

An Exposition of the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14)

By James Moriello, August 10, 2013

Matthew 22

New King James Version (NKJV)

The Parable of the Wedding Feast

22 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, ³and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. ⁴Again, 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.”’ ⁵But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. ⁶And the rest seized his servants, treated *them* spitefully, and killed *them*. ⁷But when the king heard *about it*, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ ¹⁰So 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. ¹²So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then 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.”

Background

In Bible times, the wedding day was typically in the fall after the harvest had been brought in. It was an occasion for family, friends, and sometimes entire villages to have a welcome respite from the daily toil. All invited guests were expected to attend, and to show up in special dress suitable for the occasion, a wedding garment. To refuse an invitation, or to show up improperly dressed, was considered insulting and disrespectful. The situation presented by the Lord in this parable would therefore be thought ludicrous in the minds of His hearers. It was something that the Pharisees would never do had they been invited by men to a wedding, yet they were doing just that when invited by God to a wedding (by way of similitude).

Exposition

Verse 1

“Jesus answered” their thoughts, as a question had not been asked of him specifically.

“By parables” he spoke, this being the third kingdom parable, following the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32), and the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers (Matthew 21:33-46).

Verse 2

“The kingdom of heaven is like” gives the subject matter that the parable is to be applied to.

“Arranged a marriage for his son” is consistent with the custom of the day of a dowry being paid by the father of the groom to secure a wife for his son. This was known as the “bride price”. We perceive here that God the Father is the King, God the Son is the groom, and the bride price that would be paid was His own blood (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Verse 3

“His servants” are the Old Testament prophets.

“Those who were invited to the wedding” are the Jews who had been invited both in times past and in Jesus’ day.

“They were not willing to come.” God’s invitation, and offer of the kingdom, was legitimate. They chose to reject God’s invitation.

Verse 4

“Again, he sent out other servants.” These are the last of the Old Testament prophets (e.g. John the Baptist), Jesus Christ Himself, and His disciples (Matthew 10:5-15).

“Those who were invited”, the Jews, receive a reminder about the invitation. Perhaps they had overlooked it the first time, or maybe they would have a change of heart.

“All things are ready.” The kingdom of heaven had come upon the earth, for King Jesus was here now.

Verse 5

“But they made light of it and went their ways”, because they were more concerned with earthly cares than spiritual ones. This was the reaction of the common people to the gospel.

Verse 6

“And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them”. This was the reaction of the Jewish authorities to their Messiah. It was the same reaction that their fathers had with regard to many of the Old Testament prophets (Matthew 23:31-36).

Verse 7

“But when the king heard about it, he was furious”. His good had been rewarded with evil.

“Those murderers” refers to the murders of God’s people in times past, but also speaks prophetically of the fact that they would murder the Son of God.

“And burned up their city”, is a prophetic reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD (Cf. Matthew 21:41, 24:1-2).

Verse 8

“The wedding is ready.” Nevertheless, the kingdom of heaven would continue to be ushered in.

“Those who were invited were not worthy”, for they had rejected the message.

Verse 9

“Go into the highways”; that is, to the Gentiles. The Lord, having been rejected by His own people, would now invite the Gentiles to the wedding feast (Romans 11:11-12). These are the ones that Jesus called “other sheep...which are not of this fold” (John 10:16).

“As many as you find, invite to the wedding.” The invitation is to all, and is based upon the generosity of the king, not the merits of the guests.

Verse 10

“Both bad and good” were brought into the banquet hall. This is relatively speaking. Some who were called were “devout Greeks” (Acts 17:4). Others were living lives characterized by the worst kinds of debauchery (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The Lord does not discriminate based upon human merits, for such merits are worthless in His sight (Isaiah 64:6).

“And the wedding hall was filled with guests.” Many people will accept the gracious invitation of the king.

Verse 11

“The king came in to see the guests”, because he had a personal interest in each one.

“He saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment.” This was an insult to the king. The wedding garment required to attend the feast in the kingdom of heaven is salvation, and this man showed up without it, thinking that this would be acceptable (Ephesians 4:24). This man typifies those who try to enter the kingdom of heaven through some means other than Jesus Christ and His sacrifice (John 10:1, 14:6). He stuck out like a sore thumb, and the king addressed him right away, before the festivities even began.

Verse 12

“And he was speechless.” This was the response of the man to the king’s query. The man stood convicted by his own conscience. Those who frequent the house of worship on earth without ever accepting Jesus Christ into the heart will have nothing to say when they meet God face to face. This applies to the Jews who had rejected God’s offer in Bible times, and it also applies to all men and women in this present church age.

Verse 13

“The servants”, which represent God’s angels, remove the man from the wedding hall.

“Cast him into outer darkness.” God is light, and His gospel is light. Separation from God and rejection of His gospel is darkness.

“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In hell, people will weep with sorrow at their plight, and regret their rejection of God’s gracious offer of salvation. They will also gnash their teeth in rage, for there is no peace there.

Verse 14

“For many are called, but few are chosen.” The invitation to salvation is rejected outright by some. Others wish salvation on their own terms, and are found wanting. Relatively few are chosen to salvation, but God knows each by name (Ephesians 1:4; John 15:16; Matthew 10:30). “Narrow is the gate, and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:14).