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The Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

In recent years with this series, we have been confronted by many challenging messages.

- From the Parable of the Talents we are exhorted to watch and pray (Matthew 25:14-30).
- From the Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price we are told that the Kingdom of God is so valuable that it is worth losing everything in order to gain it (Matthew 13:44-46).

- From the Parable of the Unjust Judge we are encouraged to persevere in light of God's love (Luke 18:1-8).
- The Good Samaritan teaches us the importance of loving all people (Luke 10:30-37).
- The Ten Virgins exhorts us to be ready (Matthew 25:1-13).

And yet of all the parables, the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Matthew 13:24-30) perhaps is the most threatening. That parable taught that the visible body of Christ is comprised of both genuine believers and false believers — true Christians and sham Christians! And with this, we are exhorted with the words of 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!"

But this raises these questions:

- How do we examine ourselves?
- Are we to look upon our faith?
- What happens when it is weak?
- How about our sin record or our faithfulness?
- Or anything in or about us?

If the focus of our examination is to look within, we will never enjoy the assurance of salvation spoken about in 1 John.

1 John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

So, what is it that determines one's salvation in Christ? The parable of the wedding feast answers this question.

For three years Christ had been preaching and teaching the gospel of the Kingdom, which included proclaiming Himself as the Messiah. And yet, during this time few of the people who called themselves "children of God" had accepted Him. In fact, the religious leaders of Christ's day were so hardened that in Matthew 21:23, 46 they maliciously challenged Christ's authority. In response, our Lord told this parable to warn these religious leaders of their impending judgment if they continued in unbelief (cf. Matthew 21:45).

We begin by looking at the rejected invitation.

Matthew 22:1-2, "And Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son.'"

In the past I have described the elements of a Jewish wedding, and so I won't go over that material here in detail. However, let me briefly review. The Wedding was the most celebrated occasion in Paul's day. It included three parts:

- The Engagement — this is where the marriage was pre-arranged.
- The Betrothal — this is where the couple entered into a formal relationship by which they committed themselves to each other to be married.
- The Wedding Feast — this is when the couple were joined together as husband and wife.

It is the last part of the Jewish wedding that Christ has in mind here: The Wedding Feast. Now that Christ narrates a story of the “wedding feast of the son of a king” would have raised the expectation on the part of those listening that this would have been the feast of all feasts! John MacArthur put it this way:

For a royal wedding such as the one Jesus mentions here, the celebration often lasted for several weeks. Guests were invited to stay at the house of the groom’s parents for the entire occasion, and the father would make as elaborate provisions as he could afford. A royal wedding, of course, would be held in the palace, and a king would be able to afford whatever he desired. (MacArthur, 1988, p. 305)

Notice some of the particulars of this wedding feast.

Matthew 22:3a, “And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited...”

This implies that the guests were invited earlier and already knew that they were expected to attend. That means that v. 3 would have been the second invitation!

To be a pre-invited guest to a king’s wedding would have been one of the highest honors. There is no doubt that those who received such an invitation would have shared this news with their friends, neighbors, and relatives. Truly, the wedding feast would have provided the finest of foods and the most prestigious fellowship in the land!

Matthew 22:3b, “...and they were unwilling to come.”

In light of the culture of Judaism, at first glance we might NOT to be shocked with their response. In the Midrash, it is expressly mentioned that a distinction among the Jews in Jerusalem was that an invitation to a feast would NOT be heeded unless it was accompanied by a second invitation.¹

On the other hand, we are NOT dealing here with an ordinary invitation: this is the invitation of a king. To reject this invitation would have risked inciting the wrath of the king! And thus, the listeners of this parable most likely would have thought, “*Who would do such a thing?*”

Matthew 22:4a, “Again, he sent out other slaves...”

To reject the invitation of a king in Christ’s day carried with it the potential for great retribution.² That this king gave his guests a THIRD INVITATION tells of his humility and patience.

Matthew 22:4b, "...tell those who have been invited, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner.'"

This would have been the first of many meals eaten during the feast. As the description indicates, it was an elaborate banquet. With this background, notice the two responses that the king received from his wedding invitation.

The Response of Indifference

Matthew 22:5, "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business."

As was just mentioned, this represents the response of the "Indifferent." These people acted as if the wedding was of no consequence; it was no big deal!

The mentioning of the "farm" and the "business" conveys the idea that these people were preoccupied with concerns of life, more specifically the making of money. In other words, they willingly and purposely forfeited the beauty, grandeur, and honor of this wedding for the sake of their everyday, mundane, self-serving endeavors. They were NOT concerned about the king's honor, BUT ONLY about what they perceived to be in their best interests!

So also, are some in the church. Religion to them is a check box which once marked, they move on to the more "important" things of life! Those in this camp are described in verse 22.

Matthew 13:22, "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

The Response of Open Hostility

Matthew 22:6, "And the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them."

This is the second response, representing "open hostility." The king's persistence was received with anger! In an act of unbelievable brutality, these people mistreated and killed some of the king's servants — which was an attack against the King himself! Those in this camp are described by Stephen in his sermon in Acts 7.

Acts 7:52a, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One..."

Matthew 22:7, "But the king was enraged and sent his armies [lit. 'his troops'- the king did NOT send his entire army, just a couple of troops], and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire."

Notice that according to the culture of Christ's day, the king would have been justified with this response at the FIRST refusal on the part of the invited guests. And so here, after witnessing the brutality of these invited guests, the king sends his "armies" to destroy these murderers, and set their city on fire. Could this have been in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. when Titus conquered the city with fire, killing some 1,100,000 Jews? (cf. Josephus' *Jewish War IV-VI*)

Based on Matthew 21:45, this parable probably didn't need interpreting. Those listening would have understood that the king of this parable was God, and the invited guests were the Jews! In fact, according to the Talmud, the Messiah's coming would be accompanied by a grand banquet given for God's chosen people. The parallels would have been unmistakably clear!

The Filled Wedding Hall

Matthew 22:8, "Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.'"

This is an important verse. The "worthiness" of the recipients in this text was measured NOT by:

- Who they were.
- What sins they had done or NOT done in the past.
- What they did for a living.

In fact, the parable goes on to make clear in v. 10 that "both evil and good" people were called.

Matthew 22:9-10, "'Go therefore to the main highways [lit. 'where the highways branch off into side streets'³], and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' And those slaves went out into the streets, and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests."

So that this wedding feast would NOT go unattended, the king sent his slaves to invite any and all who would come: both evil and good. Once again, the FOCUS here is NOT on the merit of those invited- it had nothing to do with those invited- BUT on the grace and mercy of the king... as is the case with our salvation. Josiah Conder put it this way:

'Tis not that I did choose thee, for, Lord, that could not be; this heart would still refuse thee, hadst thou not chosen me. ¶ My heart owns none before thee, for thy rich grace I thirst; this knowing, if I love thee, thou must have loved me first." (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. #471)

And so, the Wedding Hall is filled to over-flowing, and all seems fine. But then Christ tells of the missing wedding robe.

The Missing Wedding Robe

Matthew 22:11-12, “But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And he was speechless.”

From the context, this person was NOT a “party crasher.” He obviously was one of the many who heeded the invitation and came. However, he did NOT come dressed appropriately; he was NOT wearing the right clothes! Now, at first reading, we wonder how any of those who accepted the king’s invitation could have been expected to come properly attired. They had been rounded up from every part of the land. No doubt, many would have come from the streets. As such, they would NOT have had the clothes befitting such an occasion. However, because the rest of the dinner guests were dressed in the right clothes, WE CONCLUDE one of two things. EITHER:

- The king had made provision for such clothes. In Christ’s day to enter into the presence of a king you had to wear the right clothes. If you did NOT have them, they would have been provided! (Taylor, 2010, pp. 155-156)
- The wedding attire was within the reach of every man. If that was the case, the appropriate “clothes” most likely would have been a clean body and washed garments... that’s all.

And yet, whatever we might guess, we must conclude that being dressed appropriately for this wedding party was within the reach of this man. And thus, that this man was improperly clothed leads to the conclusion that HE was fully accountable! Notice once again.

Matthew 22:12, “And he said to him, ‘Friend [a title of warmth], how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And he was speechless.”

The king gave the man the opportunity to respond, and yet he was speechless. This implies that he had NOT even the feeblest excuse. And so, at the wedding feast, even among those who accepted the king’s invitation, there was a person who did NOT belong because he chose to be improperly clothed: whether it was that he rejected the robe or refused to wash. Either way THIS MAN CONSIDERED THAT WHAT HE HIMSELF HAD ON WAS *GOOD ENOUGH* for the occasion. And thus, we read this:

Matthew 22:13, “Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Here Christ transitions into application.

- Outer darkness: is a description of hell (cf. Matthew 8:12; 25:30).
- Weeping and gnashing of teeth: is a Hebraism for anger and rebellion (cf. Matthew 8:12;

13:42; 24:51; Luke 13:28; Acts 7:54).

And thus, the place for those associated with the body of Christ who do not know the Lord is a place of misery, rebellion, and grief. It literally is Hell!

And all of this brings us to the point: What message is Christ here conveying? The Message is a simple one found in verse 14.

Matthew 22:14, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

That is, "Many hear the call to turn from their sin unto Christ, BUT few are enabled by God to effect such repentance." The Kingdom of God belongs to the chosen — NOT the called OR those who simply show up. It is such that its members are those whom the King Himself clothes in the appropriate attire!

Yet, this raises the question: Just what is meant by the "wedding robe," apart from which salvation is impossible?"

Biblically speaking, the "Wedding Robe" is the Righteousness of Christ! Had one of Jesus' hearers interrupted and asked, "How can I be clothed in the proper garment? What can I do to keep from being cast into outer darkness like that man?", no doubt Christ would have said this:

Matthew 11:29, "Take My yoke upon you..."

See, the wedding garment that God demands is the garment of none other than Christ Himself. : Unto the false church of Laodicea, Christ said this:

Revelation 3:18a, "I advise you to buy from Me... white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed..."

This is the call of salvation by which a person is clothed in the righteousness of Christ...

2 Corinthians 5:21, "[God] made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Thus, we see Paul's passion. Most of you know that there was a time in the Paul's life when he was one of the most outstanding Pharisees in his day.

Philemon 3:4b-6, "...If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."

Paul wrote this in response to vv. 2-3 and the Judaistic boast that they had the merit to approach

God because of their religious activity! Paul's response was to demonstrate that if any had the ability to save themselves, He did! His "worldly" credentials, as seen in vv. 5-6, far outstripped that of any Jew of his day! Yet, in coming to Christ, Paul gave all of this up.

Philemon 3:7, "But whatever things were gain to me [his religious resume], those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

Why? Because God had opened his eyes to reality. As incredible as Paul truly was when it came to being a Hebrew and a Pharisee, he was NOT perfect! And that imperfection condemned him... and he knew (cf. Romans 7:7-13)! And yet, Paul wasn't crushed or despondent, for God had opened his eyes to the glory of Christ.

Philemon 3:8-9, "More than that, I count all things to be loss [NOT just his stellar pedigree or resume... everything and anything in which man might boast... If Paul had it, he counted it as dog waste! Why?...] in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, NOT having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, BUT that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith."

This is what God has done for all in Christ! Lest He be defiled by the ones He loves, God cleanses, purifies, and robes us in His own righteousness THAT WE MIGHT STAND BEFORE HIM!

Isaiah 61:10a, "I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness..."

What will be your response to this good news today? Will you respond like those mentioned in this parable with Indifference? If you do, it will be to your detriment. Ryle commented

There are thousands of hearers of the Gospel who derive from it no benefit whatever. They listen to it Sunday after Sunday, and year after year, and do not believe so that their souls are saved. They feel no special need of the Gospel; they see no special beauty in it; they do not perhaps hate it, or oppose it, or scoff at it, but they do not receive it unto their hearts. They like other things far better. Their money, their land, their business, or their pleasures, are all far more interesting subjects to them than their souls. It is an awful state of mind to be in, but awfully common... Open sin may kill its thousands; but indifference and neglect of the Gospel kill their tens of thousands. (Ryle, 2012, pp. 204-205)

Will you respond with Hostility? If you do, like the prophecy of Christ in this parable of the destruction of the CITY of Jerusalem (Matthew 22:7), you likewise will perish.

Romans 1:18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and

unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Will you respond with self-confidence — like the man in this parable who refused the appropriate dress in favor of his own, in essence saying, “I’m good enough! I’ve done enough!”? That likewise leads to death. John MacArthur wrote this:

Since Cain’s first attempt to please God by offering his self-appointed sacrifice, men have been trying to come to the Lord on their own terms. They may fellowship with believers, join the church, become active in the leadership, give generously to its support, and speak of devotion to God. Like the tares among the wheat, they freely coexist for a while with God’s people. But in the day of judgment their falsehood will become obvious and their removal certain. (MacArthur, 1988, pp. 311-312)

OR will your confidence be the garment of righteousness provided by your Savior at the cross?

You say, “I want Christ’s righteousness to be my confidence, but I’m so sinful; I fail so often!” And yet as I said at the beginning, you will never come to any assurance of salvation as long as you look within or upon yourself. Christian, take your focus off of yourself and place it solely upon Christ and His righteousness!

You must see, it is this that makes Christianity completely different from any and every other religion. Outside of Christ, the movement of religion goes from the outside to the inside. It is subjective and wholly me-centered. In contrast, Christianity at its core is other-centered! We were made NOT to think of ourselves (the definition of humility), BUT to make much of God, His grace, His sacrifice, and so His purpose and work.

So regardless of what you might see or think as you gaze upon yourself, give glory to God and set your gaze solely upon Christ and the righteousness He provides which could never be rejected by God!

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End Note(s)

¹ Lament. iv.2 (ed. Warsh. p. 73b). (Edersheim, 1992, p. 427)

² See (France, 2007, p. 312)

³ This captures both the compound *dia* and *ek* of *diexsodoi*.