

1. The Parable of the Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

The Parables of Jesus

Warm-Up Question: Introduce yourself by taking something out of your wallet or purse that describes something about you and your family.

Alternative Warm-up question [for a group that knows one another]: Have you ever been to a wedding? Share one memory about it that was fun, unique, romantic or something that spoke to you about Christ.

Why Did Jesus Speak in Parables?

The word *parable* comes from the Greek word *parabolē*, meaning "comparison, illustration or analogy." It is a simple story designed to illustrate a spiritual truth to the imagination of the listeners. A picture is worth a thousand words. A parable is a way of sharing spiritual realities that will get past the filters in our minds that prevent us from seeing things in a new way. Jesus is not bypassing our minds, but showing us how to see things through His eyes. The Lord is bringing the truth of the Kingdom of God, but the enemy of our souls seeks to blind our minds to the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). When the disciples asked Christ why He spoke in parables, He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. This is why I speak to them in parables, though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand" (Matthew 13:11,13). The Lord is not trying to prevent people from understanding spiritual truths; the enemy of our souls is the one that does that.

What Jesus accomplished by speaking in parables was to challenge preconceived ideas and go right to the heart of the matter! His teaching was for everyone. This was one thing that made His teaching so different from other religious teachers of His day. It does not matter how smart you are, what your social standing, age or gender is, the Lord is talking to you! He looks for a response from the heart. The heart or spirit of a man is like long, hardened, unplowed ground that needs to be broken up before the seed of the Word of God can be sown (Hosea 10:12). These stories challenge the mind. If a person's heart is open to receive, the heart and will are touched and moved.

Often the parables need to be thought upon, mulled over, and only when a person's heart is open to listening will he "get it." The light shines, and one becomes aware of the spiritual truth hidden in the garb of the everyday story. There is a responsibility, though, that comes to people when they acquire spiritual understanding. That is, when one gets the meaning of the spiritual truth, one becomes accountable to living out that truth in his life! The ground of the heart is often prepared by the Lord ahead of time before hearing the seed of the Word of God. This is why the Lord will often allow us to go through hard situations or difficult "seasons" in our lives—it breaks up the hard soil of pride and resistance to the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts.

The parables of Jesus also reveal our spiritual condition. This is why the Lord drew so much unwanted negative attention from the Pharisees and religious leaders of His day. Jesus would tell a story, and it was like looking into a mirror. The Pharisees did not want to see their condition

before God and felt insulted instead of being humbled. Many of us reading these words can look back to situations in our lives when we began to search out eternal things after going through a difficult situation. The Lord uses many tools at His disposal to prepare our hearts for His Word because He knows what we need. My hope and prayer is that, as we study these words of Jesus through the parables, the eyes of our heart will be opened and that God will bring spiritual growth through understanding His ways. The parables teach His children the “ways of the kingdom.” As we are invited to His banquet, let us open our hearts and ask Him to illuminate His ways to us.

A Wedding and Banquet Being Prepared (Matthew 22:1-14)

1Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 4“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ 5“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. 7The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. 13“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14“For many are invited, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:1-14).

The story is about a king preparing a celebration-wedding feast for his son and for those who will hear the invitation to come. This feast, banquet or supper symbolizes what is ahead for those who have received the work of Christ on the cross in payment for the debt of their sins. John the apostle also wrote of the time that is ahead for true believers in this way:

8It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9Then 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 19:8-9).

Those invited are given clothing to wear, clothing that is described as righteous acts. We should not think for a minute that we should work hard to be invited. No, our place at that table is totally free and a gift given by God. However, once we receive God’s grace and believe the gospel of God, we are changed and transformed to be like Jesus by the work of the indwelling Spirit. We are secure in our love relationship with Christ to serve Him and do good works to glorify Him: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

When we think of the preparation work that is occurring for this feast, we often think of the table being prepared and the food that is on it, but I believe that there is a higher meaning than just that. God's preparation work is in the lives of the people who are invited and chosen to be there. Jesus said, *“Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”* (Matthew 4:19). When we come to Him and follow Him, He will *make us* into what He has called us to be and do. In the disciple's case, it was to make them into fishers of men.

God is at work in you, if you belong to Him, to transform you into His image (Galatians 4:19). Although there is a real feast at the end of the age, the picture of a feast is a description of a close intimate relationship. To enjoy such a relationship, we don't have to wait until the end of the age. If I were to ask you to describe one of the best times of your life, many of you would describe a time of close family time eating together around a table. Feasting together is a picture of intimacy in the scriptures. Jesus said in one place,

*“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, **I will come in and eat with that person**, and they with me”* (Revelation 3:20 Emphasis mine).

Jesus is saying that, for all those who hear the call and open their hearts, He will come and enjoy a close intimate relationship with them, typified by sitting around a table and eating with Him.

Invitations to the Wedding (Verses 3-4)

3He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 4“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

At the time of Christ in the Middle East, people of means would send out a general call or invitation for all to attend the wedding feast that they were preparing. The day would be set but not the time. Verse three of our passage above says that the servants were sent to all those who had been invited (i.e., past tense).

Who would you consider to be the first servants sent to bid the people come to the feast?

All the ordinary people came early; they wanted to share in the joy of the king's happiness at the marriage of His Son. The more distinguished guests would wait for the servants of the king to come and tell them when all was ready. This consideration on the part of the king would allow for no waste of time for the more noble guests. They could come just as the celebrations started. The first servants sent out might represent the ministry of John the Baptist, and then the Lord Jesus, (Isaiah 42:1), the Bridegroom Himself.

Verse three tells us that the response is not of being unable to come, but being unwilling to come. Notice the graciousness on the part of the king. When the first servants received refusals from guests who would not come, the king sent out His servants a second time, *“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My*

oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet' (Matthew 22:4).

In what ways have you heard the invitation of God in your life? Can you think back to a specific instance or instances when you have been aware of His call? How many times did God send His servants to you?

Think of the expense the king of the universe has taken to prepare for men to be reunited with Himself—even to the death of His own Son on the cross to pay for people's sins. Don't you think that He would feel insulted at the rejection of His servants' invitation?

The Insulting or Slighting of the King

Who would the second servants symbolize and what in history was the response?

I believe that the second servants sent out represent the apostles and other disciples that took the gospel from Jerusalem to the outlying areas of Judea and Samaria. Half-hearted excuses met the response to the offer of love by God:

5“**But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. 6The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.**

Jesus was sharing the words of this parable in the temple area itself. Around Him were the religious leaders that were resistant to His gracious words. He had already shared two parables before the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 21:23-46). His words about their excuses would have cut to the heart because the parables that He spoke were getting too close to the mark.

Often today, the claims and call of the gospel are pushed away because of many different excuses. For example, some people put their business and their work life ahead of matters of the heart. “I’m too busy,” they say. They never seem to be too busy for sport, or social media, or movies, etc. Today many people are obsessed with being connected to technology. They have to be “plugged in” all the time. I call them “screenagers.” This trend occurs among those of all ages, though it is hugely prevalent in the youth culture. It refers to those who cannot get unglued long enough from their mobile phones or laptops to be concerned about anything else, including spiritual issues. We can be so preoccupied with the things of our time, that we forget the things of eternity.

It is a fact that, if you do not exercise, your muscles will atrophy. It is the same with our spiritual lives. We are meant to be spiritual beings, alive to God. If we are not alive to God by listening to His Word and giving our attention to spiritual things, our sensitivity to God’s Holy Spirit will wane and wither. The enemy of your soul wants you to be asleep concerning your spiritual need.

Fortunately for our spirit, God uses trials, difficulties, and hardship to awaken us to our need for Christ and brings us to the point where we will begin to look to Him. What will it take for global awakening? It is possible that the things that will awaken people to their need are things

prophesied as happening at the end of times:

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and **fearful events** and great signs from heaven. ¹²But before all this, **they will seize you and persecute you**. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. ¹³And so you will bear testimony to me... ²⁶**People will faint from terror, apprehensive** of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken" (Luke 21:10-13, 26).

God will not idly stand by while His servants are murdered. The king in the parable responded to His servants being killed by destroying the murderers and burning down their city (Matthew 22:7). We don't know all the numbers that were persecuted and died in the early years of the Church. The Scriptures mention Stephen and James being martyred and the persecution afterward (Acts 8:1-3). History records the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans thirty-seven years after the crucifixion of Christ. The abuse of God's servants and families brought judgment on the political and religious elite in Israel. Even today, all over the world, those who preach the Gospel of Christ are being persecuted and murdered.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

When the nation's leaders reject both invitations, God brings into the kingdom the Gentiles, who were considered outsiders. This was God's plan right from the beginning of time that the Jewish people would give meticulous attention to the protection of the Word of God and bring forth the message of God's love to all men, not just to one nation. The gospel of God being shared with the Gentiles did not go down well with those who resisted Christ's message. When Saul who became the apostle Paul, was preaching to the Jewish people outside the temple precincts, they were okay hearing of his conversion experience and God revealing Himself to him, but when Paul told them that the Lord instructed him to go to the Gentiles and bid them come to the feast, this was unacceptable to them. It was at this moment when they tried to kill him for saying such a thing:

And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him. ²¹“Then the Lord said to me, ‘**Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.**’” ²²**The crowd listened to Paul until he said this.** Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!” (Acts 22:20-22).

Paul was called to a difficult task. It was not a popular message among the people of his day. He had been sent to preach the good news of the Gospel to the Gentiles. At that time, there was much controversy in the church as to who was invited! When God began working among Gentiles too, the apostles found out that the call went out to *everyone*, not just those who *they* considered fit for the kingdom of God. Once again, their worldview was being turned upside down. Those of us that are Gentile Christians should be thankful because as Paul said:

“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:25-26).

Paul said that Israel had been hardened to the truth for a time, but this will work for good since the message of the kingdom then went out to all. Paul also looks forward to the time when Israel is restored and accepts the New Covenant of God (Jeremiah 31:31). We ought to be so alive to Christ and so full of love towards one another that we provoke others to jealousy, Jews and Gentiles alike, to have the same kind of life. We must never make the mistake of thinking that God has given up on the Jewish people. No, Paul tells us that a time will come when they will hear and respond to the grace of God. When that time comes, Paul wrote that Jews and Gentiles in the Church together would bring about a time of great spiritual riches:

“Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, **how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!**” (Romans 11:11-12).

Paul is looking forward to a time of awakening among the Jews, which will herald a blessing to all when Israel is restored. The difference will be so dramatic that it can only be described as the difference between life and death:

“For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be, but life from the dead?” (Romans 11:15).

What a day that will be! It will be an outpouring of God’s mercy that will seem like life from the dead to the church. There is no place for pride or elitism in the kingdom of God. We are called to the Wedding Banquet because of His great love and mercy and not for anything that we bring to the table. In His great plan, He has invited everyone.

Can you think of instances in Scripture when Jesus reached out to those whom others despised? Do you think it is possible to pass by some people today, based on our assumptions? Discuss.

The Man with No Wedding Clothes

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. ¹³“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:11-14).

In verses 11-12, what do you think the wedding clothes represent?

Jesus now tells us of the king’s coming into the midst of the wedding celebration and seeing a

man wearing no wedding clothes. In the story of Samson's wedding in Philistine territory, there was a custom of supplying the wedding guests with linen garments (Judges 14:10-13). In Samson's case, he tried to get out of the tradition by posing a riddle.

This custom is alluded to in our parable. The king in the parable is a picture of God who supplies all of His wedding guests with a robe of righteousness. There will be none at the wedding feast better dressed than others—we will all be one in Christ Jesus and clothed in God's righteousness:

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 his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isaiah 61:10).

This man's lack of proper garments shows that he has purposely rejected the king's provision for him, a greater insult than those who refused to come to the wedding. This man decided to insult the king in the presence of all His guests. He is a picture of those who refuse to wear God's provision of the garment of righteousness that God has given (Isaiah 61:10). This part of the parable alludes to the Jews who were standing around Christ as He spoke, acting as believers but trying to trap Him in His words (Matthew 22:15). This is also a picture of those who think they are believers; however, they have never indeed submitted their lives to the Son and been born again of the Spirit (John 3:3). Sadly, they will find out too late that their hope was built on moving sands rather than upon the Rock of Christ (Matthew 7:24-27).

Many Invited, Few Chosen

Many are invited in the "general call" that goes out to all who will hear it. The call is a summons to repentance and faith in Christ. Many will hear, but few will respond. Jesus said, ¹³**Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.** ¹⁴**For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it** (Matthew 17:13-14). All those who will respond to the call are those whom God has foreseen their repentance. These are the chosen of God before the foundation of the world:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵**He predestined** us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself (Ephesians 1:3-5).

"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit **the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world**'" (Matthew 25:34).

Ruthanna Metzgar had an experience that I would like to close this study with (Copyright Ruthanna Metzgar, excerpted in *Heaven*, by Randy Alcorn). I quote Ruthanna herself:

"As a professional singer, it was not unusual to be asked to sing for a wedding, but it was

a bit unusual to sing for the wedding of a millionaire. I knew the wedding would be picture-perfect and was pleased to be able to participate, but when the invitation to the reception arrived, I knew it would be something exceptional. The reception was held on the top two floors of Seattle's Columbia Tower, the Northwest's tallest skyscraper, and it was even more beautiful than I imagined. Waiters were wearing snappy black tuxedos who offered luscious hors d' oeuvres [appetizers] and exotic beverages for the most discriminating tastes. The atmosphere was one of grace and sophistication. After about an hour of merriment, the bride and groom approached a beautiful glass and brass staircase that led to the top floor. A satin ribbon draped across the bottom of the stairs, was cut and the announcement made that the wedding feast was about to begin. The bride and groom ascended the stairs, and the guests followed. What a lavish event of which to be a part.

A gentleman with a beautifully bound book greeted us as we reached the top of the stairs. "May I have your name please?" "I am Ruthanna Metzgar, and this is my husband, Roy Metzgar," I replied. The gentleman searched the Ms. "I'm not finding it. Would you spell it please?" I spelled it slowly and clearly. After searching throughout the book, the gentleman looked up and said, "I'm sorry, but your name is not here. Without your name in this book, you cannot attend this banquet." "Oh, there must be some mistake," I replied. "I am the singer. I sang for this wedding!" The gentleman calmly answered, "It doesn't matter who you are or what you did, without your name in the book you cannot attend this banquet." As I looked around the room, I thought briefly of running to the groom and trying to plead my case, but with a hundred guests on the stairs behind us and every place at the tables assigned according to the thoughtful choices of the bride and groom, I stood silent. The gentleman with the book motioned to a waiter and said; "Show these people to the service elevator please." We followed the waiter past beautifully decorated tables laden with shrimp, whole smoked salmon, even gracefully carved ice sculptures. And adjacent to the banquet area was an orchestra, its members all dressed in dazzling white tuxedos, preparing to fill the room with glorious music.

We were led to the service elevator, stepped in, and the waiter himself pushed "G" for garage. My husband, thoughtfully, did not say a word, nor did I. As Roy drove out of the Columbia Tower garage, we both remained silent. After driving several miles in silence, Roy reached over and gently put his hand on my arm. "Sweetheart, what happened?" And then I remembered: "When the invitation arrived for the reception I was very busy, and I never bothered to return the RSVP. Besides, I was the singer; surely I could go to the reception without returning the RSVP!"

As we drove on, I began to weep. I was not crying because I had just missed the most lavish banquet of my life, but I was weeping because suddenly I knew what it would be like someday for people as they stand before the entrance of heaven: People who were too busy to respond to Christ's invitation to His heavenly banquet. People who have assumed that the good things they had done, even perfect church attendance or singing in the choir, would be enough to gain entry to heaven. People who will look for their name in the Lamb's Book of Life and not find it there. People who did not have time to respond to Christ's gracious invitation to have their sins forgiven and accept Him into their hearts.

And then I wept again because I was so grateful that I had, many years earlier, received Christ as my personal Savior and can be confident that my name is written in the most important book of all: The Lamb's Book of Life. Is Yours?"

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12).

Let me be clear about the invitation. To recap, the invitation is sent to *everyone*. If we could only understand what God has prepared for those who love Him, none of us would find any excuse not to come to the Wedding Feast. William Barclay, a famous theologian, has stated, "The Christian life is at one and the same time an invitation to privilege, to responsibility and to glory. And at the back of it, there remains the haunting thought that the tragedy of life is to refuse the invitation of God."

Prayer: Father, I come to you now with no more excuses. Thank you that you love me and have given the provision of the righteousness of Christ as my clothing to cover my sin. Make me new in your Son. I want to receive this new life that you are offering me. I turn to you, asking for forgiveness of my sin. I bow the knee to you and receive all that you want to do in me. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com