

THE MARRIAGE FEAST

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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:1-10

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests.

Many shall come from the east, and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven. But the children of the wicked one shall be cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Another parable of the kingdom is the parable of the marriage feast for the king's son, as recorded in the 22nd chapter of Matthew. Although the parable of the great supper from the 14th chapter of Luke was told under completely different circumstances, and lacks several of the important elements of the parable of the marriage feast, there are some marked similarities. In both stories, the invitation was twice repeated. In both, the invited guests remain indifferent, or plead excuses which show their indifference. In both, other guests are finally brought in from the highways and byways. Both parables are addressed principally to the Jews; but both contain lessons for the Gentiles as well.

In Matthew's account, the parable of the marriage feast comes shortly after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when the chief priests and scribes were aroused to a fever pitch of hatred and antagonism by the acclaim given to Jesus. These chief priests and elders came to him asking by what authority he performed his miracles. Jesus answered them by asking them where John the Baptist had gotten his authority. This question put them on the horns of a dilemma, for they had denied the authority of John too; but John was still much too popular among the people for the priests to come out openly in denial of his authority. Then Jesus told the parable of the two sons who were commanded to go to work in their father's vineyard. One said, "I will not," but soon after repented and went. The other said, "I go, sir," and went not. By asking one simple question -- "Which one did the will of his Father?" Jesus turned this parable upon his hypocritical questioners who neither entered the kingdom themselves nor suffered others to go in, and declared that the publicans and harlots who had repented under John's preaching should go into the kingdom ahead of the scribes and priests who said "I go, sir," and went not.

Following this is another parable of the hard-heartedness and rebellion of Israel -- the parable of the household who planted a vineyard, and then let it out to husbandmen. When the time of fruit drew near, he sent servants to collect his share of the fruits; but his servants were beaten and stoned and driven away empty. Then other servants were sent, who received the same treatment. Then the household sent his son, but the husbandmen killed him, thinking thus to secure the vineyard for themselves. Again Jesus asked a skillful question: "When the Lord of the vineyard

cometh, what will he do unto those wicked husbandmen?" And again the priests and scribes condemned themselves with their answer; they said unto him, "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." And Jesus confirmed their own judgment by saying, "The kingdom shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Then belatedly, the chief priests and Pharisees saw that he was speaking of them, and sought to lay hands on him, but desisted for fear of the multitude. It was in answer to this situation, then that Jesus began to tell the parable of the marriage feast.

The marriage feast of this parable was being given by a certain king -- not just a certain man, as in Luke's parable of the great supper. Jesus knew that it was fashionable among the haughty Pharisees never to respond to the first call to come to a feast, but to wait for the urging of the second invitation. Therefore in this story, the invitation came from a king, which made the situation somewhat different. A king's invitation is a command, and a careless indifference towards it is rebellion and treason. A second invitation received only ridicule and indifference, as one man went to his farm and another to his merchandise, while some even went so far as to mistreat and kill the servants bearing the invitation. The king was justifiably angry. This was more than a social affront; it was rebellion against his authority. He sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city, and then sent outside the city into the highways and byways for guests to fill up the tables at the wedding feast.

Obviously this is another parable pointing to the wickedness and rebellion of Israel, their rejection of the ancient prophets in several dispensations, and finally the rejection of the plea made to them by Jesus and the apostles. The city of Jerusalem was burned by the armies of Rome in 70 A.D., and one and a third million Jews killed in the slaughter, according to Josephus. The apostles then turned to the highways and byways outside of Israel -- to the Gentiles -- and invited them to come in to the marriage feast. The kingdom of God was taken from Israel and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. The Jews had received and spurned the invitation of the prophets, and the invitation of Jesus and the apostles; then the invitation went to the Gentiles. The chosen people, those who should have been righteous, and socially and morally worthy of a king's presence, were invited first; but when they refused to come "both bad and good" were invited. The publicans and harlots and common people entered the banqueting hall before the self-righteous Pharisees.

Although this parable seems to be addressed specifically to the scribes and chief priests and Pharisees among the Jews of Jesus' day, there are lessons in it for us today. There are abundant blessings waiting for us in the kingdom of God, awaiting only our entering in. "My oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready." But like the men in the parable, we make light of the invitation. Our farms, our merchandise, our five new yoke of oxen, our new wife, are more important than the king's invitation,

God is the great King. Whenever any nation or people persistently and stubbornly and continuously refuse his invitation to live under the laws of his kingdom and to partake of his good things, when they spurn and kill his prophets and apostles and servants, the day will come when he will send his armies, and destroy those murderers, and burn up their city, as he sent the Roman armies against Jerusalem.

When any nation gets the notion that it is God's favorite nation, and that nothing can possibly happen to remove it from that position of preference and superiority, it is time to beware, and to remember that "many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven," -- that if the "children of the kingdom" do not respond to the invitation they will be cast into outer darkness.

Again in this parable, as in the parables of the wheat and the tares, and the net cast into the sea, both bad and good are gathered in; the bad do not stay forever. In the parable of the wedding feast, even the most ragged beggar was welcomed into the

banquet hall; but he was not worthy to remain there unless he had on a wedding garment -- the robe of righteousness -- both the righteousness which is by faith through Jesus Christ, and the righteousness of a godly, righteous life of good works.

The king's plans for a wedding feast were not frustrated; the feast was held. God's plan for the great marriage supper of the Lamb will not be defeated either. It will be held. The great question is, will you and I be there, or will we be among those who ignored the invitation?