

Prophetic Parables

Temple Parables

(3)

The Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

“The Divine Prosecution of the Kingdom -
its Call and Consummation”

Matthew 22:1-14

“And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding [feast]: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, the wedding [feast] is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Preliminary Observations

The meaning of this parable has been widely debated. For this reason and because the exposition below differs somewhat from what we may define as the mainstream view, we must begin by setting out the interpretative principles upon which it is based.

1. Unlike the two parables that precede it, there is no reference here to the nation of Israel as God's vineyard. Instead, we have a parable – one among many in the NT, which is explicitly about the *character* of the *kingdom of heaven* and implicitly about Israel's place in regard to it.
2. The *marriage* in the parable refers to the *covenant relationship* between God and His elect nation. "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom 9:4).
3. The *wedding feast* we suggest is figurative and does not refer to an actual feast. It refers to the *consummation* of the covenant relationship between God and the nation of Israel. That is, when the blessings under the covenant are realized by Israel through their repentance according to the moral requirement of the kingdom - *righteousness*. This moral principle we recall was the lesson of the first of these three parables in Matthew. These covenant blessings were enshrined in the unconditional Abrahamic, Davidic and Palestinian covenants that God made with the nation. They were there for the accepting – but now postponed because of the nation's disobedience and unbelief. And so we must resist the temptation to draw a parallel between this parable of the "wedding feast" with two similar parables.
 - a. *Matthew 25*: Though this parable of the wedding supper is to do with Israel, it is about a marriage feast and the *readiness* and *anticipation* of the guests. The five virgins with oil in their lamps represent the *faithful remnant* of Israel during the Tribulation. The moral lesson is quite different – a matter of readiness and preparedness, plainly given by verse 13. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." It has the Millennial Kingdom in *prospect*; whereas our immediate parable sees the Millennial Kingdom in its *present* form.
 - b. *Luke 14*: This parable of the "great supper" answers the question "who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God?" It is to do with partaking of the provisions in grace that are provided by God to those *in* His kingdom and it is not confined to the Jews.

The Character of the Kingdom - Verses 1-2

"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son."

Marriage is a form of compact or covenant. In this instance it is unilaterally made by the king. It means therefore that these verses declare that the kingdom of heaven as presented in this parable has a *covenant* character to it. This being so it concerns the nation of Israel and Israel alone, for Israel alone is under a covenant relationship with God. "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom 9:4). This covenant

character of the parable rules out any application of it to the Church. It concerns the nation of Israel and its covenanted place within the kingdom of heaven. The term “kingdom of heaven” (cf kingdom of God) is unique to Matthew. It is essentially Jewish in derivation and refers to the seat of God’s administration and authority – heaven.

The call to the Kingdom - Verses 3-6

“And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding [feast]: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.”

We now move into the historical and prophetic aspects of this parable which are governed by the context noted above. There are a number of things to determine regarding the historical aspect.

The called, the caller and the callers

The called

We noted that as part of a set of three prophetic and dispensational parables in Matthew 21-22, this parable vitally concerns *Israel*. The servants were commissioned to call (*kaleo*) those who were “bidden” (*kaleo*). The repetition of the verb - “calling the called” - indicates that those who were called by the servants were already nominated for calling into the kingdom of heaven. The meaning is clear. Those who were called by the servants were none other than those who were of the elect nation – the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

The caller

God – Jehovah is the Caller. He is the nation’s *Father* and Israel is His *son*. The truths of Israel’s election, sonship and place in the kingdom of heaven were established at the time of the nation’s election and redemption. “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn” (Ex 4:22). “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hos 11:1). “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Jer 32:38).

The callers

Broadly speaking there were two calls to Israel - those who were “bidden.” The first was the call to the nation and its elect people made by the OT prophets. The second call was made by the Lord and His servants during the initial New Testament times and comprised:

- a. The call by the forerunner, John the Baptist. “Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4).
- b. The call by the Lord. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matt 23:37).

- c. The call by the Lord's disciples. The disciples were told (initially) not to go to the Gentiles and to call only the lost sheep of the house of Israel. "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6).

The substance of the call

These calls offered the kingdom of heaven to Israel. The calls ceased when the Lord withdrew the offer when the nation rejected God's servants and the offer they brought, which rested in God's righteous Servant, Jesus of Nazareth. The setting aside of the nation was anticipated in Matthew 12 when the Lord left the Temple for the seaside; it was consummated when He was crucified at Calvary. The rejection of these calls by the nation is confirmed by the parable before us. "But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise." Moreover the servants were put to death. "And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." The Lord noted it in the prelude to His prophetic Olivet discourse. As noted above - "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt 23:37).

The Chastisement by the King – Verses 7-9

"But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage."

The King's wrath against the nation is prophesied and its execution is now part of history. We refer of course to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Roman people under Titus. Here, as in other instances, God used heathen hands to bring judgment upon Israel. Not the Assyrians or Babylonians now, but the iron fist of Rome was raised to chastise His disobedient firstborn nation. It is important that we understand the significance of this particular judgment. It was a divine demonstration that Israel had been set aside by God because of its unbelief and its rejection of His Son. The setting aside of Israel involves the judicial postponement of the consummation of the covenant promises – the wedding feast.

This national chastisement includes bringing the Gentiles into blessing. So we read that the servants were told to go beyond Judea – beyond the lost sheep of the house of Israel, into the "highways" and bid "all" to the wedding or marriage feast. It was not now just an offer of the kingdom of heaven to the Israelites but to the Gentiles as well.

It is important to determine the occasion in *this* parable when the Gentiles were introduced into blessing. The conventional view seems to be that it was marked by the coming of the Church. It is true, that by bringing in the Church God chastened Israel nationally and brought the Gentiles into the good of His grace. Paul says so in Romans 11. "I say then, have they [Israel] stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them [Israel] to jealousy" (Rom 11:11). This chastisement was executed when the Church was established and the Gospel taken to Jew

and Gentile. “That...ye [Gentiles] were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now...made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:12).

However, the context of this parable and the call to the kingdom of heaven is the time of the *Tribulation*. In this seven-year period the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all peoples. Jew and Gentile will be called to place faith in the coming kingdom in which the marriage feast – the covenant relationship between God and Israel will be consummated. The covenant blessings will then be realized directly by Israel and indirectly by the Gentile nations – in the Millennial Kingdom.

The Coming of the King - Verses 10-14

“So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Clearly, the coming of the king alludes to Christ’s Second Advent and the Millennial Kingdom on earth. Some may be wondering! Did we not say the king is the Father in this parable? Indeed He is! But what we have here is language and title in keeping with the context of the parable – the kingdom of heaven – the seat of paternal authority and power. At this point we recall the first lines of the disciples’ prayer. “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:9-10). This is assuredly a reference to the Millennial Kingdom in which the Son reigns as Sovereign Judge – and, yet it is the Father’s kingdom; another glorious occasion of the co-equality between the Father and the Son in purpose and essence. “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (Jn 5:22).

Fittingly then, we have here the Father in judgment *representatively*. He judges the guests. Observe now that we said the marriage feast refers to the consummation of the covenant relationship between God and Israel – and the blessings that flow from it (to both Jew and Gentile). It is important to realise that this consummation and its celebration is not confined to an event – such as the marriage supper of the Lamb, which will take place on earth at the beginning of the Millennium. Rather, it is a feast or a consummation that lasts *the entire one thousand years*. And, during that period there will be those who genuinely accept the Kingdom and its righteousness and others who do so outwardly - as a mere profession – the “good and the “bad” respectively.

Once we grasp this truth, the matter of the man without a wedding garment becomes clear. Like all *throughout* the Millennial Kingdom, he is invited to enjoy the blessings of the consummation by bowing to the moral principle of the kingdom – peace reigning through righteousness under Christ. But he feigned obedience to it. And, it was for *this* reason that he was not chosen. He was not “clothed with the garments of righteousness.” He is a mere

professor, and is representative of all the “bad” who reject the way of righteousness through Christ.¹ They are therefore not entitled to receive a wedding garment. At the end of the millennium they are judged and cast into eternal punishment. This man was “speechless,” as every person will be who stands in their own righteousness before God. Their garments of righteousness are as “filthy rags,” and “all do fade as a leaf” and their iniquities, like the wind, have them taken away (Isa 64:6).

If we fail to interpret the circumstances relating to this man correctly, we risk being plunged into the terrible mire that is Calvinism and Reformed Theology, with their denial of man’s responsibility to God and doctrine of unconditional election.²

We have, in this final parable of the Temple trilogy, the call and consummation of the kingdom of God on earth. It concludes where the first parable began – with the vitality of the divine principle of righteousness through penitent faith.

¹The *living* number of which will be gathered by Gog and Magog through Satan from the four corners of the earth to do battle with the King at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (Rev 20:7-9). The “good” are those who stand before God clothed in the righteousness of Christ. “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21).

² Under Calvinism the “few who are chosen” are said to represent the elect” – those who God unconditionally elects to salvation to the divine exclusion of all others.