

Mysteries of the Kingdom - Matthew 22:1-14

The Wedding Feast

Every year, five young college football players gather at a pre-determined site. They gather for a very honored ceremony. All five have been called to attend this ceremony. But at the end, only one will be chosen to receive the coveted Heisman Trophy award.

All of us here have, at one time or another received that warm, personal correspondence from Ed McMahon: an invitation to enter the Publisher's Clearing House \$10 million sweepstakes! In a sense, we have been called to compete, but have any of us ever been chosen to receive the prize? I do not think so!

In today's scripture we see the vast distinction between being called and being chosen! This message continues the study of three parables Jesus told in response to a challenge to His authority. We saw in the first (21:28-32) rebellion against the Father. In the second (21:33-44) we saw rebellion against the Son. And we see here rebellion against the Spirit.

Notice first, **those who rejected**. What is being rejected? In the parable, a king provides a wedding feast for his Son. Servants are sent to give invitations yet the invitation is rejected TWICE! What is this? Obviously, it is more than just a simple meal! This meal is symbolic of the great feast God has prepared for us. Herbert Lockyer, in his commentary, says this feast includes: "pardon of sin, favor with God, peace of conscience, exceeding great and precious promises, access to the throne of grace, the comforts of the Spirit, and a well-grounded assurance of eternal life." What a wonderful array of blessings and benefits!

Now, this has both historical and personal implications. First of all, consider the historical implications. All of these blessings were available to Israel! Yet they continued to reject God's gracious offer. That we are dealing on the surface with the Jewish nation is evident in the parable. Remember this is the third in a series of three parables. The first two show the rejection of the Father and Son. Even here in this parable we see Jesus predicting future judgment: "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (v. 7).

This occurred in 70AD when the Roman armies of Titus leveled and burned Jerusalem. But this is the third of three parables and it deals with the rejection of the Spirit. Warren Wiersbe suggests that this pictures the awful "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" described in scripture. Here he pictures it as a "national sin" committed by Israel. In rejecting John the Baptist, they rejected the Father who sent him! But there remained the ministry of the Son. Yet, as the second parable shows, they rejected the Son, even killing Him! Yet they were forgiven because of their ignorance and still there remained the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But when Spirit came they rejected the ministry of the Spirit and brought final judgment. They had rejected Father, Son and Spirit - there were no more opportunities!

But let us also consider the personal implications. That this has meaning beyond the historical application to Israel is suggested by the parable itself. Again we find a Father present in the parable. We also find a Son present and alive, in spite of what husbandmen did in preceding parable. But we also see that now this Son has a bride! The suggestion is most certainly the Lord Jesus with His church (the bride of Christ).

May I suggest that these reactions of national Israel (vv. 1-6) are representative of many today? More than once the invitation was refused. Why? Certainly not because they COULD not receive it but simply because they WOULD not! They had other things they cared more about. Verse 5 describes these things - farming, business, etc. Now, there is nothing wrong with farming or running a business, but when those things become more important than responding to God then our life is out of balance! Many today reject the work of God in their lives with equally flimsy excuses! I work two jobs; I enjoy recreation and would rather do that than worship; I have got lots of money invested in a weekend getaway and do not want to waste it; and on and on and on the excuses go. In short, I am too busy for anything spiritual. Charles Spurgeon tells of a rich ship owner who was visited by a godly man. The godly man asked, "what is the state of your soul?" "Soul?," the ship owner said. "I have no time to be concerned with my soul. It's all I can do to keep up with my ships." But he was not too busy to die, which he did one week later!

Do you fit this pattern? More interested in clients than Christ? Rather read stock quotations than scriptural quotes? Prefer to work for money over witness about the mercy of God? You do not have to murder a prophet to miss out. You only have to fritter away your time on things that will eventually pass away and thereby let your opportunity for repentance pass by! Do not be like those who reject!

In contrast, notice **those who received**. Even here, though, there are some we would not want to emulate. We notice among those who receive, two classes. Consider first, those called. Verses 8-10 describe these: "Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. [9] Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. [10] 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."

But notice something carefully in v. 10. Those called included BOTH GOOD AND BAD! We notice two levels of reception among those called. There is sincere reception. This is the good that is gathered. Many have sincerely received Christ and have confidence they belong to Him. But there is also surface level reception. This is the bad that is gathered. Those who have an outward appearance of religion yet inwardly are dead! It is true of many in the church today. As we have seen before in Matt. 13, in the parable of the wheat and tares, not all who profess, possess!

You see, it is not enough to simply be called. Many have been called. The gospel appeal goes out throughout the world and many answer it. Millions of people are in church today because they have been called! But it is not enough to simply be called. We must also be chosen.

What does it mean to be chosen? That we need to be chosen is illustrated in vv. 11-14 by the one without the wedding garment: "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: [12] And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. [13] 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. [14] For many are called, but few are chosen."

Notice that the parable describes a time when the king comes. He finds the wedding hall full, yet he also finds one without the proper wedding garment. I think there are some

interesting things to note here. Certainly on that day will be MORE than one without a wedding garment. In fact, the Greek of v. 10 has both good and bad in plural form showing that more than one will be without that wedding garment. Yet the parable singles out one individual. Why? Because on that day each person who stands before God WILL be singled out! Scripture says: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). All your excuses will be useless on that day as well for as Rom. 1:20 says, "we will be without excuse." In fact, notice here in this case v. 12b - the man was speechless!

It is also interesting to note the description of the fact that this man did NOT have on a wedding garment. In Greek, there are two words for not; *ou* and *me*. In v. 11, it says the king saw a man who had not (*ou*) a wedding garment. This word simply marks a fact. He noticed he did NOT have it on. But in v. 12, the king asks, how did you come in not (*me*) having on wedding garment? This suggests that he not only lacked the garment but he did so definitely, of his own thought, own will and own intention. In essence, the king said, you not only do not have a wedding garment on, you never intended to have one on!

So, what then is this wedding garment? It seems pretty important - and indeed it is! The wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ! Scripture is replete with descriptions of believers being clothed in the righteousness of Christ. 2 Cor. 5:21 says: "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."

Perhaps Paul puts it most clearly in Gal. 3:27 and Rom. 13:14. In both, he says, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

You see, until you have repented and put your trust in Christ, you are no more prepared to enter the presence of Christ than a lifeless piece of wood! You may have heard the call. You may have responded and come (remember, both good and bad). But you certainly have not been chosen. The man without the wedding garment seems to say, "I am my own master. I will do it my way." In contrast, those chosen say, "I am not my own. I have been bought with a price. My righteousness is as filthy rags, but the Lord is my righteousness!"

The famed evangelist of the late nineteenth century, D.L. Moody was fond of describing the phrase "few are chosen" as "few are choice." When we lived in North Carolina, one of our favorite places to eat was a steak house called The Peddler steak house. An older couple we knew had a card for a \$20 credit at that steak house, and often they would treat us by loaning it to us with an additional \$20 that would pretty much cover the cost of a meal. It was always a special treat as it was not the type of place we would go to just on our own! While there, a meat cutter would come to the table. He would cut your steak before your eyes, and show it to you to get your approval of the cut. Then it would be taken to the kitchen and always cooked to perfection! It was a choice cut!

I tell that to you because I want you to know that God holds before you a choice cut. It is not the blood of any cow preparing to be grilled to taste. It is the blood of His Christ who groaned upon a tree. What is held before you is your only hope for eternal life. God does not just call you to come and inspect Him and nod approval. At that steak house we could have easily nodded approval then got up and walked out. But that would be to miss out on all that we had gone there for! Rather, God invites you to choose Christ and what He has done for you. Many are called, but few are chosen. What choice have you made?