

We continue our study of the Parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22:1-14. It is a familiar story because throughout many Jewish writings there are parallels that show us how important the Wedding Supper was in Jewish culture. The Jews clearly believed in their place at this Feast because of their elect status. Sadly, as we will see in this week's notes, they also believed that they *deserved* such a place and that they could present themselves to God and be accepted, clothed in the "wedding garment" sewn by the hand of their own good works. This week, may we recover our joy in the prospect of this Wedding Feast with Jesus, and may we begin to taste the joy of it – but only because we shall be dressed in a robe of righteousness not our own!

Mon/Tues: Read Matthew 26:29 and John 2:1-11

Wedding Plans

By refusing to drink of the Cup of the Kingdom until we drink it with Him at the Wedding Supper (Matt. 26:29), Jesus shows how much He desires to share with us His wedding joy!

It was this same concern for the joy and honor of the bride and groom that prompted Jesus' first miracle of turning the water into wine (John 2). Notice especially that this miracle was a sign of His power to make all things new. John 2:6-8 tells that He used the large pitchers of water used normally for ritualistic washings. The Jews were obsessed with such washings, seeking by such outward cleansings to cleanse their guilty hearts. In other words, they took the ritual laws of the Old Testament (designed to point to the need for a better sacrifice to come) and exalted them to affirm their hypocrisy and outward self-righteousness. No wonder Mark describes such outward traditions as "vain hypocrisy" in Mark 7:1-7!

But Jesus came to provide real cleansing from sin and real peace of conscience through the "Cup" of judgment which He would drink in our place and through the blood of His sacrifice, which can really cleanse our hearts and hands to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14). Alas for those who refuse such inward heart cleansing. Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them will not entrust Himself to them because He knew the guilt and dark iniquity within them (John 2:23-25).

Meditate and Pray: Father in Heaven, thank you that you care so much for the honor of your Son's wedding that you send forth your messengers to gather guests again and again. Even when those bearing your wedding invite are abused and even killed (Matt. 22:6) yet still you send forth your Gospel good tidings from one generation to the next. Thank you also that your invitation does not return to fruitless. You effectively call the lowliest and the most undeserving for this feast. Most of all, thank you that the cleansing water of the Holy Spirit can truly restore the joy in being invited to the feast. So, search us as a church family. Provide deep cleansing from sin and give us joy as those called to serve the living God. And when many refuse to enter into this wedding joy, please send forth workers again and again in order to fill your banqueting hall! Amen.

Weds/Thurs: Read Matthew 22:1-10 and Luke 14:15-21

Excuses

Consider the excuses given by those who refused to come to the Banquet of salvation in the Kingdom of God. These excuses are mentioned in Matthew and expanded upon in Luke's account. They range from outright refusal and even violence towards those who bring God's invitation, to pre-occupation with what they considered "more important" occupations, such as fields and businesses. Luke adds to our understanding of these excuses. With his help, we can interrogate those who make such excuses with these questions:

- Did you really buy that field “sight unseen” so that you have to skip the Marriage Supper of The Lamb in order to go look it over (Luke 14:18)?
- Did you really buy those oxen before you ensured that you could work with them, so that you have to try them out right now (Luke 14:19) instead of coming to the banquet of the King?
- Can you not bring your own wife along to enjoy the festivities, since the Bible only precludes military service and public business for that first year of marriage (compare Deuteronomy 24:5 with Luke 14:20)? Would there not be lasting benefit for her as well as you in attending?

No! These excuses simply show that those called outwardly to be the people of God can often hold the privileges of their status as God’s invited ones in a light, contemptible manner. That is what Matthew 22:5 says of these invitees: “They paid no attention,” meaning they couldn’t care less! What a terrible day it will be for those who are negligent of spiritual things to realize that their values were upside down! The fields, businesses, marriages, oxen and relationships they put so much stock in were actually worth nothing compared to invitations to the banquet of salvation!

Meditate and Pray: As we see how heedless so many in the world are to the things of God, we cry out: Lord, open their eyes that they might see! Do not let us give up holding forth the Gospel invitation to sinners, no matter how many times we are spurned because of it! Reassure us once again that our Gospel labor is not in vain. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Fri/Sat: Read Matthew 22:1-14

Many are Called, Few are Chosen

In antiquity, when the King invited you, there would be no question as to your initially accepting the invitation – if you wanted to survive and thrive as a subject of the King! There was no RSVP system or casual e-mail option of refusal. When the day came for the banquet, the servants of the King would come to retrieve you for the day’s festivities. It would therefore be the highest dishonor to refuse the summons when the servants came to the door to take you away. How much more is this true when the special feast is *the marriage supper of the King’s Son!*

Let’s make the lesson as practical as possible. When the King is God the Father and a marriage invitation means being joined to a Savior, there simply is no proper response except a joyful reception of the call to feast on this salvation provided through God’s Son! But with our self-absorbed lives, someone may ask: “What if there is a conflict in *my* schedule with the date of the proposed wedding?” If the King invites you to the wedding feast for his son (Matthew 22:2), how could you dare refuse? His joyful invitation is all that matters!

We are amazed to see those who refuse God’s invitation (Matthew 22:3), abuse God’s messengers (Matthew 22:6), or, just as wickedly, casually excuse themselves because of their preoccupation with the things of this world (Matthew 22:5 & Luke 14:18-20). It is enough to leave us speechless!

Yet we are not done with our list of reasons men can “disinvite” themselves from the feast of God’s saving grace. In Matthew 22:11-12, there is one who crashes the Kings’ banquet by brazenly showing up without a wedding garment. This disrespect was unthinkable given how important marriages were in the ancient east! [Compare Judges 14:11-15, where provision of wedding garments was such an important thing in the eyes of

the thirty Philistines assigned to attend Samson's wedding that they were willing to burn down the house of Samson's fiancé if she failed to ensure that Samson would buy them garments himself!]

On a much higher and holier level, can there be anything as important as being properly attired in the garments of Christ's righteousness before daring to approach God as our King? In Rev. 7:9-14, only those attired in white robes of righteousness can surround the throne to praise the Lamb. His blood has made them white and given them glorious dress fit for God's presence. Anyone who dares to approach God in garments of his own making repudiates the righteousness which comes from God (Romans 10:3). When it comes to God's dress-code, they refuse to submit to God's righteousness and seek to wear their own good works. Their end is terrible, as Matthew 22:13-14 makes clear.

Meditate and Pray: Lord, make us willing to put all other earthly priorities aside. And may we value the beauty and righteousness which Christ alone can give us and wear it daily in place of our own sins and dry good works. Help us to sing with fresh gratitude the words of hymn # 520, speaking to us of the beauty of Christ's garments for our salvation. Amen.

*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.*

*Bold shall I stand in Thy great day;
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.*

*The holy, meek, unspotted Lamb,
Who from the Father's bosom came,
Who died for me, e'en me to atone,
Now for my Lord and God I own.*

*Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which, at the mercy seat of God,
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me, e'en for my soul, was shed.*

*When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,
Ev'n then this shall be all my plea,
Jesus hath lived, hath died, for me.*

*This spotless robe the same appears,
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.*

*Jesus, the endless praise to Thee,
Whose boundless mercy hath for me—
For me a full atonement made,
An everlasting ransom paid.*

*O let the dead now hear Thy voice;
Now bid Thy banished ones rejoice;
Their beauty this, their glorious dress,
Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness.*

Sunday: Read Matthew 22:8-14 & Luke 14:23

The Glory of God to Conceal

Our last word must not be about the judgment on those who refuse God's grace and dare to come into His presence by their own proud self-righteousness. This is a parable of salvation, not only judgment, for we see God repeatedly sending out His messengers to gather "the poor, crippled, blind and lame" (Luke 14:23).

Ah, here is where God as our King *is most unlike* the kings of this world! Dishonor an earthly king once, and you are in fear of your life! Break his laws, and it is the glory of earthly kings to search out your transgression and punish you to the full extent of the law. But refuse and reject God, transgressing His ways repeatedly, as we have done? Well, it is the "glory of God to conceal a matter"! How do I know this from the Parable of the

Wedding Supper? See how (Luke 14:23) God gathers *even the most unwilling* of sinners who have previously ignored His invite! He gives instructions to “constrain” or to “compel” them. That is how determined God must be to make one stubborn sinner to bow the knee and receive His salvation. What a profound mystery: that man must be persuaded and even compelled to receive the good news of salvation. What profound grace, that God is willing to so winsomely coerce us by His grace. How much we owe to our constraining God! Truly as the hymn writer says: “Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.”

Meditate and Pray: Lord, your word says, “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out” (Proverbs 25:2). You know the sad story from the beginning to the end, and still you conceal my sin glorious wedding clothes of your Son’s righteousness. Help me to always and only boast in the cross of my beloved Savior and so be crucified to the world and it’s call.