

Parable of the Wedding Banquet
A Series on Parables Rebuking Jewish Religious Leaders: Part 3

1. Why is Jesus telling this parable (Matt 22:1-14)? What is the setting and context of his storytelling?

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet is the third and final parable that Jesus directs towards the Jewish religious leaders during His last week on earth. The Jewish religious leaders had been questioning Jesus' authority to teach in the temple. In His first preceding parable of the Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32), Jesus tells the Jewish religious leaders that tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom of God before them. In the parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33-45; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19), Jewish religious leaders learn that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them.

2. Consult Luke 14:16-24. Is this a second account of the Parable of the Wedding Banquet? What are the similarities and differences?

Some scholars see the similarities of Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:16-24 as evidence that they arose from the same basic story; they believe that Jesus told the parable once, and the gospel authors retold the same story. However there are significant differences as the following table shows:

Matthew 22:1-14	Luke 14:16-24
Story concerns a king.	Story concerns a certain man.
A wedding banquet for the king's son.	A great banquet / supper.
Two invitations.	One invitation.
Invited guests refuse and become violent.	Invited guests make excuses.
Invited guests are destroyed.	Invited guests are passed by.

Another method of examining this question of whether these two accounts arose from the same basic story is to look at the number of similar words between the two accounts as some scholars have:

Total number of Greek words in Luke 14:16-24: **159**

A. Greek words in Luke's account that appear in identical form as Matthew 22:2-10: **10**

B. Greek words that are common to both passages but in different lexical or grammatical form: **14**

C. Greek words that are clear synonyms for corresponding words in Matthew 22:2-10: **4**

Percentage of A to total: **6.3%**

Percentage of A, B and C to total: **17.6%**

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To put this into perspective, consider the comparisons between two parables:

Parable for comparison	Wicked Tenants (Luke 20:9-16 and Mark 12:1-9)	Wedding Banquet (Matt 22:1-14 and Luke 14:16-24)
What is known	Luke 20:9-16 and Mark 12:1-9 are two accounts of the same parable.	It is debated whether Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:16-24 are two different parables or two accounts of the same parable.
Percentage of identical words between accounts	53.3%	6.3%
Percentage of common words but in different grammatical forms	67.5%	17.6%

From the above data, the low correlation of similar words means that of the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Matt 22:1-14) is probably a different parable than the one of Luke 14:16-24.

Luke 14:16-24, the Parable of the Great Banquet, is part of a series of dinner table conversations at the home of a Pharisee (Luke 14:1). In contrast, Matthew 22 takes place in public in the temple. Most scholars believe that Jesus does tell two different parables. However, the lesson of the two passages is similar: some who are expected to be present in the kingdom of God will be excluded, and those excluded have only themselves to blame.

3. When reading a long passage, it may be helpful to examine the passage in parts. How would you break up Matthew 22:1-14 into parts? What do you observe about each part? What are your interpretations?

A. The first invitation and the people's response (Matt 22:1-3)

Observations

Jesus uses a simile to inform people what the kingdom of heaven is like; it is like a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

Jewish wedding feasts of the first century were large gatherings, and a very wealthy person could invite the entire town or city. They often lasted seven days and guests were expected to attend the whole celebration. Aristocratic landowners may have the luxury of time; however, attending could be a burden for peasants and other workers who were dependent on daily wages. To be invited by the king was a great honor which no one would refuse lest they face the terror of displeasing him.

In Jesus' parable, the invitees were "unwilling" to come. It was not a question of prior commitments, but that the invitees did not want to come.

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Interpretations

In the first two parables, God was portrayed as the father in the Parable of the Two Sons and as the landowner in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants. In this final parable and sharpest rebuke of Jewish religious authorities, the Jews would have recognized that the king symbolized God. For those who heard John the Baptist, they may have recognized the Messianic overtures of the bridegroom and king's son (John 3:29) or earlier allusions by Jesus of Himself (Matt 9:15).

Aside from this, there is probably no further meaning to the imagery of the marriage. Accustomed to Old Testament motifs of marriage, Jews would have recognized the image of a marriage if the king was getting married; the nation of Israel was recognized as the bride of God (Ezek 16:1-63), albeit the harlot. However, this parable was about the marriage of the king's son which would be meaningless to the Jews.

The point of this parable was about the guests of the wedding banquet. The Jews were not the bride, they were the guests. With the dawning of the kingdom of heaven, invitations to the banquet have gone out and were being refused, because the Jews refused to acknowledge the Bridegroom Jesus Christ.

B. A graceful repeat of the first invitation and the people's response (Matt 22:4-6)

Observations

The king repeats his invitation and describes the greatness and immediacy of the banquet: all of the king's oxen and fattened livestock have been butchered, and everything is ready. This was just the start of the festivities!

Not only did the invited guests ignore the king's entreating invitation, the king's messengers were mistreated and killed. The invited guests disregarded the honor and command of the king's invitation.

Interpretations

The behavior and violence by the invited guests portray the contempt that the nation of Israel treated God's grace. At the dawn of the kingdom of heaven, John the Baptist is murdered.

C. The king's response to the murder of his slaves (Matt 22:7)

Observations

The act of ignoring and murdering the royal messengers was seen as treason, which resulted in the king's wrath and judgment. For the relatively few messengers that were murdered, an army was sent to exact punishment on the murderers and burned their city!

Interpretations

First century Jews recognized that royal emissaries represented the king, and any mistreatment of them was despised. Herein is the first point of the parable, Jesus points out the sin of Israel and God's judgment of it. To the ire of Jewish religious leaders: as they follow Jesus' parable, they agree with the king's judgment only to realize that Jesus is portraying them as the treasonous murderers. It is also possible that Jesus was making Jewish religious leaders aware of His knowledge of their plans to kill Him.

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D. The second invitation and the people's response (Matt 22:8-10)

Observations

When juxtaposed with the preceding verse of the king's army destroying the murderers and burning their city, the second invitation is all the more compelling. In his desire to honor his son's wedding, the king sends his servants out to invite everyone they could find including the evil and the good. The invitation was for everyone *who would come*; the invitation was without any conditions or qualifications

Interpretation

Jesus makes the point that everyone is invited to His wedding banquet, because they are simply a human being. The invitation is made without any qualification of socioeconomic position or moral state.

E. The King's appraisal (Matt 22:11-14)

Observations

The king notices a guest who is not appropriately attired and asks how the guest gained entrance to the banquet. There is irony when the king calls the offender as "friend" and pronounces judgment shortly after. The guest's speechlessness reflects the guest's guilt, and the king has the inappropriately dressed guest forcibly removed and tossed into the darkness outside. The king's invitation does not guarantee participation!

Cultural studies of the first century do not reveal evidence that wedding hosts provided wedding garments for their guests. Instead there is evidence that the wedding garment was newly washed clothes; dirty clothing was an insult to the host and wedding couple.

Interpretation

Participation in the wedding feast required the appropriate wedding garments, and there is debate about what the wedding garments represented.

In the latter part of the prophetic book of Isaiah, Isaiah reminds Judah about their covenantal relationship with God and speaks of preparing for the coming of the Messiah. In Isaiah 61:10, Isaiah says, "... For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness..."

In the context of the wedding banquet, only the King could provide this special "garment of salvation"; but, the guests had to put it on. The idea that human beings even had a choice was established by the original invited guests who refused to even come (Matt 22:3), and the man who came to the wedding feast without his "garment of salvation".

Figuratively, clothing has been associated with the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49) and Jesus states explicitly that the Holy Spirit is necessary for one to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5-16).

Without the garment of salvation, there is judgment and final judgment.

It is important to note that only those who were obedient and wore the proper clothing were called by Jesus as "chosen" (Matt 22:14). The use of this term of election indicates God's sovereign knowledge and control even as the original invitees refused to come or some participants didn't wear the appropriate wedding garments. God did not choose to save some and condemn others; the qualification of God's chosen was predicated on a person's obedience to accept God's provision of grace.

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The greater meaning of the Parable of the Wedding Feast is the identification of the nation of Israel as the original invited guests who were unwilling and murdered the prophets (King's messengers). Now Jesus makes clear that the invitation is going out to all.

While much can be learned by studying a parable in isolation, it is vitally important to study them in a series as a narrative unit. A case in point is the three parables that Jesus use to rebuke Jewish religious leaders.

Three days before His crucifixion, the parables are initiated by a controversy. Jewish religious leaders raised the question Jesus' authority in the temple court (Matt 21:23-27), and Jesus' decisively questions their competence to judge.

Parable of the Two Sons: Jesus makes a distinction between the religious leader and repentant sinner; the righteousness of the religious leader is not enough to enter the kingdom of God.

Parable of the Wicked Tenants: Jesus exposes Jewish religious leaders of their neglect of their covenantal duty. For their rejection of God's son, Israel will be removed from their caretaking of the kingdom of God.

Parable of the Wedding Guests: For their contempt with which Israel as a whole treated God's grace, invitation to the kingdom of God was going to be made formally to all. And it is worthwhile to note that there is a marriage feast with the return of the Lord (Rev 19:7-9)!

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