

The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13

Lesson 12 – The Parable of the Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

May 11, 2025

Alva J. McClain comments regarding this last series of parables that Jesus taught as He neared the end of His ministry on earth;

“It is significant that at this point our Lord again resorts largely to the parabolic method of teaching. In a new series of parables, at least seven in number, He drives home certain facts concerning His Messianic Kingdom. The first three, directed primarily against the ecclesiastical rulers who had challenged His divine authority (Matt. 21:45), are the parables of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-32); the wicked husbandman (vv. 33-41), and the King’s marriage feast (22:1-14). The other four, given to His disciples, (Matt. 24:3), were the parables of the budding fig tree (vv. 32-35ff), the faithful and unfaithful servants (vv. 43-51), and the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) and the talents (vv. 14-30).

It is also noteworthy that, with the possible exception of the first, these parables present a composite picture of the Kingdom as something definitely future, associated with a glorious advent of the King with great power; and that its establishment shall be sudden, catastrophic, accompanied with the ordeal of Messianic judgment on the wicked and reward for the faithful.”¹

This parable is the 3rd in Jesus’ series of judgment parables which He gave as rebukes to the Jewish religious leaders who constantly and maliciously opposed His obvious authority and Messiahship (Matt. 21:23, 28-30, 33-39). It is also easily classified as a Kingdom Parable according to the first verse, 22:1; and the context supports it. ①

As we have seen in our studies so far of the Kingdom Parables from Matthew 13, Luke 19 and Matt. 21, the primary design of the parables is to, as Luke 19:11 says, *“He proceeded to tell a parable because He was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.”* We have seen that it was not coming immediately, and the reason for its delay was that Israel had rejected Christ as Messiah and as their King.

The real difference in these 3 judgment parables from most of the others is that the leaders do get His point – it is not hidden from them as the Matthew 13 parables were stated to be (cf. Matt. 13:10-17). These parables are clear rebukes of their own sin and corruption, wickedness and character of open and hypocritical rebellion against God.

So, building on what we observed in our last lesson – the Parable of the Tenants in Matt. 21:33-46 – let’s observe how Jesus uses yet another well known situation

¹ Alva J. McClain; The Greatness of the Kingdom; BMH Books, 1980; pg. 355

(the wedding of the king's son) to expose the peoples' lack of interest in following God, His Son Jesus Christ, and God's desires and commands to them.

Jesus is Still with the Chief Priests and Elders Matthew 22:1-2

There appears to be no interruption of time between the Parable of the Tenants and this parable, which opens with the words, "And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying..."

v. 2 – Again, we see this, by now, well known formula – *"The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son."* They would have been familiar with how important and excellent such a celebration would be. But quite likely, they were still angry about how He had (rightly) offended them in the last parable. The end of that parable (cf. 21:46) tells us that they sought to arrest Him but they feared the crowds.

In that era, and in that situation, a royal wedding would offer the feast of all feasts, a tantalizing temptation to attend if invited. Interestingly, no bride is, nor is any other feature of the wedding mentioned in the parable. Jesus chose this subject to illustrate parabolically the ultimate celebration that was being offered. The ironic and sad aspect of it is the lack of a joyful response with which the invited guests are willing to pass up the chance to attend. Invitations apparently would have been sent early enough for people to be prepared to attend and to feel important because they had been invited.

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But they had refused His invitation of the Kingdom, so in that sense, this looks back and exposes their actions; they had also perennially refused the ovations of the OT prophets, as well as rejecting their King, who so obviously was then in their midst. But, as in the other kingdom parables, there is a definite future (prophetic) function as well as we will see. There are three events depicted regarding the wedding feast which we will observe as we work our way through the parable.

James Montgomery Boice has a partially correct take on it;

"From time to time in this study I have noted that a particular parable is difficult to interpret, and have mentioned several ways the details of the story could be taken. That problem does not exist with the parable of the wedding banquet, however. On the contrary, it is all too clear. It speaks of God's gracious invitation to us in the gospel and of the indifferent and arrogant way men and women sometimes respond to it. It speaks of hell, the end of those who attempt to enter the king's presence without the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness."² (accentuation is mine – here is where he reads too much in)

In this quote, he jumps right to the end of the parable, ignoring the calls to attend, the rejections, and the paltry reasons why the invited guests rejected the king. Certainly, the end of the parable is important, even critical, but what gets us to

² James M. Boice, *The Parables of Jesus*; Moody Press, 1983; pg. 66

this result is too important to pass up. He does exegete the passage after this quote, but even then it seems he is focussing on the wrong aspect of this. Before Jesus ever gets to the point of sending out His servants to invite whoever they can find He is calling out the response of Israel first, not once, but twice.

Once again, we must establish early on is who is being represented in this parable, or we will never arrive at a proper interpretation of it.

- The King / the father is God the Father
- The son is Jesus
- The premise is not the marriage supper of the Lamb which biblically takes place in heaven. This parable depicts a celebration which takes place on earth at that time.
- The servants in vv. 3,8 are first, the OT prophets, then Jesus' disciples and John the Baptist
- The first group in vv. 3-5 – the invited guests – is that generation of Israel and their leaders who had rejected Christ already
- The second group called in vv. 6-7 – is the generation of Israel who will face Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD. This group will include those servants who are mistreated and killed in the book of Acts and following that in history
- The third group in vv. 9-10 are Gentiles during the Interregnum – who will be called into the church (to begin to form it) and who continue to be the dominant people of the "Church."
- The attendants v. 13 are the Angels (cf. Rev. 14:14-20, and Matt. 13:41-42)

③

The Invited Guests Matt. 22:3-6

v. 3 – As the time for the wedding feast draws near, the King, the father (God) sent his servants to those who had been invited. Per above, the invited guests were that generation of Israel and their leaders. They had been offered the Kingdom numerous times by their prophets, by John the Baptist, and by Jesus Himself prior to Matthew 12 when their leaders callously rejected Christ completely as King and Messiah (see our first two lessons last year). Once He had chosen His disciples, they were sent out to give the people the gospel message, to let them know their Messiah was among them finally.

v. 4 – The second call – *"he then sent other servants..."*. And the time is even shorter in the parable, the feast (note the sumptuous food mentioned) is ready with no one to serve it to. It is well to remember that, although the father in the parable seems desperate to feed someone, in reality, God the Father is not reacting to Israel's rejection of His Son – that was planned by Him before the foundation of the world, so it did not take Him by surprise. In fact it was this rejection which put things in motion – Christ's crucifixion/resurrection/ascension and the Interregnum – things which the entire world should be rejoicing about! The parable is for the edification of the leaders to make them realize they need to repent. The feast that is now ready to serve is the substitutionary atonement of Christ.

This second call is also rejected – v. 5 as these people now make their excuses – I have to go to my farm, I have to go to my business. Paltry excuses when a King’s son is being thrown a beautiful banquet! In reality, what they are rejecting is the chance to be with Christ and to have their sins forgiven!

Then, in v. 6, we see that while many just ignored the summons and went on with their petty lives, that some (I believe this is a referral to the Israeli leaders) seized the servants, abused them and killed them. It’s obvious to any reader of the Gospels that no disciple of Christ (a lone exception is John the Baptist) was captured and abused or killed in the Gospel era. That began to take place in “Acts” and Jesus predicted it in John 15:18-21. So what is this talking about?

First, let’s hear from Alva McClain;

“Then there was to be a second call announcing that the dinner is now “prepared” and “all things are ready.” (v. 4) – certainly a reference to our Lord’s finished work of redemption at Calvary. Such a call could not have come forth until after the Resurrection. But again the call is rejected, this time by actions which help to identify it in biblical history: some Jews would turn away with contemptuous indifference, according to the parable. While others would mistreat and kill the messengers (v. 6). This points to the post-Pentecostal offer, as described in the book of Acts, when the officials of Israel did exactly that. During the Gospel period not an official disciple was killed by the Jews, but during the period of the Acts the terrible persecution and killing of the messengers began. And there is no third call for this generation of Israel, but judgment falls: the King sends forth His armies, destroys the murderers, and burns their city – a parabolic prediction of the awful destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (v. 7).”³

④

Have you noticed the varied reactions to the calls? V. 3 – “*but they would not come,*” v. 5, “*but they paid no attention and went off..*” and “*while the rest seized the servants, treated them shamefully and killed them.*” Do you see in this the progression from the Gospels to Acts?

The Angry King Matt. 22:7-10

Who is he angry with? V. 8 tells us, “*those invited were not worthy.*” Notice how his anger plays out – v. 7 – Most dispensational writers see this as a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD by Titus and the Roman army. This was a generation after Jesus’ crucifixion (probably in 32 AD at the latest).

In Acts, although some Jews were saved for sure – initially more Jews than Gentiles – there was no en masse turning of Israel to Christ, In fact, throughout Acts they were the primary antagonists against Christ and His missionaries. Examples;

³ IBID, McClain. P. 406

Acts 4:1-3, 18-21; 5:17-18, 29-33; 6:8-11; 7 (after Stephen's lengthy rebuke against them) 54-60; 8:1-4; 9:22-25, 28-29; 13:45, 49-51; 14:1-2; 17:5-9; 18:5-6; 18:12; 19:8-10; 21:27-36; 22:22-24; 23:12-22; 25:2-3; 26:21; 28:23-28.

So, as vv. 8-10 are spoken by Jesus, he is announcing parabolically that the interregnum has begun. The Kingdom is postponed for Israel, and Christendom is in force. The Church has started and will become a stronghold for Gentiles until the "*times of the Gentiles*" are fulfilled. (LK 21:24)

The parable of the sower and the wheat and the tares are coming into effect, and the hated and harried missionaries' work is bringing many men and women into the Church, one effect of which is to "make Israel jealous. (cf. Rom. 11:25-27)

Then finally, invited to come to the feast are Gentiles, not other Jews. They are found on the roads, not in synagogues. The result? Vv. 9-10. This was the beginning of the Church! The mustard seed of the third Matthew 13 Kingdom parables was sprouting and would grow. (Matt. 13:31-32)

To me, this parable may be the most prophetic of all – Simon Kistemaker – definitely not a dispensational commentator, makes a comment that does fit into this narrative, and I believe it's an accurate depiction of the setting for this parable:

"The parable of the wedding banquet is the third in a series of three, and forms the climax to the parables of the two sons and of the tenants. These three kingdom parables were uttered during Jesus' last week on earth, when He experienced concealed hostility from Pharisees, chief priests, and elders, as they laid their traps to catch Him in His teaching. Undaunted, Jesus taught the parable of the wedding banquet which clearly was directed against His opponents. This parable, therefore, should be read and understood against the historical background of the closing events in Jesus' ministry."⁴ (5)

Notice in the parable that the servants "*gathered all whom they found, both bad and good.*" What does this mean? It means the servants found these people in a state of either being wicked, or being good comparatively. We know that the Bible indicates that none are good (Romans 3:10ff; Matt. 19:17). So I believe that the 'good' people here are those who (like in the parable of the Sower) listen to the call and respond with joy. The 'bad' or evil are those who may be skeptics or uninterested in the call, but since 22:10b tells us the "*the wedding hall was filled with guests*" both were gathered together. This tells us that the call goes to all and God controls the response. In His sovereignty He can save people of any character – evil or good - which means they are His elect, chosen from before the foundation of the world. It doesn't matter what state their mind or heart are in when they are called, because God changes their heart from stone to flesh, and they respond positively with God-given faith and repentance.

⁴ Simon Kistemaker, *The Parables of Jesus*, Baker, 1980, pp 101-102

This takes place (and continues to take place today) in the realm of the interregnum / Christendom. Many hear the call and fill the hall, yet not all are true believers (as in the parable of the Sower). Note Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-30, and this is fairly early into the history of the church! There are already tares among the wheat!

Even as this new institution, the Church begins, we already see the prophecies of the kingdom parables coming to fruition – Sower, wheat and tares, leaven, and demonic presence entering into the church itself. What Paul predicts in Romans 11 (his focus is on the end times in this passage) is already shaping up to be a reality. The Jews are being set aside (temporarily) and Gentiles are being called to form the Church. Just as Israel was neither unified nor righteous, the church will start out the same and worsen over time.

The Man Without a Wedding Garment

Matt. 22:11-13

Verses 11-12 tend to be controversial. Some commentators want to place this whole parable in a heavenly setting, James Boice's quote earlier in this lesson seems to convey that idea (for example).

But this scene is not taking place in heaven. It is on earth during the gospels and then the interregnum. The call is heard and rejected twice, then people are starting to be gathered into the Church. But while God is working, so is Satan to make the Church impure, infecting it with leaven right from the start. This is what the first 4 parables of Matthew 13 (for sure) were warning about, and here in this parable, we have an early glimpse of a tare among the wheat. ⑥

But what is this “wedding garment”?

Alfred Edersheim, a well-respected biblical historian comments in his lengthy and detailed “The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah” the following;

“As the guests had been travellers, and as the feast was in the king's palace, we cannot be mistaken in supposing that such garments were supplied in the palace itself to all those who sought them. And with this, agrees the circumstance, that the man so addressed was “speechless”. His conduct argued utter insensibility as regarded that to which was due to the king, and what became such a feast. For although no previous state of preparedness was required of the invited guests, all being bidden, whether good or bad, yet the fact remained that, if they were to take part in the feast, they must put on a garment suited to the occasion.”⁵

This satisfies us as to what the wedding garment was in terms of the parable's facts. But since there is an underlying spiritual message here in the parable we must flesh out what this means symbolically. First, let's read Isaiah 61:10-11, which may shed some light on this.

⁵ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Eerdmans, 1971, 1979; pg 429

It makes sense to understand this as “the righteousness of Christ,” which is what all believers are clothed in (cf. Rev. 3:4,5; 7:9). It is a ‘robe of righteousness as one modern hymn⁶ and an older one say;

“Jesus thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.”⁷

A more modern hymn, “His Robes for Mine” also takes on this theme;
“His robes for mine: O wonderful exchange! Clothed in my sin Christ suffered ‘neath God’s
rage.

Draped in His righteousness, I’m justified. Faultless I stand, with righteous works not mine. In
Christ I live, for in my place He died.”⁸

This robe of righteousness is something that only God can see. It is not something visibly worn by anyone in the Church – or the servants would have denied the man entry. In parabolic understanding, it is most probable that the man had pretended to respond positively, and on whose ‘confession of faith’ was like the seed that sprouted in Matt. 13:5-6 on rocky soil (cf. 13:20-21). In this case, so early in the start up of the Church, the man is not allowed to grow as a tare among the wheat as in that parable, but is called out almost immediately.

James Montgomery Boice rightly comments;

“What is the wedding garment? It is the righteousness of Christ, provided freely to all who will repent of sin and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. If we are clothed in that righteousness, we will be able to stand before God and rejoice in our salvation. If we are not clothed in it, we will be speechless before Him.”⁹ Cf. Isaiah 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21. ⑦

It appears that this man was not being forthright, but disguising his unbelief. – perhaps so that he could enjoy the feast without having to honour the King or His Son. God sees his heart and he is stopped, and has no answer to the father’s question – “*Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?*” (v. 12)

This is another way to show that, even as the Church begins, not all who join are completely sincere in their beliefs. The man was “speechless” because his heart had been exposed by the One who sees all, including the heart – Heb. 4:12.

Arno Gaebelin comments;

“The Lord Jesus Himself is the wedding garment and all who are mere professors of Christ, without having put on the Lord Jesus Christ, will share the fate of this man in the parable. They will be cast into outer darkness.”¹⁰

⁶ Modern hymn – His Life for Mine

⁷ Cited in Boice, *The Parables of Jesus*, pg. 72 – Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness

⁸ Chris Anderson & Greg Habegger; pg. 181 – *Hymns of Grace; His Robes for Mine*

⁹ IBID, Boice, pg. 72

¹⁰ Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Loizeaux Brothers, 1977, pg. 443

The punishment for this transgression is severe. We should understand here that, in, the parable of the Wheat and Tares gives us a sense that, in most cases, tares are allowed to live and grow alongside the wheat and to be left till the harvest (when the difference is obvious) so as not to accidentally harm the crop itself (cf. MT 13:28-30 & 2 Pet. 3:8-9). He has planned it all. His elect will be saved, but the non-elect will not be saved, even though they live well disguised masquerading as believers in Bible believing churches.

The sentences at the end of the age, at the time of the “harvest” – cf. Rev. 14:14-20 – is to experience weeping and gnashing of teeth, a classic icon of eternal hell (cf. Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:8-9; Rev. 14:10-11 and Isaiah 66:24).

Many Are Called, but Few are Chosen

MT. 22:14

This sentence is also found at Matt. 20:16, but only in the KJV and NKJV versions.

I'll start this section off by quoting 2 commentators, Ed Hindson and John MacArthur regarding this verse.

Ed Hindson comments;

“Again, the phrase, “Many are called, but few are chosen,” is repeated to emphasize to the Jewish audience, who considered themselves to be God’s chosen people, that the outward call of God was not sufficient for salvation apart from responding to that call of grace in an effectual manner. There will be, as F.C. Cook notes, “the entire rejection of many.” No one should think that because he is Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu that he will be received by Christ. Everyone has to come to Jesus Christ for his soul’s salvation, no matter what his or her religion should be.”¹¹

⑧

John MacArthur adds;

“Consequently, the Lord closed with the simple but sobering statement, Many are called, but few are chosen. That phrase reflects the scriptural balance between God’s sovereignty and man’s will. The invitations to the wedding feast went out to many, representatives of everyone to whom the gospel message is sent. But few of those who heard the call were willing to accept it and thereby be among the chosen. The Gospel invitation is sent to everyone, because it is not the Father’s will that a single person be excluded from His kingdom and perish in the outer darkness of hell (2 Pet. 3:9). But not everyone wants God, and many who claim to want Him do not want Him on His terms. Those who are saved enter God’s kingdom because of their willing acceptance of His sovereign, gracious provision. Those who are lost are excluded from the kingdom because of their willing rejection of that same sovereign grace.”¹²

In summary, although not found in Matthew 13 with the 8 initial kingdom parables, this 3rd in a series of kingdom parables in Matthew 21-22 certainly qualifies as a kingdom parable, and in fact, I found it to be even a bit clearer

¹¹ Ed Hindson & James Borland; The Gospel of Matthew, AMG Publishers; 2006 pg. 198

¹² John MacArthur, Matthew 16-23 Commentary; Moody Press, 1998, pp. 312-313

example of that genre, along with the Parable of the Tenants which we looked at in our previous lesson.

This parable provides an unhidden rebuke of the Jewish leaders, a recounting of Israel's rejection of her King and Messiah prior to Matthew 13, then a prophecy of a coming 2nd rejection (over and above Jesus' crucifixion- the ultimate rejection) which comes as a second offer of the kingdom is made to Israel in the Book of Acts after Jesus has ascended. This second rejection is implemented along with violence against Jesus' faithful followers and missionaries, coinciding with the start of the Church in Acts 2 and carrying on right through to the end of Acts and predicting the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. It also shows us that even at the very beginning of the Church how Satan is placing tares among the wheat and causing planted 'seeds' to be destroyed even shortly after sprouting.