

Kingdom Parables

The Parable of the Great Supper

XIV. The Parable of the Great Supper - Luke 14:15-24

There are some Bible scholars that equate this parable with the Parable of the King's Son found in Matthew 22:1-14. However, a more careful examination of these two parables show that they are not the same at all. In fact, there are many significant differences which lead us to believe that they are different parables, and as such, should be understood in their separate contexts. Specific differences are listed below:

- In Matthew 22:2 the man is said to be a king. No such reference is found in Luke.
- In Matthew 22:2 we find that the supper is for his son, no such reference is found in Luke.
- The events of Matthew 22 take place during the passion week, Luke 14 takes place during the great Perea Ministry which occurred prior.
- The setting of the giving of the parables are totally different. In Matthew 22 the Lord is in the temple, in Luke 14 he is in the house of a chief Pharisee.
- The context of the parables are different. In Matthew 22 the context is amid the hostility and rejection of Israel. This rejection will culminate in the crucifixion within the next few days. The context in Luke is during the Perea ministry when the minds of many of the Pharisees were not as yet committed to the rejection of Christ.
- Reference is made in Matthew 22:6-7 of the shameful treatment the servants of the king received and the destruction of the cities of those who took part in that treatment. No such reference is made in Luke.
- In Matthew 22:11-13, reference is made to the man who did not have on a wedding garment. No such mention is made in Luke.
- In Matthew we only see one excursion by the servants to obtain guests. In Luke, there are two.

In summary, it is a mistake to equate these two parables. What probably happened is that the Lord used some of the same concepts recorded in the parable in Luke and expanded on them to give the parable found in Matthew.

A. The Central Point of the Parable

The original recipients of God's invitation for entrance into the Kingdom, Israel, were not interested. As a result, God had to turn to others, Gentiles, in order that his Kingdom be filled.

B. Significant Elements of the Parable

1. The Man

The man mentioned in this parable was undoubtedly very rich in order to put on this lavish supper. Although he could have been a king, no mention is made of that here. To make this assertion would be to read something into the text that is not there.

2. The Supper

The supper is the main element of this parable. It is the supper that people were invited to attend, and it is the supper that they refused.

3. The Invitation

It is interesting to note that according to the social customs of the day, two invitations were issued for events such as this. The first invitation would take place some time before the event so that those invited would be able to schedule their activities. Later, and just before the event itself, a final invitation was issued to those originally invited. This invitation was the official notice that the event was ready to start and for those who were invited to come and attend.

4. The Servant

The servant is the agent in this parable who serves as the one issuing the invitations. He is the one sent out by the master of the house to notify those invited that all things are ready.

5. The Invited

These are the people to whom the initial invitation was given. Unfortunately, instead of scheduling their activities so that they would be able to attend this supper, they ignored the invitation. As a result they were unprepared to attend when the second, and final, invitation was given.

6. The Others

These are the people who were invited by the servant to attend the meal as a result of the refusal of those originally invited. It is of importance to note two things about this group of people. One, they had no idea that they would be invited and therefore had no time to plan their attendance. Secondly, these people are the ones that would have hardly been invited since they represent the social outcasts of that society.

C. Insignificant Elements of the Parable

1. The Excuses

Many scholars try to make the excuses be representative of the various kinds of reasons people refuse God's offer of salvation. However, this kind of reasoning ignores the context of the parable. The real reason Christ uses these excuses is to 1), show that the invitation was refused by those who

should have attended, and 2) to show the utter foolishness of the kinds of excuses made.

The specific excuses serve to only color the context of the parable, they are not specific points that need to be interpreted. To do so is to force meaning into the passage, a very definite no-no in Biblical interpretation.

D. Interpretation of the Parable

Before looking at each of the elements of the parable, it is essential that we understand the context in which it is given.

The events in Luke 14 occur as Christ is making his way to Jerusalem about six months prior to his crucifixion. As he journeyed from city to city, he made a stop at a Pharisee's house for supper. While there, he healed the man suffering from dropsy and confronted the Pharisee's regarding their status consciousness. He then told his host to invite those who could not repay the favor since that was well-pleasing to God. At this point, someone in attendance made the statement "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." This served as a perfect lead-in for Christ to give this parable.

When the above context is examined, several points make themselves evident.

- The Kingdom referred to is obviously the Millennial Kingdom. Any other interpretation reads a meaning into the text that would have been incomprehensible to those present.
- The main questions answered by the parable is "Who are the blessed that get to eat bread in the Kingdom?"
- The reason for the above is that Christ is answering the comment made by the attendant at that supper.

With the above in mind, let us now look at the specific elements of the parable.

1. The Man

In the parable, it is the man that prepares the great supper and it is the man that issues the invitation. As a result, it should be obvious to all that the man refers to God himself.

2. The Supper

Again, from an examination of the context, it should be clear that the supper symbolizes the Kingdom of God. The reasons for this are listed as follows:

- The giving of this parable serves to answer the comment made by the guest in verse 15, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God."
- Christ wants to clear up the misunderstanding held by all of the Pharisees that the only ones to partake in the Kingdom would be righteous Jews. This concept must be destroyed if the true nature of God's offer of salvation is to be understood and accepted. In fact, Paul

spends all of Romans 9-11 explaining why the Jews misunderstood the promises of God and why the Gentiles have been made recipients of the blessings of God.

- There is no other definition of the supper that makes any sense given the context of this passage.
- Christ uses the concept of a supper in Matthew 22 in the Parable of the King's Son. In that parable, the supper clearly represents the Kingdom. Although that does not mean that the supper must be the Kingdom here, it does lend weight to that argument.

3. The Invitation

The invitation refers to the call of God to become recipients of the Kingdom promises. The original invitation was made to Israel in the Old Testament. In fact, a cursory reading of the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and the other prophetic books should be enough to convince anyone that God was serious when he gave the Kingdom promises to Israel.

The saddest thing about the invitation, however, is that it was rejected just before the event. As we have noted in the discussion of this point in the first section, there were usually two invitations given to big events. The first invitation would give those invited a chance to plan ahead. The second invitation, given just before the event, would notify those invited that the event was ready to begin.

Throughout the Old Testament we find occurrences of the first invitation. John the Baptist and Christ heralded the second. (See Mark 1:14-15, Matthew 3:2, and Matthew 4:17).

4. The Servant

The servant in this parable refers to the herald(s) of the Kingdom. The difference, however, is that the Kingdom of God has had many heralds, whereas this parable only mentions a single servant. However, this should not cause alarm since we have already stated that it is not proper to interpret any parable allegorically. Just because there is one servant in the parable does not mean that there can be one, and only one, herald of the Kingdom.

The servant in this parable is a beautiful picture of how we should herald the message of salvation. In verse 23 we find the lord of the servant telling him "Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in". The message of the Kingdom is one of urgency. One is either in the Kingdom, or is without.

5. The Invited

Those invited originally to the supper refer to Israel. As we have already noted above, the entire Old Testament is full of promises regarding the coming Kingdom.

Some additional evidence for the above is:

- An examination of this parable with the Parable of the King's Son in Matthew 22:1-14 will show that in both cases those who rejected the invitation refer to Israel. Although the Parable of the King's Son will be examined in detail later, it is important to note that Christ gave this parable after the final rejection of Israel. Therefore, the main theme is that the original recipients of the Kingdom promises were unworthy and other recipients had to be found. (This does NOT teach that Israel is forever set aside).
- Again, Christ is giving this parable to contrast the perceptions of the Pharisees with reality. The Pharisees understood the Kingdom promises as being applicable to them alone. Christ needs to show them the error of this thinking while there is still time for repentance.
- This interpretation fits in with the entire message of the Gospels, that being the rejection of the true King by Israel.
- This interpretation fits in with the more developed theology of the setting aside of Israel and the place of the Gentile in God's plan as presented by Paul in Romans 9-11.
- No other interpretation makes sense.

Note at this point that the excuses given to the original recipients of the invitation are ridiculous. No one will buy a piece of property without first inspecting it (if you do, I have some Florida real estate I will sell you!). No one will buy untried oxen. No one will refuse an invitation of this kind because of marriage.

As we have mentioned above, these excuses point to the fact that the original recipients of the invitation were indifferent.

We find that Christ was basically rejected as the King because he did not deliver the kind of kingdom desired by Israel. They were merely interested in physical and political deliverance from Rome, not in eternal salvation. Because they rejected the requirements of the Kingdom, repentance, they were rejected by God.

6. The Others

The other people mentioned in this parable refer to the Gentiles who have become partakers of God's blessing. Since the original recipients of the Kingdom were not interested in heeding the invitation, God turned to another people.

Additional evidence for the above interpretation is:

- It fits the context of this parable. Christ is explaining who the recipients of the Kingdom will be as opposed to who the Pharisees understood as being the recipients.

- It fits the context of the Gospels where we find Christ being rejected by his own people. As a result of this rejection, God turned to the Gentiles.
- It fits the context of the parables given during the Passion week, the Parable of the King's Son, the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, and the Parable of the Fig Tree.
- It fits in beautifully with Romans 9-11 in which Paul shows the reasons for Israel's rejection of the Messiah and the place of the Gentile in God's plan.
- It is the only interpretation which makes sense with the interpretation of the original recipients being Israel.

E. Application of the Parable

1. Because Israel rejected the Messiah, they forfeited the immediate start of the Kingdom. As a result, God opened up the invitation to others, namely the Gentiles.
2. This parable DOES NOT teach that Israel is forever set aside. A study of Romans 9-11 will answer any questions in respect to this assertion.
3. Israel's rejection was based on trivial reasons. Since they refused to submit to the internal requirement, a repentant heart, God refused the external Kingdom. In fact, the external Kingdom will not start until Israel is repentant.