we an answer to that prayer? The answer is 'yes.' We are finding creative ways to find the new 'street corners', which are virtual corners in the

internet cloud. We are sending invitations to anyone who will click on the King's invitation.

One of our members emailed last week suggesting we do a prize contest for the person who invites the most people to sign up for our livestream worship. I wasn't sure if he thought I should be the one paying for the prize trip to the Virgin Islands. But the point is, let's encourage invitations.

For example, though we cannot do the FirstHope Community Meal right now, we are trying to assemble a team of 10 adults and 10 youth who will go pack food boxes in a safe setting at the Food Bank. Are you ready to go to that street corner to announce the King's invitation to the Banquet?

Tomorrow night our Consistory is considering partnering with a new ministry opportunity that could present us with a new street corner to visit in town, where those needing housing can be served an invitation.

That's then the first half of the Big Idea I want you to take home this week. Allow the Spirit to transform you so that you are willing to deliver the King's invitation to the Banquet, the kingdom of heaven, at new street corners and to everyone you meet.

But the story takes another strange turn at the end. There is one fella at the party who doesn't have on the proper wedding attire, and he gets tossed out by the king. What did he do wrong? What does it mean to be dressed properly for the King's Banquet?



You maybe have seen the PBS series Downton Abbey. Well, in that huge house a wealthy family is served by butlers and maids. Each evening the staff rings the dressing gong. A gong is struck, reverberating its' sound through the entire mansion, telling the family they need to go to their rooms to put on their evening tuxedos and formal gowns, so they are properly dressed for dinner. And when a guest shows up in a suit instead of a tux, well, you would think they had just committed one of the seven deadly sins.

Men, have you ever had your wife say to you, 'Are you wearing that to the party?', which of course means, 'You are not wearing that to the party.' Well, Jesus tells us what we need to wear. Let me tell you about these wedding gowns.

First, they are free. Jesus bought them for us.

Second, they are made by the King himself.

Third, they are available to everyone, one size fits all, and fits perfectly.

Fourth, they are light as a feather, expanding waistlines, flowing lines for dancing, easy movement for after dinner walks along the lake. These gowns are made of amazing grace, they make a most sweet sound.



So, you see the problem, right? Everyone is invited to the King's feast. Everyone, just as you are. But then you need to allow the Dresser, the Spirit, to put you into the wedding gown. That is the beautiful transformation that happens when you respond to the dressing gong, go to your prayer closet, speaking your repentance, allowing the King to turn you around, wrapping you in the lightest, whitest robe of glory which all humankind is invited to put on.

That, friends, is the second half of this secret to being a citizen of heaven. Invitation requires us to not only be willing to deliver the invitations, but when we receive them we are to say 'Yes, Jesus, I am coming now, I have heard your call, and I am on my way to be changed into the dinner companion who by grace alone can be seated at the King's Table, dressed in royal robes.

Many are invited, few are chosen. Why? Because few are willing to be changed. Come just as you are but enter transformed into the one God designed you to be.

What Jesus teaches us is that the King's wedding feast is going to happen. The dining hall will be filled. The King is exceedingly patient, but at some point our delay, our excuses, our attempts to tell Jesus 'I want to be there, really, but "I got a thing"', at some point the doors are closing and the party is starting with our without us.

Enough with the excuses already. The dinner gong is ringing, don't you hear it? Come in, get dressed in the free gown of grace, and take your seat at the table.

You are invited. Say 'yes' today! And don't forget to get dressed.