

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet
Matthew 22:1-14
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The parable of the wedding banquet is the third of a series of three parables that Jesus spoke to the chief priests and elders in response to their question regarding His authority, *“By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”* (Matthew 21:23). Jesus refused to answer their question because it was insincere and lacking faith, and led Him to tell them the parable of the two sons (21:28-32), the parable of the tenant farmers (21:33-46), and now this parable.

The point of the first parable, the parable of the two sons, was to show the son who claimed to do the will of his father and did not, was like the religious leaders, while the son who initially rejected, repented and did the will of his father was like the tax collectors and prostitutes who will enter the kingdom of God.

The point of the second parable, the parable of the tenant farmers (21:33-46), was to show the evil tenant farmers who attacked the representatives of the landowner who came for the produce of the vineyard were like the Jews who have resisted the prophets of God throughout their history, and now who are plotting against the Son of God.

This third parable further illustrates the failure of the nation by emphasizing the replacement of Jews in God’s plan by the church, including Gentiles. This idea was introduced by Jesus when He said, *“Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you”* (Matthew 21:31), and *“Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it”* (Matthew 21:43).

There is a progression in time with the first parable referring to John the Baptist (21:32), the second parable about the rejection of Jesus (21:42), and the third parable about the establishment of the church. John came to prepare the nation for Jesus, and Jesus came to be rejected by the nation, leading to the kingdom of God going to the Gentiles, as predicted in the Old Testament. The Jews saw the kingdom of God as being for the Jews, with some Gentile proselytes to Judaism. Jesus’ message was the kingdom would be taken from them and given to a people producing fruitfulness.

Many people view a similar parable spoken by Jesus in Luke 14:16-24 to be Luke's version of this same parable. However, these should be considered two separate parables. First, Jesus spoke this parable on the Wednesday before His Friday crucifixion, while the Luke 14 parable was spoken in "*the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath*" (Luke 14:1), as He was headed to Jerusalem.

Also, the content of the two parables have many differences. Matthew 22 includes a king who gave a wedding banquet for His son, not a man who invited guests to a dinner. In Matthew, there are two distinct invitations, which are refused by people who become violent. In Matthew, judgment includes destruction.

These differences are significant and those that view them as two versions of the same parable presuppose that Matthew and Luke are basing their text off an alleged common source and make their own deviations or are due to later editing. This is an unnecessarily low view of the inspiration of these Gospels and there is no reason to avoid the obvious consideration that these are two distinct historical moments in the teaching ministry of Jesus.

The first invitation and rejection (22:1-3)

Matthew's introduction to this parable, "*Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying,*" is consistent with the words of Jesus in the last parable, "*Listen to another parable*" (Matthew 21:33). This is a trilogy of parables, each designed to counter the view of the chief priests and elders, who considered themselves as having authority over the religious affairs of the people.

This parable is addressed to "them." In context, the antecedent are the chief priests and Pharisees from 21:45-46. In their arrogance, "*they sought to seize Him*" (21:46), but they were too fearful to do what they wished. Yet, there was a crowd of people listening to His words (Luke 20:9).

Jesus used this parable to teach about the kingdom of heaven. As with the last parable, the son refers to Jesus Himself. Many New Testament texts use the imagery of a bridegroom to refer to the Messiah (Matthew 9:15; 25:1; John 3:29; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 21:2, 9). This parable used the wedding culture of first century Judaism to describe the enthusiasm that one ought to have toward the good news of Jesus Christ. As the king represents the Father, and the son represents Jesus, those who are invited to the wedding feast are the religious leaders who "*were unwilling to come.*"

The second invitation and rejection (22:4-6)

The unresponsive invited guests are like the uncooperative farmers of the previous parable of the tenant farmers. Just as in the parable of the tenant farmers, there is a second effort made to encourage the invited guests to accept the invitation. The slaves in this second invitation explain the benefits of attendance, *“Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready;”* There has been preparation and all is ready. In other words, the benefits of attending the banquet are great, just as the benefits of the kingdom of God are great.

The gracefulness of the king is met with indifference by some, who *“paid no attention and went their way.”* This apathy to the invitation refers to the Jews of Jesus’ day who didn’t bother to listen to Him, follow Him and obey His commandments. By extension, people today who are disinterested in the message of the Gospel are likewise destined for destruction, for *“how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation”* (Hebrews 2:3).

Others had competing interests, *“one to his own farm, another to his business.”* These people were more concerned with other matters and Jesus referred to these people who do not persevere in the parable of the sower, *“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful”* (Matthew 13:22).

Jesus taught that this same distractedness will be in the tribulation period, just as it was in the days of Noah. *“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be”* (Matthew 24:37-39).

By extension, people today fill up their lives with many earthly interests that crowd out any potential spiritual input that they may encounter. Like the people of Noah’s day, those who are too busy with other matters will be judged. *“No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier”* (2 Timothy 2:4). As a faithful servant of Christ, we must prioritize our allegiance to Him over any other competing interest.

Besides the passive resistance by those who were apathetic and by those who were distracted, there was a third group who engaged in active rebellion, *“and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.”* These invitees were like the tenant farmers of the previous parable who not only did not respond to the landowners request via his slaves with their produce of the land, they attacked and killed the messengers.

This is another reference to the people of Israel who attacked and killed the prophets who represented God. As Jesus told the lawyers in Luke 11:47, *“Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them.”* Later He would tell the Pharisees, *“Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and 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,”* (Matthew 23:34). And Stephen would say the same thing to the Jews, moments before he was stoned to death, *“Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become”* (Acts 7:52).

The punishment of the rejectors (22:7)

The king would judge the violent men harshly, similar to the tenant farmers (cf. Matthew 21:41), and *“he sent in his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city of fire.”* Many suggest this is fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. At best, the destruction of Jerusalem is only a partial fulfillment and this language is similar to Old Testament passages like Judges 1:8 and Isaiah 5:24-25, along with other extra-biblical ancient Hebrew texts concerning judgment.

Luke 21:20 makes it clear that there will be a desolation of Jerusalem in the tribulation era leading up to the return of Jesus, *“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.”* The point of this parable is simply those invited to the banquet (i.e. the Jews) will be judged when they revolt against the king (God the Father). The violent men are these religious leaders who seek to seize Jesus (21:46).

The third invitation and acceptance (22:8-10)

This parable is not only about the judgment of the Jews who were given the opportunity to come to the kingdom of God, it is also about those who will be given an opportunity to come because the Jews did not receive their King (John 1:11-12).

This third attempt to invite people to the wedding feast moves others who were not originally invited. The slaves are instructed by the king to *“Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.”* This is obviously a reference to the Gentiles, who were not part of the nation of Israel, who were unresponsive to the invitation to come.

The king sent the slaves out to invite people indiscriminately. These slaves went out to the streets and successfully found sufficient people to fill the wedding hall with dinner guests. Those who were gathered into the banquet hall included *“both good and evil.”* These included people that the Jews would consider to be uniquely unworthy, such as the author of the Gospel, a tax-collector.

Today, the good news of Jesus Christ goes to all people. We must not discriminate regarding those who ought to hear the invitation to come to Jesus Christ in faith and enter the kingdom of God, for they are all in need of salvation. The kingdom will be from every people group (cf. Revelation 7:9), and the nature of the kingdom was prophesied to be including all types, *“for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”* (Jeremiah 31:34; cf. Hebrews 8:11).

The punishment of the unprepared (22:11-13)

Of those attending the banquet, both good and evil, one man stood out when the king came to look over the dinner guests. This man was identified by not being dressed in proper wedding attire. Certainly, the king would have made provision for the wedding clothes to be worn, for he could not have expected those from the streets to know how to dress and have such clothes at their disposal in order to wear them.

The king expected the man to wear such clothes and questioned the man regarding his attire, yet the man was speechless. He must have known what he was to wear and knew of his failure. The king refers to him as a “friend” yet he orders the servants to *“Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

The imagery here is one of eternal judgment, with words that have been used previously in this Gospel toward that end (cf. Matthew 8:11-12; 13:41-42, 49-50; 24:50-51). Here, the “servants” are involved in carrying out the judgment, rather than the “slaves” in the earlier verses. The angels serve in the task judgment (cf. Matthew 13:41; 25:31), while the slaves are God’s messengers of salvation.

This person then is much like those who participate with the people of God, but who are not truly saved. Some compare the wedding clothes with believers, clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Whether this reference is so specific is speculative, yet those with the proper wedding clothes remain at the banquet of the king's son and are not cast into the outer darkness. They are the true children of God.

This parable pictures the church age. Because the original invited guests did not respond to the king, the invitation went to the Gentiles, who joined with the remnant of Jewish believers in the church. Jesus taught that there will be people participating with God's people, and profess allegiance to Him, but are not truly His, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."* (Matthew 7:21ff). His parable of the wheat and the tares shows that there will be people among us who appear to have true faith but in reality do not (cf. Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).

This invitation to the wedding banquet for the Son will continue through the church age, until the banquet commences at the second coming. The imagery from this parable is used at the second coming to describe the welcome of the believers, *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God.""* (Revelation 19:7-9). These righteous acts are the imputed righteousness of Christ, *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The point of the parable (22:14)

The final verse provides a principle that sums up this parable, *"For many are called, but few are chosen."* Many are invited to the banquet, but some do not respond due to indifference, or distraction, or even hateful opposition. Still others respond, but for the wrong reasons, and are not truly His disciples. What is left are the few who are chosen.

Since not all who are called are chosen, we know that the many Jews, who were the "chosen people," were a part of God's work, but were still not chosen. This then teaches the role of the sovereignty of God in the responsiveness to the general call to the kingdom of God.

Indeed, no one would respond to the invitation apart from God's work in their heart. Jesus had earlier told the Jews, *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day"* (John 6:44). This gives further context to the principle of Matthew 22:14, for it is the Lord who uniquely chooses those who could come in faith. Jesus would tell His disciples in the upper room the next evening, *"You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain"* (John 15:16).

Conclusion

The parable of the wedding banquet depicts the desire of God the Father to call many to the banquet for His Son, Jesus Christ. Because of the sinful nature of man, there will be those who resist His invitation, either passively or actively. Some will come, but for the same selfish reasons of those who did not respond. They are not repentant over their sin and do not desire the forgiveness of the Savior.

Apart from God's merciful work to bring about this repentance in the heart of man, all will die in their sin, for, *"there is none righteous, not even one"* (Romans 3:10). Jesus is about to *"give His life a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28). This will bring His elect from the Jews and the Gentiles into the kingdom of God, forever. Because of God's unilateral grace, we are secure in His love. *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand"* (John 10:27-29).