

Biblical Notes – Matthew 22:1-14

Commentary on Matthew 22:1-14, Dr. Knox Chamblin

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET. 22:1-14.

I. INTRODUCTION: THE PARABLE IN CONTEXT.

A. Relation to the Preceding Context.

This is the last of the three successive parables of judgment (beginning in 21:28) against Israel, especially her leadership. The audience remains the same: "Jesus spoke to them again [mainly if not exclusively "the chief priests and the Pharisees" of 21:45] in parables..." (22:1a). The plural "parables" need not mean that Matthew views 22:2-10 as one parable, and vv. 11-14 as another. "Parables" may join 22:1-14 to the foregoing two parables; or the expression may simply mean "parabolically." There are in any case obvious connections among the three parables: Each has an "authority figure" (father, landowner, and king respectively). "Sons" or "a son" appear in all three. Parables two and three have in common the two groups of slaves and the severe judgment against those who oppose the son (note *apollymi*, 21:41; 22:7).

B. Relation to the Following Context.

This parable prepares the way for the remaining four controversies (22:15-46; cf. opening comments on 21:23-27) between Jesus and the authorities against whom he directs the three parables. These parables and controversies together prepare for Jesus' woes against the Pharisees and teachers of the law in ch. 23.

II. THE PARABLE ITSELF.

(We will take account of the similar parable in Luke 14:16-24.)

A. The Occasion.

In Lk the host is "a certain man," in Mt "a king." Lk speaks simply of "a great banquet." In Mt the king plans "a wedding celebration" for his son. (Forms of *gamos* appear eight times in 22:1-14. As generally, the plural *gamoí* denotes the celebration, as distinct from the wedding itself.) Moreover, the meal in Mt is called an *ariston*, "breakfast" or "noon meal," whereas that of Lk is called a *deipnon*, "dinner, supper, the main meal (toward evening)" (*BAGD*). As things turn out, the wedding banquet of Mt also takes place at night (22:13, "throw him outside into the darkness") owing to the delay caused by the guests' refusal, the attack upon their city, and the issuing of new invitations.

B. The First Invitations.

It was customary at the time (and is still a custom in the East) for a preliminary invitation to be issued to the guests, followed by a second when the feast was ready (Manson, *Sayings*, 225). This practice is reflected in both parables (though in rather different terms): see Lk 14:16-17; Mt 22:3-4.

C. The Responses.

There is a kinship between the three guests of Lk 14:18-20 and the three responses of Mt 22:5-6 (where one goes to his field, another to his business, and "the rest" seize the king's servants). But there is a remarkable difference in the respective ways of response. In Lk, each guest has presumably accepted the initial invitation. Upon receiving the second invitation, each guest politely asks to be excused owing to something that has just happened ("I have just bought," or "just got married"). But in Mt both invitations are refused; and in neither case is there the slightest sign of politeness: "but they refused to come" (v. 3b); "but they paid no attention" (v. 5a). Nor is there evidence of extenuating circumstances: "they...went off - one to his field, another to his business" (v. 5b). Most startlingly, the great majority of the guests "seized [the king's] servants, mistreated them and killed them" (v. 6)! Both parables depict the guests' indifference and occupation with other things; Mt alone testifies to murderous hostility against the king and his servants.

D. The Second Invitation.

Again there are notable differences.

1. The places. In Lk people in the town are first invited (14:21), and then (as there is still room for others) those living outside the town ("Go out to the roads and country lanes," v. 23). In Mt, there is no room for a further invitation to people in the city; for, in response to the behavior of the first guests, the king has destroyed their city.

So NIV's "street corners" for *tas diexodous tōn hodōn*, v. 9a, is misleading. In some contexts this would be an appropriate translation. But here, with the city having gone up in smoke, the phrase denotes "the places where the streets of the city pierce through the walls and turn into country roads" (Gundry, 438; cf. BAGD, s.v. *diexodos*). The servants may be gathering refugees fleeing the holocaust (Manson, Sayings, 226).

2. The people. In Lk the new invitation first goes to "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (14:21), and then apparently to people without distinction (v. 23). In Mt the king expressly makes the invitation all-inclusive: "Go...and invite to the banquet anyone you find" (v. 9). The invitation thus includes the kinds of people who are invited in the Lukan version. But Mt's way of spelling out the comprehensiveness of the invitation is to say that the servants gathered "all the people they could find, both good and bad" (v. 10).

E. The Man Without the Wedding Garment.

Mt 22:11-14 has no counterpart in the Lukan parable. According to Jeremias, "wedding clothes" (*endyma gamou*) means "not...a special garment, worn on festive occasions, but a newly washed garment.... The soiled garment is an insult to the host" (Parables, 187; he cites Rev 19:8; 22:14). If the guests were to provide their own garments, then the parable is not concerned to explain how they might have been expected to do so on such short notice. But we are perhaps meant to infer (especially given the extremity of the situation?) that the king furnished the proper clothing - which this particular man refused.

III. THE MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE. Here we focus on Mt exclusively.

A. God's Celebration.

The king of the parable is God the Father; the king's son is Jesus "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (16:16). The celebration reminds us that God the Father glorifies his beloved Son for who he is and for what he does. It would (in my judgment) be too narrow an application of the imagery to confine it to the Messianic Banquet at the Kingdom's consummation (8:11; 26:29). It is better to say with Manson that "the marriage feast for the king's son is a figure for the Messianic age with all its joys" (Sayings, 225) - an age inaugurated with the first coming of Jesus, an age whose blessings can already be experienced (5:3-10).

B. God's Calling.

1. The comprehensiveness of God's call. The king's invitations are all-encompassing: they are first delivered throughout the city, then throughout its environs. Jesus concludes his two-tiered parable with the words, "For many are invited, but few are chosen" (v. 14). These words are crucial for understanding the preceding 13 verses; and we shall find that they provide understanding on more than one level. For now we observe that the saying witnesses to the all-inclusiveness of God's call. The "many" (*polloi*) of this verse embraces not only those gathered after the destruction of the city, but also those invited from the very first. The succession of invitations corresponds to God's declaration of truth concerning his Kingdom and his Son - first to Israel and then to the Gentile nations.

2. God's calling to Israel. The invitation to the first guests corresponds to God's revelation of truth to Israel, his chosen people. While the twofold invitation of vv. 3-4 recalls the two groups of servants in 21:35-36, the two invitations do not correspond strictly to the work of the Former and the Latter Prophets. God's judgment (22:7) also presupposes the ministries of John and Jesus. (This parable has nothing to correspond to the son's mission in 21:37.) As the king in the parable issues his invitation indiscriminately, so God declares saving truth to Israel comprehensively. Jesus proclaims his Gospel of the Kingdom to the entire nation: cf. 4:23-25 ("Jesus went throughout Galilee..."); 15:24 (where "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" means the whole of Israel).

The first guests' rude and ruthless rejection of the king's gracious invitation, illustrates contemporary Israel's rejection of the grace of God offered in Jesus. That the king's army "destroyed those murderers and burned their city" (v. 7), depicts - in more terrifying terms than 21:41 - the forthcoming destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps (in keeping with Manson's suggestion) those next invited include "Jewish refugees" who have chosen to follow Jesus.

3. God's calling to Gentiles. The servants' going into the country (vv. 9-10), illustrates (principally if not exclusively) the apostles' mission to Gentiles. Again the invitation is all-inclusive (cf. 8:11, "from the east and the west"; and 28:19, "make

disciples of all nations"). Messiah calls Gentiles as well as Jews into his New Community.

C. God's Church.

1. The mixed multitude. The king's servants, sent forth with a new invitation, gathered persons "both good and bad" (v. 10). This prepares for the second part of the parable, vv. 11-14. (This link should caution us against driving a wedge between vv. 2-10 and vv. 11-14, as though they were originally separate and unconnected parables.) "The guests who fill the wedding hall" (v. 10) stand for the Church. The inclusion of "both good and bad," witnesses not only to the comprehensiveness of grace but also - and here especially (in view of vv. 11-14) - to the mixed character of the Church (cf. comments on the parables of 13:24-30, 36-43; and 13:47-50). Here we find another application of v. 14, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." While v. 14 reflects upon the whole of vv. 2-13, it is chiefly a comment on the story of vv. 11-13 - as underscored by the opening "for" (gar), v. 14a. What then accounts for the distinction between the "many" who fill the hall, and the "few" who are rightfully there?

2. The cruciality of obedience. What distinguishes true disciples from false? Jesus' answer in Mt: Living obediently to the Law of God as newly and finally expounded by Jesus (5:17-48; 7:13-29; etc.). Good works are not the cause or the ground of salvation; but they are the proof that one has been saved by grace. What the disciple does bears true witness to what the disciple is (7:20). I agree with those who take the "clean wedding garment" to be a picture of the good deeds with which the true disciple is clothed. The absence of the proper garment, testifies to the falsity of the disciple's profession. "The missing wedding garment...symbolizes neither eschatological joy nor works meriting salvation, but evidential works of righteousness" (Gundry, 439; cf. 5:20). The garment "is best understood as the way of life that shows the genuineness of the initial repentance" (Bruce, Matthew, 71; cf. 3:8). Manson notes that "as early as Irenaeus [2nd c. A.D.] the wedding-garment is understood to signify works of righteousness" (Sayings, 226).

3. The certainty of judgment. In this context, the words "few are chosen" speak not of predestination (despite the verb *eklegomai*) but of God's judgment on human responses to the truth about his Son. God rejects those who reject Jesus - whether they be non-disciples (like those who refuse the invitation) or false disciples (like the man who comes without the proper garment). The "chosen few" are those who demonstrate the authenticity of their profession by the way they live. The king's inspection and decision prefigure the final judgment, when everyone - disciples included - will be rewarded "according to what he has done" (16:27; cf. 2 Cor 5:10). The severe treatment of the man without the garment (v. 13), depicts in terrifying terms the consequences of an adverse judgment from God. That a professing disciple is so judged, solemnly warns church members against imitating the Jewish leaders, whose words contradicted and concealed what they really were. As those who have experienced the grace and power of the kingdom, disciples are called to the most radical obedience of all.

Website Reference:

http://reformedperspectives.org/article.asp/link/http:%5E%5Ereformedperspectives.org%5Earticles%5Ekno_chamblin%5ENT.Chamblin.Matt.22.1-14.html/at/The%20Parable%20of%20the%20Wedding%20Banquet