

STUDY ON THE PARABLES OF SALVATION

Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Read Matthew 22:1-14

This parable is all too clear. It speaks of God's gracious invitation to us in the gospel and of the indifferent and arrogant way men and women sometimes respond to it. It speaks of hell, the end of those who attempt to enter the king's presence without the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness. Wise is the man or woman who learns from it.

This parable occurs in more than one place and in slightly different form in each place. The fullest form is in Matthew, so we will use Matthew as a starting point. But it also occurs in Luke 14: 15-24 which contains elaboration on the excuses of those who refused the king's invitation.

THOSE WHO WOULD NOT COME

The story begins with a certain king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son and sent servants to those who had been invited to tell them that the feast was now ready and that they should come. But they refused to come. Their refusal was a great insult, of course. It was dishonouring to the son, the king, and even to the servants who carried the king's message. But the king did not get angry. Instead, he sent other servants to repeat the invitation: *"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.""* (v4)

Again, they refused, but this time, those who had been invited did not merely reject the invitation. They also mistreated the messengers and killed some of them. The king sent an army to destroy the murderers and burn their city. After that, he invited others. The thing that makes the parable so easy to understand is that nearly every part is discussed in plain terms elsewhere. The king is God, sitting upon the throne of the universe. the son is His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The messengers are the prophets and early preachers of the gospel. The banquet is the marriage supper of the Lamb. Those to whom the gospel was first preached were Jews and those who actually came to the banquet were Gentiles, as is taught in John 1:11- 12 – *"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name"*

As with the preceding parable, this is one of a special class of parables that deals with the refusal of Israel to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ when He came first to His own people. That was a major issue during the lifetime of the Lord, as well as afterward, so it is not surprising to find a number of parables dealing with it either directly or alluding to it indirectly. The character of the older son in the parable of the prodigal represents Israel (as well as those Gentiles who possess the same spirit of resentment). So, do those workers in the vineyard who were hired early but were paid the same as those who came late. So does the Pharisee in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18). Those stories explore the thinking of people who supposed they had worked long and faithfully for God, unlike others, and who were envious and resentful when the grace of God was shown to those, they considered unworthy.

The unique element in the parable before us is the wilful refusal of those who were invited. It was not that they could not come. Rather, they would not. The reason for their refusal is not totally spelled out, but it is suggested in the way the servants were treated. They *"seized"* the servants, *"treated them shamefully, and killed them"* (v6).

If the invited guests felt that way toward the servants, they obviously felt that way toward the king who had sent them and would have seized, mistreated, and killed him if they could have. In other words, they would not come because they actually despised the king and were hostile to him.

Jesus did not hide God's view of the Pharisees and the Jews of His day... and this parable was exposing their hearts. In Matthew 23:29-32, 34-35, 37, Jesus pronounces woes on them:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ “Therefore, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt... Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar... “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matthew 23:29-32, 34-35, 37)

We know that at the last those rebellious subjects of the King of heaven killed Christ. As Stephen later put it, *“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” (Acts 7:52-53)*

Today we are not so inclined to kill prophets. But if we are honest, we will admit that the same spirit is present among many of our contemporaries and that they and others sometimes dispose of God's messengers by ridicule or neglect, if not by more violent hostility.

Some who are invited to the gospel banquet do not openly express their hatred of the one who gives it, but they make excuses. As the parable says, they go off *“one to his farm, another to his business”*. Jesus elaborates that point in Luke's version of the parable.

“But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’ Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’” (Luke 14: 18- 20).

Each of those excuses is trifling. As Jesus tells it, it is not a case of a man on his deathbed, unable to move, nor a woman's being kept at home by a violent husband. Not one of their excuses has any weight at all. So, what if a man had just bought a field? There is no reason why he would have had to see it on that particular day and so miss the banquet. The field would wait. There was no reason why the second person had to try out his oxen at that time. Even the excuse about marriage had no weight. Are we to think that a new bride would be unwelcome at a feast to which her husband had been invited?

Besides that, the invitation was not the first they had received. In both versions of the parable, Jesus speaks of an invitation to those who had already been invited. That is, the invitations had already been sent out. There was no excuse for the guests to have failed in arranging their schedules accordingly. When the final summons came, they should have been anticipating the festivities eagerly.

Many who reject the gospel invitation today have equally flimsy excuses and will rightly incur the King's wrath. They say they are too busy for spiritual things. They say they have fields or patients or bonds or whatever it is that imprisons their souls and keeps them from faith in Him who brings salvation.

Do you fit that pattern? Are you more interested in your good credit than in Christ? Do you read your Bible? You do not have to murder a prophet to miss out. Don't let your chance for repentance pass by!

THOSE WHO CAME

The King invites as many as would come to the feast (vv. 8-10).

Because the ones who were invited refused to come, the king now turns to others. He sends his servants out into the streets to invite all that they could find, whether good or bad. The banquet hall was soon filled with people wanting to have a share in the King's wedding feast for his Son. The call is not for the wise and the learned, certainly not for the smug and self-righteous, but for all who would come. He came into the world to seek and save that which was lost, not those who had rigorously kept the Law (or who said they did) and could claim to have the righteousness to enter the Messianic banquet. What is drawn into the hall are both good and bad people--but all-in need of God's invitation to escape the sin and bondage of this world.

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

THE MAN WITHOUT A GARMENT

The king expels anyone who did not prepare properly (vv. 11-13).

The parable tells how the King arrived to see the guests who wanted to be at the wedding feast for the Son. But he found a man who was not wearing the proper wedding clothes. The King addressed him as "Friend"--but do not be misled by this word in Jesus' teaching, for when He called someone "friend" it was always in an ironic sense and a word of judgment followed. Whenever Jesus called anyone "Friend," he usually made it clear they were not. Examples:

"But he answered one of them and said, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?'" (Matthew 20:13)

"Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why have you come?'" Then they came and laid hands-on Jesus and took Him." (Matthew 26:49-50)

In our story, the King wanted to know how the man got in without the proper attire, but the man was speechless, a sign of his guilt. Generally, there was an invitation to the banquet, but not all who responded to the invitation were allowed to remain. The King had the man without the proper attire tied and cast out into the darkness, where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The outcome of this man's situation informs us of the true meaning of the symbolism of this garment. We have to say that the proper attire would correspond to all that Jesus said was required for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven--true repentance for sin and faith in Christ, and then a commitment to love and obey the Lord as evidence of saving faith. In Jesus' day, many people certainly wanted to enter the kingdom, but when Jesus started telling them to come to him and take his yoke upon them and learn of him, they went away. And in the day of judgment many will claim to have done good deeds, but Jesus will turn them away because they will not have dealt properly with the basic issue of salvation--they will not be prepared properly and spiritually to be received by the King at the wedding of the Son.

CONCLUSION

The lesson closes with an explanation ("for"). Many are "**called**," but few are **chosen**. The word "many" is not intended to be a restricted number; it is used several times in Isaiah 53 to speak of those for whom

Christ poured out his blood. The invitation has gone out to all who care to listen, but some just refused, and some wanted to come but refused to submit to the requirements of entrance into the kingdom. So, none of these will be present in the kingdom. Those Jesus refers to as "**chosen**" are the people who respond to the invitation to come and respond in the proper manner so that they are prepared to enter the kingdom.