

Kingdom Parables

The Parable of the Marriage Feast

XXV. The Parable of the Marriage Feast - Matthew 22:1-14

There are some Bible scholars that equate this parable with the Parable of the Great Supper found in Luke 14:15-24. 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.

Note that this parable closely parallels the Parable of the Great Supper found in Luke 14:15-24.

B. Significant Elements of the Parable

1. The King

This particular King made a marriage feast for his son. In those days the most joyous occasions were marriages. Even the poorest of people went to great lengths to celebrate these times. As a result, it is not unlikely that this King would go to great lengths to provide one of the most elaborate feasts possible.

As a side note, most wedding feasts in New Testament times lasted for several days. Note the marriage and Cana found in John 2 for an example.

For a modern day analogy consider the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana.

2. The Wedding Feast

The feast is the main element of this parable. It is the feast that people were invited to attend, and it is the feast that they refused. The other elements of the parable only serve to add color to this main element.

Note that we have equated the marriage feast with the event of the marriage itself. The wedding would last only a few hours whereas the feast would often last several days.

3. The Son

The reason for this gala occasion was the wedding of the heir to the throne. It is not an understatement to say that this would have been the social event of the decade for those invited.

4. The Invitation

After everything had been prepared for this feast, the King sent his servants to notify those previously invited to attend.

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.

5. The Servants

The servants are the agents in this parable who serve as the ones issuing the invitations. They are the ones sent out by the king to notify those invited that all things are ready.

6. 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 feast, they ignored the invitation. As a result they were unprepared to attend when the second, and final, invitation was given.

However, what was the most detestable thing about these men is that they only did not refuse to come, but they molested and killed some of the servants who were sent by the King. This is so wicked as to almost be beyond belief. The subsequent actions of the king show the reprehensible character of these men.

7. The Armies

Because of the shameful treatment of the King's messengers by the original invited guests, the King sent his armies to wipe out the ungrateful and their cities. This is a most deserving action to say the least.

8. The Others

These are the people who were invited by the king to attend the feast 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.

9. The Man Without the Garment

It was the custom in an event such as this that the attenders would have been provided a wedding garment. This was usually an outer garment that would be worn over their clothes. Furthermore, it was considered bad manners to attend a feast such as this without one.

Somehow, this particular man made it into the feast without such a garment. As a result, the king ordered him removed and cast into prison.

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 of Matthew 22 are given Wednesday of the passion week. On Friday Christ will have been crucified.

This parable is given in the temple to the crowds gathered around Christ. As he is giving this parable, he is referring to the false religious leaders of Israel who have rejected him as the Messiah. Because of this rejection, the manifestation of the Millennial Kingdom will be postponed.

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

- i. 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. However, although the Millennial Kingdom is what is primarily in view here, an extension to the eternal kingdom cannot be discounted.
- ii. The main questions answered by the parable is "Who are the ones who are allowed to participate in the Kingdom?."

1. The King

In the parable, it is the king that prepares the wedding feast and it is the king that issues the invitation. As a result, it should be obvious to all that the king refers to God himself.

2. The Wedding Feast

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

- The giving of this parable serves to answer the the question about who participates in the Kingdom.
- 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.
- The Jews believed that the first thing God would do when the Kingdom was established would be to have a great feast in which all of those allowed to enter the Kingdom would participate.
- There is no other definition of the feast that makes any sense given the context of this passage.

- Christ uses the concept of a supper in Luke in the Parable of the Great Supper. In that parable, the supper clearly represents the Kingdom. Although that does not mean that the feast must be the Kingdom here, it does lend weight to that argument since the two parables closely parallel one another.

3. The Son

The Son refers to Christ. The only Son that God is stated as having is Christ. No further comment needs to be made.

4. 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).

5. The Servants

The servants in this parable refers to the herald(s) of the Kingdom.

The servants in this parable are a beautiful picture of how we should herald the message of salvation. In verse 9 we find the king telling the servants to go and find anyone who could attend.

6. 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 Great Supper in Luke 14:15-24 will show that in both cases those who rejected the invitation refer to Israel. It is important to note at this point 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. They only serve to show the attitude of those invited towards the King.

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.

7. The Armies

This element of the parable serves to color the parable as it shows the attitude of the King towards those who rejected his invitations as well as their subsequent faith. To state that the armies refer directly to Rome is not a good interpretation. It is probably best to see the armies as representing God's judgment on the original recipients of the kingdom, that judgment being destruction by Rome as well as the rejection of Israel and their subsequent setting aside. For more on this see Romans 9-11.

8. 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 other parables given during the Passion week, 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.

9. The Man Without the Wedding Garment

This man is used to represent those who attempt to enter the Kingdom without God's righteousness. Evidence for this is as follows:

- The wedding garments were provided by the King just as the robes of righteousness are provided by God.
- The only righteousness which will enable us to enter the Kingdom is God's righteousness, not ours. See Philippians 3:3-13 on this.
- This man was cast into outer darkness, a reference used by Christ on several occasions to refer to eternal hell. Anyone who attempts to enter the Kingdom of God on their own merit will be sent to eternal hell instead.
- This man had no excuse. The wedding garments were free. In the same way, those who are lost have no excuse, God's forgiveness is free.
- Wedding garments are usually white. When the church is pictured as returning with Christ to establish his kingdom in Revelations 19, they are wearing white robes. Throughout the Bible, white robes are a symbol of God's imputed righteousness.

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.