

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen" (Mat.22.1-14).

Introduction

Keep in mind that the parable we are covering today (Mat. 22.1-14) is part of a trilogy: the two sons, the tenant framers, and now a king's banquet (the three are a unit). The parallel of the third parable with the other two comes into play when we hear about the people first invited to the banquet and how they respond. In parallel are the sons of the first parable, the farmers of the second, and the prospective guests of the third. There is also another parallel, a positive one, between the original "no-sayer," the other people, and the people who come to the banquet. This unity per the parallels is our guide to interpretation.

All three parables relate to the conflict between Jesus and His contemporaries, the conflict that peaked when He taught with authority in the temple. Therefore, along the way today, we must consider how this parable contributes to the reply of Jesus to the challenge of His authoritative teaching in new temple worship.

We should do three things to sink our teeth into the parable of the king's wedding feast for his son. First, we should summarize the parable keeping its context in mind. By talking through it and about it, we begin to absorb it into our hearts. Second, we do well to think about some of the idiosyncrasies of the parable, which draw us into the experience of the characters in the story. At first, we might go here and there and all over the place before we are able to focus and get to the heart of things. The idiosyncrasies help us get this focus. Third, we should reflect on the meaning of the parable that comes from *within* it and from comparison with the previous parables. At that point, we can turn our attention to applications. Thus, we will cover summary, idiosyncrasies, and meaning.

1A. Summary

Now, how does the story unfold? Jesus speaks of a king in parallel to the father and the master of the preceding parables. The king decides to throw a party for his son; it is a wedding party, a wedding feast. This is a celebration of a coming marriage. Apparently, within his kingdom is a special city (22.7), and the king sends his servants to invite the people of that city to come and enjoy the festivities. Through his servants, he calls (22.3) these city people to the party, but surprisingly, they refuse to come: **but they would not come** (22.3). Undaunted, like the master in the vineyard parable, he sends other servants. These other servants give details about the preparations for the party. They make clear that anyone in his right mind would greatly desire to attend this feast. However, the recipients not only refuse to come, but the invitation and the thought of attending *angers* them in a most unthinkable way. We need to read verses 4-6:

⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' ⁵ But they

paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

The reaction is astounding like the reaction of the tenant farmers in the previous parable (the wicked vine growers beat, stone, and kill the servants, Mat. 21.35). Therefore, Jesus goes on to tell us that the king is angry and he counter-responds in a harsh manner by sending troops who go and destroy the city and its people (22.7).

At this point, you might think that that is the end of the story, but it is not the end because the king fervently desires to have this feast for his son. Accordingly, he sends out his servants again to insure good attendance at the banquet:

⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests (22.8-10).

Now, we are sure that that is the end of the story, but there is more.

Jesus takes us in thought to the banquet and directs us to look around at all the guests. Specifically, He makes us focus on the attire of the attendees. How are they dressed? Are they properly dressed for the occasion? Lo and behold, the king finds a man with no wedding garment (22.11), he quizzes him, and then he punishes him severely. We have to read this noting that the narrative continues to 22.14:

¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen"

Now let us turn our attention to the idiosyncrasies of the parable.

2A. Idiosyncrasies

You probably noticed some unusual things in this story. I refer to things that do not comport with ordinary life and that seem odd; that is what I mean by idiosyncrasies. What are the striking and odd elements in this parable? You might find more, but here is a short list. 1) We have to wonder why these people would refuse to come to a feast. After all, it is a free meal, and more than a meal: it is an elaborate provision of food and drink. 2) Then, we have to stand in amazement at the fact that they not only ignore the invitation attending to their own business (their busy lives), but some of them also get angry at the invitation. Their anger is so intense that they treat the king's servants shamefully and even kill them! This is uncalled for and outrageous conduct. 3) Next, the king's angry response is understandable, but he not only executes capital punishment on these murderers, he also destroys the entire city! 4) Then, we have the happy fact that these events do not lead to the cancellation of the wedding celebration because the king is fervent in his desire and determination. He thus gathers people to the wedding feast from the main roads. 5) Now, to our surprise, the king gathers in people good and bad such that when he looks around at the guests, he sees the bad. Thus, we have the unusual account of the speechless guest without a wedding garment. Moreover, we have the severe judgment on the speechless guest: he is bound hand and foot, cast into outer darkness, and endures weeping and gnashing of teeth. 6) Finally, the king explains his actions by distinguishing between the called and the chosen. Thus, explanation surfaces within the story, but Jesus does not explain the parable, we might say, from outside the story. Matthew's narrative moves on to other conflicts with the Pharisees without giving any outside interpretive comment (neither his own or from Christ; comparison of the three Gospel accounts may reveal Matthew's emphasis).

3A. Meaning

To get at the meaning of the parable, we can consider how it relates as a reply to the challenges of the leaders who oppose Jesus. Thus, we can study the reply itself and the teaching that goes beyond the reply.

1B. Reply to the religious authorities

The people invited who refuse to come to the kingdom/wedding feast represent the leaders and the nation. The Lord destroyed them and their city in 70 AD. Thus, they challenge His authority and His response is that their attack on how He teaches kingdom truth is worthless because they refuse to enter the kingdom; they refuse to come to the wedding feast for the king's son. They refuse God and oppose His son. Therefore, how can they demand an explanation of the authoritative kingdom teaching of Christ when they are blind to the kingdom and know nothing of its coming and benefits? They cannot be teachers of the kingdom of God and criticize Jesus as a kingdom teacher when they stand outside the kingdom and do not enter it (not childlike in faith, not embracing John's message as blind dogs). Jesus disqualifies them in their attacks, and they thus store up wrath for themselves and destruction for their city.

They are murderers who kill the prophets of God. This ultimately includes the murder of the Prophet, Christ per the parallel parable of the vine growers. Thus, Jesus counters the religious leaders and their challenge to His authority. Instead of having a place as judges, they come under the condemnation of the true Judge, the Lord Jesus.

2B. The agenda of Christ (beyond the reply *per se*)

Jesus replies to the challenges of the spiritual leaders but He also has His own agenda of things He seeks to teach using the challenges as opportunities to give instruction. He takes this opportunity to teach about the judgment that is coming on the leaders and on the entire nation: judgment includes the city where those first invited live. Judgment includes the giving of the kingdom to another people; this time they are the people on the main roads; the people are bad and good.

Furthermore, regarding those at the wedding feast, judgment includes severe punishment of the speechless man who attends the banquet without a wedding garment. The king explains the difference between those at the banquet (with or without a wedding garment) by the principle of the calling of many, but the choosing of few.

Applications

1) The gospel is triumphant through rejection.

Again, the leaders and nation (Jn. 1, His own received Him not) refuse to come to the wedding feast; instead, in anger (and in the story-with vicious, unheard of, uncalled for, outlandish, and extremely evil conduct) they kill the servants that the king sends to them with invitations of joy and feasting! How odd is this and how "out there." We cannot understand such conduct; it makes no sense; their wicked reactions are nonsensical and irrational. Nonetheless, there is a point to the graphic extremes that surface in the story. They show the utter folly, wickedness, and irrationality of sin. More specifically, they show that this is the case for covenant breaking sinners who have repeated invitations from the king of creation, but who in inexcusable wickedness refuse to taste of the feast. (Cf. the hymn that says, "Why was I made to hear thy voice, and enter while there's room, when thousand's make a wretched choice and rather starve than come?").

Thus, the gospel has repeatedly sounded in the ears of the children of Abraham (cf. Rom. 10- in creation and in the word of the prophets). They rejected the message, rebelled, and sought their own way distorting God's word to fit their sinful biases. Nonetheless, God continues to keep His covenant faithfully that goes back to David, to Abraham, and to creation week. He will have a kingdom of image-bearers and they will fellowship with Him around a matchless table feast. God's saving program does not fade into oblivion due to the sins of the covenant people. We therefore sing, "Great is thy faithfulness" for God is triumphant in and through rejection that includes the murder of the servants of the Lord who bring good tidings of great joy. He is triumphant over the rejection and murder of Jesus-Messiah by His covenant people.

2) The gospel is now international

With the city of Jerusalem destroyed, God's servants are to **9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find** (22.9). We have prophetic perspective hinted at here that is similar to the teaching of Matthew 10. In both passages, the meaning of servants grows larger in scope, from the prophets to apostles (Mat. 22) and from the apostles to preachers (Mat. 10). Here in Matthew 22, the Lord sends His servants to do their work *after* the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD. These servants are therefore the apostles and all preachers that follow in their steps, taking the gospel of the kingdom to all nations.

There is a free offer of the gospel that belongs to the nations, with promises that belong to the nations. You need to have that vision always before you wherever you may be in the history of the church and in your personal histories. You must do whatever you are able to do to spread the word everywhere.

3) The gospel gathers both good and bad

What does it mean to have good and bad people at the feast? At the least, it refers the *presumed* good and bad, the Jews and the Gentiles. By analogy with the gospel fish net of Matthew 13, we have the additional point here that the gospel actually gathers all kinds of fish into its fish net. It brings people under its influence. They want its benefits, but they want them without faith (21.29), repentance (21.32), or the fruits of repentance (21.43).

Now we learn that where the gospel takes hold and gathers people into various forms of religious change, and even into the Christian church, there will be a mixture of saved and lost. This has to be the lesson of the man without a wedding garment. It gives us much needed perspective on the day-to-day realities of sin in the church and the need for church discipline. Sometimes, it is necessary to go through the process of discipline and conclude at the end that someone is not a believer. However, we cannot rid the church-garden of all weeds. This explains some of the calcified antagonism that surfaces between professing Christians though we cannot go around judging people's hearts. It is a difficult fact, but it should not surprise us. The Lord told us ahead of time right here in this parable. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Now, here is the important point to print on our hearts: Jesus triumphs over rejection in this context too; He is faithful, He will build His church, and He will see to it that His people arrive safely to glory.

4) The gospel goes hand in hand with divine election

What explains the certainty of triumph despite all the tremendous obstacles at every level? Why does the offer find acceptance that is genuine, not hypocritical, childlike, radically determined, and faithful to the end? The answer to that question is divine election: many are called but few are chosen.

The invitation to the feast is insufficient for salvation. It is not saving; it offers salvation. It is a genuine offer. God in fact stretches out His hands to disobedient and stiff-necked covenant breakers across the face of the earth just as He did with Israel: **...of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people** (Rom. 10.21; cf. Israel and the nations, Mat.10).

The triumph comes because of God's choice to save particular sinners by calling out a remnant from the disobedient in His kingdom. By His saving call, God overcomes human resistance. Even man's willfulness, his stubbornness of will, cannot prevent God from accomplishing kingdom salvation. They therefore eventually find something they are not looking for; they find the righteousness of God in Christ as a balm for their souls: **Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me"** (Rom. 10.20).

5) The gospel includes election and the cross

In the context, what secures their election to salvation? God chooses them to salvation through the rejection of Christ, the rejected stone made the head of the corner by resurrection (Mat. 21.42). In other words, the death of Christ accomplishes the redemptive work that brings a new Israel into existence. His death, overcome by resurrection, secures the victory. We cannot

separate the cross from election! Jesus secures the salvation of the Father's elect by the humiliation of His utter rejection. If we keep the trilogy of parables together, we cannot avoid the third point of the tulip, efficacious redemption on the cross (i.e. limited atonement, which is just actual substitutionary atonement or efficacious redemption).

6) Finally, the gospel puts Christ at the center of all celebration.

Thus, the way onward, forward, and upward to glory is to cling to Christ.

Though rejected, God raised Him from the dead. His resurrection is the promise of your resurrection if you trust Him, if you confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is risen Lord. Clinging to Him as your risen Lord is the way to go; it is the way of life; He is the ladder from earth to heaven. He is the house of God, the place of the presence of God.

He gives you a robe of righteousness (cf. the fruits of righteousness). This righteousness is His gift to you that flows out from you into your daily life. Therefore, be what you are. Go and bear much fruit by abiding in Christ your Lord and king. Abide in Him by faithfully abiding in His word. Be disciples determined to learn how to learn under His authority and to learn how to live under His authority as your supreme Prophet.

Finally, you can apply the fact the Christ is the center of all celebration to the elements of worship because that is what the celebration is all about. Celebration is about joy and rejoicing in worship at the King's banquet for His Son. Your worship now anticipates the celebration yet to come in the wedding supper in glory when the Son of Man comes. To be specific then, and practical, we need to meditate on the elements of worship, so, what are the six elements of worship? You can answer that question by thinking through our worship. How do we begin? There are two elements there (reading Scripture and audible prayer). Then we typically do what? That is a third and vital part of worship (singing). Next, we come to what takes most of our time, which is what? We refer rightly to the sermon as "the primacy of preaching." For the fifth element, what is another form of preaching in our worship? Yes, it is the gospel in the sacraments. Are we missing the sixth? This last one may not come to mind immediately because it is a quiet, very important, and a very practical aspect of your worship: yes, giving. These elements, all of them together, make up new temple worship, so, regarding each, you can set your heart to focus earnestly on Jesus Christ your risen Lord, sovereign king, and wise prophet.

To the Lord Jesus be all glory now and forevermore, Amen.