

Series Kingdom Parables

This Message The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Scripture Matthew 22:1-14

The two previous parables are closely connected with the Parable of the Wedding Banquet. All three of the parables were told on the same occasion — on the Monday of Passover week. Jesus made His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem on Sunday. On Monday He entered the temple area and drove out all the merchants who were buying and selling. The parables were spoken to the religious leaders after they confronted Jesus about His actions.

In the first parable, Jesus called attention to the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. They loudly, publically, and frequently proclaimed their commitment to God but they seldom did what God wanted them to do. Jesus used the parable to tell the religious leaders that they were unqualified to enter the kingdom of God.

In the second parable, Jesus pointed out the consequences of rebellion against God and the rejection of God's Son. In spite of the efforts of rebellious leaders in the Old Testament to thwart the purposes of God, and the efforts of those who were currently listening to Him, Jesus wanted everyone to know that the purposes of God would be accomplished. Even though the leaders would succeed in killing God's Son, the Son would become the "cornerstone" of God's kingdom.

Furthermore, Jesus wanted His listeners to know that the kingdom would be taken away from the people of Israel and given to other people who would produce kingdom fruits. Because of Israel's rejection of the Messiah, God was going to alter the method by which He was going to accomplish His purposes.

In the first parable Jesus called attention to the obstinate refusal of the religious leaders to accept the teaching of those who revealed the "way of righteousness." In the second parable, Jesus highlighted the deliberate refusal of the religious leaders to fulfill their covenant responsibilities as the people of God.

When the religious leaders eventually caught on to the fact that Jesus was talking specifically about them, they were barely able to conceal their anger and hostility toward Jesus. Only the presence of many other people in the temple court prevented them from immediately arresting Him. Jesus did not back down in the face of their belligerence. He immediately told them another parable in order to call attention to their evil attitudes. By means of this third parable, Jesus focused on the fundamental problem of the religious leaders — their rebellious attitudes and unwillingness to obey God.

Read Matthew 22:1-10

This parable depicts the contempt of the nation of Israel for God's grace. God's grace was illustrated by His invitation to various individuals to enjoy a festive banquet in His presence. A royal wedding banquet would be an especially important occasion. Receiving an invitation from a king would be a great honor. Most people would be very glad to receive such an invitation and they would undoubtedly make every effort to attend. To decline a personal invitation from the king would be insulting and inexcusable. Refusal to attend would convey the idea that neither the host nor the honored guest were worthy of time and attention, and such a refusal would indicate the lack of loyalty and allegiance of the invitee.

Typically, invitations would be sent out several days before of the celebration. In the absence of a postal system and internet, the host would send out servants to personally announce the coming event. In telling this parable, Jesus assumed that this had already occurred. He said nothing about the elaborate preparations that went into the staging of the feast. In verse 3 the servants were sent out to announce that the day of celebration had arrived and that everything was ready for the guests to appear.

Unfortunately, none of the invitees showed up. Verse 3 explains that they refused to go to the feast. The king therefore sent out more servants to make sure that everyone was informed about the banquet. The servants gave details about the extensive preparations: "the oxen and fattened cattle had been butchered, and everything was ready" and waiting for participants.

In spite of the urgent summons, the invitees paid no attention to the servants. They stayed away from the festivities for mundane and selfish reasons. Some went to work in their fields; others engaged in routine business activities. Some were so negative about the event that they mistreated the servants and killed them. The special occasion which had been planned by the king to be a time of gracious fellowship, generous sharing, and joyous celebration had turned into a violent rejection of his efforts. It was not surprising that the king reacted so vigorously against his ungrateful subjects. He sent out his soldiers to destroy the murderers and to burn their city.

Let me hit the pause button here in order to comment on verses 1 through 7. In view of the first two parables, all the individuals who were listening to Jesus would have understood that He was again describing the Old Testament history of Israel. All Israelites were aware that their ancestors had rebelliously rejected the ways of God, and mistreated the prophets that God had sent to call the people back to Himself.

Like the individuals mentioned by Jesus in the parable, the Old Testament Israelites had reacted with attitudes ranging from indifference to open hostility. Indifference to God was evidenced when the people displayed more interest in earthly matters than the ways of God — when they demonstrated more concern about material things than spiritual. Active hostility was evident when the prophets of God were mistreated and killed.

Those same attitudes had been manifested against John the Baptist, which Jesus described in parable one. The same unaccepting and hateful attitudes had been and were being manifested against Jesus. The religious leaders had accepted the teachings of neither John nor of Jesus even though, through them, “the way of righteousness” had been described and demonstrated to the people of Israel.

If the Israelites were honest, they had to acknowledge the patience of God who repeatedly tried to draw people into His presence. There had been repeated invitations issued over many centuries. In spite of rejection after rejection, God did not pour out His wrath on those who obstinately refused to cooperate with Him.

At least, He did not until the people refused to honor His Son. That's when His incredible patience finally ran out. That's one of the themes of this parable. The celebration of God's Son was to be the most important event in the history of humanity. When God's own called-out people refused to take part in His plans and purposes, God had no choice but to deal with them in a heavy-handed way. The rejection of God's Son represented the ultimate and final rebellion to God's sovereign authority and to His gracious offer for the Israelites to meet with Him in fellowship.

Just like the Israelites of old and the Israelites of Jesus' time, many believers today ignore and refuse the benefits of God's grace. In the busyness of their lives and their concerns for earthly living, they are in danger of not hearing the appeals that God makes to take part in His times of celebration. They have forgotten one of the most important Biblical statements made about God. Back in the book of Deuteronomy, as Moses was preparing the Israelites to enter the promised land, he told them, "Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; ... for the LORD your God is a consuming fire" (*Deuteronomy 4:23-24*). Moses was warning the people about the serious consequences of ignoring and rejecting God, a warning that some believers need to take seriously.

Jesus had already announced, in parable two, that the evil tenants, who represented the religious leaders, would be killed and be replaced by others who would produce acceptable fruit for the landowner. He summed up the parable by saying, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to others." Today's parable illustrates this conclusion. Notice what happened in verses 8 through 10 after the soldiers of the king destroyed the rebellious murderers.

The king sent his servants into the streets to invite to the banquet everyone they could find. And what a variety of people were gathered together. The implication is that the guests came from near and far, and were of the underprivileged ranks of society. They were even described as "good and bad," a description of their earthly behavior. The key point here is that they responded to the invitation, thus proving that they were more worthy to be guests at the banquet than the covenanted people of God. The "wedding hall was filled with guests," and the Son was properly celebrated. The king's plan that his son should have a proper celebration was fulfilled.

Among the “good and bad” individuals who responded to the message of the kingdom given by John the Baptizer and Jesus were the tax-collectors and prostitutes mentioned in parable number one. Jesus said that such people would enter the kingdom ahead of Israel’s religious leaders. After the establishment of the Church on the day of Pentecost, the group of outsiders who would join the banquet would be Gentiles. The king in this parable was eager to share his grace and benevolence with everyone who responded to his invitation. The history of the past 2000 years indicates that sinners from many, many ethnic groups and walks of life have responded affirmatively to God’s invitation to come into His presence and celebrate.

The parable could have ended at this point, but Jesus added another segment — what is essentially a fourth parable in the sequence.

Read Matthew 22:11-14

Commentators have raised lots of questions about these verses, and some assumptions have to be made about the context in order to get at the meaning. On a quick reading, the added verses are a logical continuation of the preceding description. Think about verses 8 – 10. The guests at the banquet had been rushed from the streets into the banquet hall. They would not have had adequate time to change from their every-day work clothes or to otherwise prepare themselves for the sumptuous royal surroundings in which they found themselves.

According to the parable, when the king came into the banquet hall to mingle among the guests, “he noticed a man who was not wearing wedding clothes.” The most common interpretation of this verse assumes that all the other guests had been provided a special garment to wear during the time they were at the banquet. Such robes were often offered to individuals before they entered into the presence of royalty, and, according to some ancient reports, robes were also offered to the guests of very important and wealthy hosts on the occasion of very special events, such as a royal wedding celebration.

The failure of the man to put on appropriate wedding clothes, whether his own or those provided by the host, would have been considered to be discourteous and insulting behavior. Hence the king asked, “How did you get in here without wedding clothes?” Obviously, the king expected everyone in the hall to be dressed appropriately. After all, they were in the presence of the king and His Son.

Most interpreters state that the wedding garment is a picture of the righteousness that God requires of everyone who enters into His presence. This is exactly what Scripture states. God, by grace, first extends His invitation to undeserving sinners, and then, after they accept the invitation, God clothes them with His righteousness. The theological term is “imputes.” God imputes or credits His righteousness to those who obey Him and follow His ways.

One verse which describes this concept is in Revelation, when, at the end of this age, the followers of Christ proclaim, “The Lord God Almighty reigns. ... The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” And then this explanation is added, “Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints” (*Revelation 19:7-8*).

An Old Testament reference to the robe of righteousness is in Isaiah, “I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness” (*Isaiah 61:10*).

The Apostle Paul used this imagery of new clothing when he wrote in one of his letters, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self (your old worldly clothes), which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self (new spiritual clothes), created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (*Ephesians 4:22-24*).

The garment of righteousness symbolizes forgiveness and justification, and indicates that the wearer is qualified to be in the presence of God. The person who is not forgiven and justified cannot be in the presence of God. People who do not avail themselves of the provisions of God’s grace can only stand in speechless silence, like the man in the parable. The phrase literally means that they are “put to silence.” The man without the wedding clothes was clearly out of place. Without the garments of the king, he had only his covering of self-righteousness, and His self-righteousness was unacceptable to the king.

In all likelihood, Jesus was pointing out that the religious leaders, for all their presumption about being in God's favor and being eligible to be at God's table, would actually be among those to be cast into the darkness. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had stated, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of the Father" (*Matthew 7:21*). That is the message that every religious person needs to remember and heed. All of us require God's robe of righteousness, and that robe is given to those who "do the will of the Father."

Both the first and last verses of the parable refer to people who are invited to the banquet of the king in order to honor the Son. In the world today, many are invited to come to Jesus, but relatively few people respond to the offer of salvation. And even among those who accept the invitation, there are those who do not demonstrate the qualities of a changed godly life. Many are invited, but the election of God is proven when the person lives in obedience to God. The invited guest who does not submit to the norms of God's kingdom will be rejected.

The Apostle Peter described God's elect people as those "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (*1 Peter 1:2*). All members of the Trinity have a hand in the calling of kingdom people. The Father chooses according to His foreknowledge. The Spirit sanctifies or sets apart those who are chosen. Jesus Christ sprinkles them with His sacrificial blood. Believers are "elected," "sanctified," and "sprinkled" for a purpose — that they might be "obedient to Jesus Christ." That's the kind of people we must be.

We have been invited to God's banquet table, and to be there we must be dressed appropriately with God's own righteousness.

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