

The parable of the wedding banquet

A sermon preached by Henry Dixon
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“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. 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 slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵But they paid no attention and went off — one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹Go 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, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. ¹³Then 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.’ ¹⁴For many are invited, but few are chosen.” Matthew 22.1-14

Introduction

What we have just read is what is known as a “parable”. A parable is a story from human life which teaches us about spiritual realities. This parable is full of meaning and significance. It teaches us about how the Jews rejected the offer of salvation that God made to them, and how as a result the Gospel has come to the Gentiles. But it also clearly has warnings for us Gentiles about how we also are in danger of rejecting salvation, just as the Jews did, and terrible consequences that can flow from this. It also teaches us about how we need to receive from God the righteousness that he has made available for us in Christ, and how if we try to get into heaven on the basis of our own righteousness we will be thrown out, into hell.

This parable was spoken by Jesus during the last week of his life. He has announced that he is the promised Messiah by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, in fulfilment of the prophecy in Zechariah. He has infuriated the Jewish authorities by driving out the money changers from the temple. From now on it is only a matter of time before he is arrested and killed. He has given a visual demonstration of God’s rejection of Israel by causing the fig tree to wither. Against this backdrop, Jesus is in this parable speaking about the rejection by the Jews of God’s offer to receive of his goodness.

Now let us consider the parable a verse or two at a time.

1. The wedding banquet

We read in verses 1 and 2, “Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.” ”

Jesus tells us he is describing here the Kingdom of heaven. What is this? This is where God is ruling in people’s hearts. This world is under the rule of another king, a tyrant called the devil. The kingdom of this world is a cruel and miserable place, where people live in opposition to God, and thereby experience the results of their rebellion against God. But with the coming of Jesus, a new Kingdom, the Kingdom of heaven has been established. God is the ruler of this Kingdom, and all his subjects are truly blessed, and enjoy eternal life.

Jesus says that this Kingdom of heaven is like a King who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. It is not hard to work out to whom the King in this story corresponds: the king obviously corresponds to God the Father.

Jesus says that this King has prepared a wedding banquet for his Son.

Again, it is not hard to work out to whom the Son in this story refers: it is obviously the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

Jesus says that this King has prepared a wedding banquet for his son. His Son is getting married. On another occasion Jesus likened himself to a bridegroom. If Jesus is the bridegroom, who is his wife? Was Jesus not single? The answer is that, in spiritual terms, Jesus is married to his people, the church. The church is the bride of Christ.

Jesus says that because the son is getting married, the King, the father of the son, is arranging a wedding banquet. The salvation that God offers is often described in the Bible in terms of a banquet. In Isaiah chapter 25 and verses 6 to 8, we read,

On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

2. The call to come

In verses 3 and 4, we read, that the King “sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.”

The King had prepared the banquet. Everything was ready. He told his servants to go and tell the guests to come. But those who had been invited refused to come to the banquet.

When Jesus originally told this story undoubtedly it was Jews that he had in mind. The Jews had for over 2,000 years been prepared by God for this time. God had kept on and on saying that a special King was going to come and bring in a new kingdom. That time had now arrived. It was now time for them to come and enjoy the blessings which God had provided for them through this King. God had sent his servants, the apostles who went out in Jesus’s name, to tell the Jews to come and enjoy the spiritual banquet that God had prepared for them in Jesus. But the majority of the Jews refused to come to Jesus.

Although this story was initially told with the Jews in mind, can we not see an application to ourselves? God is saying to us as well, “The

spiritual banquet of salvation has been prepared. Come and receive what I have for you.” Could it be that some of us here have heard this message, perhaps many times, but have until today refused to come? May God grant that, if you are in this condition, you might soften your heart, and that you might today come and receive the salvation that God has provided.

3. The call renewed

In verse 4 we read, “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 slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’”

The King was not put off by the initial rude reply of those who had been invited. Instead he sent more servants. Through these servants he entreated the guests to come to his banquet. The message was sent, “My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”

This corresponds to the message of the Gospel to us. Everything has been done for our salvation. Jesus has died on the Cross. He has paid the price for sin. There is nothing we need to pay. All we need to do is to come to Jesus and receive from him the eternal life that God has provided. God urges you and me to come to him and receive. At the end of the book of Revelation, in chapter 22 and verse 17, we read, “Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.” What will you do with God’s invitation? Will you spurn it like the Jews did?

4. The response of those invited

We read in verses 5 and 6, “But they paid no attention and went off — one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them.”

Those who had been invited showed utter contempt for the King. Some just plain ignored the invitation and got on with their daily business. Some were even worse, seized the servants who had been sent to give out the invitation and ill-treated them and killed them. Their response was shockingly bad. The very great kindness that the King had shown by inviting them was repaid with treating the King’s messengers in a very rude and insulting way, even killing some of them.

The primary thing that Jesus is talking about here is the terrible way in which he and his disciples were treated by the Jews when they announced God's salvation to the Jews in the time of Jesus.

But again, is this not also an illustration of the way in which many today treat those who go out in the name of Jesus, proclaiming the good news of salvation through him. Many completely ignore God's offer of salvation and walk away. Others attack those who are the Lord's servants, have them arrested and put to death.

Let me ask you this: what is this your response to the Gospel? Perhaps you are brought up in a Christian home. Perhaps you endure church, because you do not want to upset your parents. But in your heart do you despise this message of salvation?

Perhaps you are someone who likes to come to meetings of the church because you like the people. But is there something inside you which is saying, "I will not believe this message."

5. The judgement of those who rejected the invitation

We read in verse 7, "The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."

The King had had enough. After entreating and urging those who had been invited for a long time, his patience ran out, especially when they killed the servants he had sent to invite them. He therefore sent his army against those who had done this. He killed those who had murdered his servants, and burned their city.

This is clearly a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, which came in AD70. God finally dealt with the Jews for the years when they had treated his servants so appallingly, and for the way in which they had refused his offer of salvation.

What God did to the Jews stands as an everlasting warning to those who reject God's offer of salvation and persecute those who bring the message. You will not get away with it for ever. For a long time God is patient with you, wanting to give you an opportunity to repent. But one day his patience will come to an end. Either you will die, or Christ will come back, and then it will be too late. You will be swept away to everlasting destruction. Come to Jesus before it is too late.

6. The “problem” that the King now has: he has a wedding banquet but no guests

We read in verses 8 and 9, “Then he [the king] said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’”

The King now had a “problem”. A wedding banquet was prepared. Everything was ready. But all the guests who had originally been invited had refused to come. His solution was to say to his servants that they were to go out into the streets and invite anyone they could find to come into the banquet.

This speaks about how the Good News about the Kingdom of God has now come to the Gentiles. It was originally given to the Jews. But the Jews refused it. So God has now extended the invitation to the Gentiles. Anybody, no matter how irreligious he has been, whatever he has done in the past, is invited. All may come, and all may receive, in Christ, forgiveness and new life.

In a similar story, in Luke’s Gospel chapter 14 and verse 23, Jesus said that the master of the feast said, “Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.”

Here surely is a strong encouragement for Christians to engage in street evangelism, and door to door visitation. Of course we should tell our friends and families about Jesus. But we should not stop with those we know. We should go to strangers, to people we do not know, and in God’s name invite them to the spiritual banquet that God has prepared for them.

This also puts the lie to those who say that we should not invite anybody and everybody to receive salvation. There are those who say that we should not invite all to Christ. We should instead, they say, only promise those who are God’s elect that they are saved. Apart from the practical problem that we, as humans, have no way of knowing who are God’s elect, this idea flies in the face of his Scripture. We learn from this Scripture that God has commanded that ALL should be invited.

7. The success of the servants

In verse 10, it is recorded that Jesus said, “So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

The servants were astonishingly successful. All sorts of sorts of people, good and bad, were gathered in. The hall was filled.

This speaks to us about the ultimate success of the Gospel. Yes, there will be many who refuse, but in the end a very large number of people from all over the world, and from all walks of life, will be saved. We read in the book of Revelation, chapter 7 and verses 9 and 10,

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

The Kingdom of God will triumph. Vast numbers will be saved. If you are a Christian, be encouraged. Keep on with the Gospel. Ultimately it will triumph over all error.

8. A guest without the right clothes

We read in verses 11 and 12, "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless."

At first this is a bit puzzling. The man had been more or less dragged in off the street. How could he be expected to be wearing wedding clothes?

It is puzzling until you remember that all the other guests had also been dragged in off the streets. None of the guests would have had wedding clothes to wear. So those who were invited must have been provided with wedding clothes to wear by the king's servants.

We must assume, then, that this man must have thought to himself "I am OK. My clothes are good enough. I do not need any wedding clothes to be provided for me." Therefore did not put on the clothes that he was offered by the king's servants.

He wanted to be in the wedding banquet, but on his own terms. He was relying on his own clothing to make himself acceptable.

This is a picture of the way that many are. Many try to get into heaven on the basis of their own good works. God has provided the pure white clothes of his righteousness, to cover our nakedness and shame. This

righteousness that God has provided is through what Jesus did on the Cross. But many say, "I do not need to have righteousness provided for me. My own righteousness is good enough. I have done good deeds. God should be satisfied with that." What such people do not realise is that our good deeds are like filthy rags in the sight of God. They think that they have accepted God's invitation. They start attending meetings of a church, or temple, or mosque. They live a life which appears to others to be "moral" and "upright". But on the judgement day what they think of as their good deeds will be found wanting. God will say to them that they do not have the pure white robe of righteousness on that they need to have in order to at the wedding banquet in heaven.

9. What happened to the man without the wedding clothes

Verse 13 says, "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.' "

This person who had come into wedding hall but did not have the right clothes on was an imposter. He thought he belonged at the banquet but he did not. He was thrown out into the darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This speaks to us about how those who have not received the righteousness that comes through will not be allowed into heaven.

So the question I must ask you is, "Are you clothed in the righteousness of Christ?" I am not asking, "Do you go to church?", or "Have you been baptised?" or "Are you a church member?" or "Do you read your Bible?" or "Do you try to live a good life". You can do all of these things yet not be truly saved. The question I am asking is this: "What are you looking to in order to make you qualified for heaven?" If you are in any way relying on your own goodness or religiosity, you will not be admitted. You have to depend on what Jesus did for you on the Cross, and that alone, to make you right with God.

10. The Lesson

Jesus concludes, in verse 14, with the words, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Many hear the call to receive God's salvation. Many are invited. But only a few respond with faith, and accept God's invitation, and depend on Jesus, and Jesus alone, for salvation.

Ultimately, those who respond in the right way do so because God has chosen them. The lesson from this is that if you are saved, you should give all the glory to God.

Conclusion

This parable teaches us much about the generosity of God. He has invited all people, from all walks of life and from all backgrounds, good and bad, to come and receive his salvation, which is depicted in terms of a banquet. It also teaches us about our sin. We have a natural tendency to be perverse to refuse God's salvation. Some people just ignore God's offer of salvation. Others actively oppose it, and persecute those who announce it. We need to stop refusing God's offer, and come to him for the salvation that he has provided. As we come to him, though, we must make sure that we do so on his terms. We must receive from him the salvation from sin that he has provided in Jesus, and not rely on our own good works.

May God grant that all those who hear this sermon, or read this booklet, will heed God's call and come to him and enjoy the spiritual banquet that he has prepared. May all also receive from him the white robes of salvation that he has provided for all who believe.

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