

1. The Parable of the Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

The Parables of Jesus

Have you ever been to a wedding? Please share a 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. 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). Jesus is not bypassing our minds but showing us how to see things through His eyes. Through the use of parables, the Lord taught the truths of the Kingdom of God.

By speaking in parables, Jesus challenged preconceived ideas and went right to the heart of the matter. His teaching was for everyone; no matter how smart you are, your social standing, age, or gender, the Lord wants to speak to all of us. He looks for a response from the heart. A person's heart or spirit is like 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 of His challenge the mind, and if a person's heart is open to receive the seed of the Word of God, their spirit will be touched and moved.

Often the parables need to be thought upon and considered, and only when a person's heart is open will he "get it." The light shines, and one becomes aware of the spiritual truth hidden in the familiar story. There is a responsibility, though, that comes when people get the meaning of the spiritual truth, for one then becomes accountable for living out that truth in his life. The Lord often prepares the ground of the heart before hearing the seed of the Word of God. He will often allow us to go through challenging situations or difficult "seasons" in our lives to break up the hard soil of pride and resistance to the Holy Spirit's work in our hearts.

The parables of Jesus also reveal to us our spiritual condition. The Pharisees and religious leaders of His day often reacted to the parables of Jesus because when He told a story, they would see themselves as God saw them and be convicted. It is a gracious work of God in us when the Word of God shows us ourselves. The Pharisees either felt insulted or were humbled. Many of us 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 to prepare our hearts for His Word because He knows what we need. My prayer is that, as we study these words of Jesus through the parables, the eyes of our hearts will be opened, and God will bring spiritual growth through understanding His ways. As we hear the invitation 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).

We read 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 believed and received the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross in payment for their sin.

In what ways have you heard the invitation of God in your life? Can you think back to a specific instance when you were aware of His call and invite? How many times did God have to send His servants to you before you responded?

John the apostle also wrote in the Book of Revelation of the time 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 come with clothing that is described as righteous acts. We should not think for a moment that we must work hard to be invited. No, our place at that table is totally free and a gift given by God when we believe the Gospel. However, once we receive God’s grace, we are being changed and transformed to be like Jesus by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit for the rest of our lives on earth. 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 this feast prepared in heaven, what often comes to mind is that of a table and

the food on it, but I believe there is a higher meaning than just that. There will be a literal table and banquet, but God's preparation work is also in the lives of the people invited and chosen to be there. Believers in Christ are being prepared to sit at that feast. 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.

If you belong to Him, God is at work in you to transform you into His image (Galatians 4:19). Although there will be a real feast at the end of the age, the picture of a feast is the 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, most of us would recall a time of close family time eating together around a table, maybe at Christmas or Thanksgiving or whatever big family time in your country. 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).

In the words above, Jesus says 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. ⁴Then 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 being prepared. The day would be set but not the time. Verse three of our passage says that the king sent his servants to all who were invited (i.e., past tense). Those listening to Christ began to wonder who He referred to as the servants sent with the invite. The listening Pharisees thought they were the only ones deserving enough to be at the banquet.

Who do you think the first servants represent, those sent out with the invitation letter to the feast? (v. 3) How do you think they were received? Who was Christ referring to as those who refused to come?

The first servants sent out with the invite might represent the prophets and the ministry of John the Baptist. Many ordinary people heard the message of repentance from God's servants. They came early to the banquet; they wanted to share in the joy of the king's happiness at the marriage of His Son. Verse three tells us that the decline of the invite was not because of being unable to come, but some were unwilling to come. Notice the graciousness on the part of the king. When the first servants received a rejection, the king sent out more 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).

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

God has gone through much pain for humanity to be reunited with Himself, the death of His servants the prophets and even to the death of His own Son on the cross to pay for people's sins. Don't you think He felt insulted at the rejection of His invitation?

The Insulting or Slighting of the King (vs. 5-6)

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 were the response to the offer of a free seat at the table of God's love:

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

Jesus spoke 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). The Lord's words about their excuses would have cut to the heart because Christ's parables 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 work-life ahead of matters of the heart and eternity. “I'm too busy,” they say. They never seem too busy for sports, social media, 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 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 to be concerned about anything else, including spiritual issues. The enemy of our souls will try to dupe us into being 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 spiritual beings inhabiting these bodies just for a time. How we spend our time on earth makes all the difference to our eternity. The enemy of your soul wants you to be asleep concerning your spiritual need.

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? The things God will use to awaken people to their need for Christ's salvation are things prophesied as happening at the end of times:

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There 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).

The King Will Bypass Those Who Reject Him (vs. 8-10).

The Lord will not stand long while His servants are murdered. The king in the parable responded to the murder of His servants by destroying the murderers and burning down their city (Matthew 22:7). We don't know the numbers of those persecuted and killed in the early years of the Church; the Scriptures only mention the martyrdom of Stephen and James 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 Israel's political and religious elite. Even today, all over the world, those who preach the Gospel of Christ are persecuted and murdered. There will come a day when those who stubbornly refuse to listen to the invitation will have the door of salvation shut to them. And then what will they do?

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" (vs. 8-10).

When Israel's leaders rejected both invitations, God brought His spiritual banquet to the Samaritans and the Gentiles. This was God's plan from the beginning of time that God would bring forth a body of people from Jews and Gentiles the world over (Genesis 12:3). The Gospel going out to the Gentiles did not go well with those who resisted Christ's message. God called Paul to a difficult task. It was not a popular message among the people of his day. He was sent to preach the good news of the Gospel to the Gentiles. At that time, there was much controversy in the Church about who was invited! When God began working among Gentiles too, the apostles were amazed that the call went out to *everyone*: **“The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles”** (Acts 10:45, Emphasis mine). Once again, their worldview was turned upside down. Those of us who are Gentile Christians should be thankful because, as Paul said:

I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25).

Paul said that Israel hardened their hearts to the truth for a time, but this will work for good for Gentiles to bring the kingdom message to all. Believers in Christ ought to be so alive and full of the Spirit, that we provoke all those outside of Christ to be jealous of the life we have. 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 (Romans 11:11-12).

The Man with No Wedding Clothes (vs. 11-14).

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 of the provision of wedding clothes is alluded to in our parable. The king coming to the banquet is a picture of the Lord who supplies all 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 freely gives. This part of the parable alludes to the Jews standing around Christ as He spoke, acting as if they were believers but trying to trap Him in His words (Matthew 22:15). It is also a picture of those who think they are good enough and act as believers but have never submitted their lives to Christ 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

A "general call" goes out to all who will hear it. The call is a summons to repentance and faith in Christ. Many will listen to the call, 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 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).

I close this study with a true story from Ruthanna Metzgar, as quoted in the book *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn:

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 wore snappy black tuxedos and 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 was 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. You cannot attend this banquet without your name in this book." "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; you cannot attend this banquet without your name in the book." 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, and 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 the garage. My husband, thoughtfully, did not say a word, nor did I. As Roy drove out of the Columbia Tower garage, we 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. The call to come 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 the same time an invitation to privilege, to responsibility and 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 be at Your wedding banquet. I turn away from sin to you, asking for forgiveness of all I have done that is wrong. I bow the knee to you and receive all you want to do in me. Cover me with your robe of righteousness. Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: keiththomas@groupbiblestudy.com

Website: www.groupbiblestudy.com