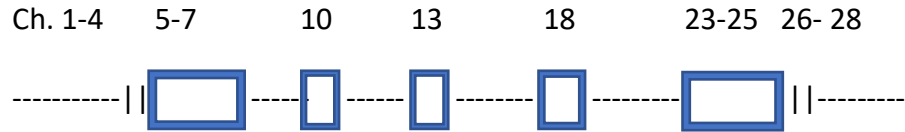


The Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew's Gospel

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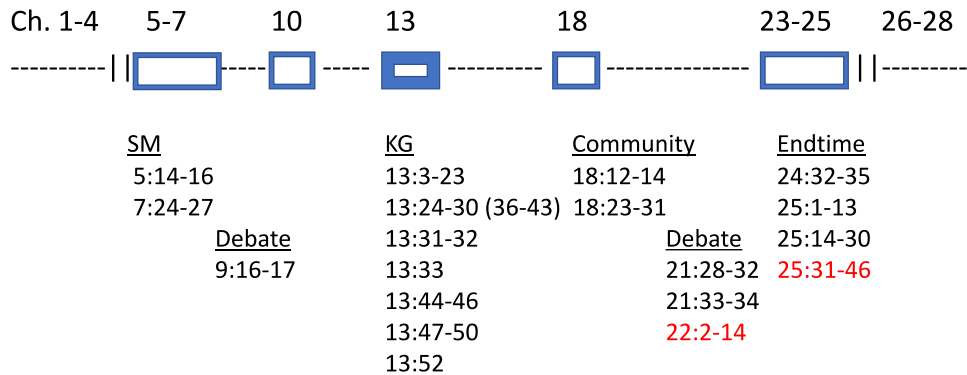
Jesus' Parables in Matthew's Gospel



- Sermon on the Mount (Ch. 5-7): 5:14-16; 7:24-27
- Debate with Pharisees on fasting: 9:16-17
- Mystery of the KH (Ch.13, 7x): 13:3-23, 24-30 (36-43), 31-32, 33, 44-46, 47-50, 52
- Community life (Ch.18): 18:12-14, 23-31
- Debate with leaders on authority: Mt 21:28-32, 33-44; 22:2-14 (wedding banquet)
- Endtimes warning (Ch. 23-25): Mt 24:32-35; 25:1-13, 14-30, 31-46 (sheep & goats)

Jesus' Parables in Matthew's Gospel

Jesus' parables in Matthew's narrative



The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (Mt 22:1-14; cf. Lk 14:15-24)

(1) The king invited guests but was dishonored.

22 ¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his

slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.

(2) The king burned their city and invited others.

⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore into the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' ¹⁰ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so, the wedding hall was filled with guests.

(3) The king came to the banquet hall and threw out a guest.

¹¹ But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen.

Four time periods, Four recent approaches

1. Meaning in Jesus' ministry
2. Meaning in Matthew's Gospel
3. Meaning in Church History
4. Meaning for Today
 - o4.1 German historical approach
 - o4.2 American literary approach
 - o4.3 Gospel narrative approach
 - o4.4 History of Effects contextual approach

1. Meaning in Jesus' Ministry: Kingdom of God

- 1) Wedding Banquet as the Kingdom of God: Like the wedding banquet for the future king (vs. social party in Lk 14), the KG is a solemn and joyful event to celebrate the union of God with people and Christ the Son of God with the church. The KG is a messianic banquet of joyful union.
- 2) The King as Sovereign God: In traditional symbol, the King represents the almighty God who is gracious and righteous. God earnestly sets up the banquet and repeatedly calls his people to celebrate the wedding. To the scornful subjects, evil murderers and

disrespectful guest, however, the sovereign God would administer justice, burning down their cities and throwing them out.

- 3) Guests as Leaders and Sinners: Who are the first invitees and who are the second?
- 21:31: Jesus said to the priests and the elders: “Truly I tell you. The tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.”
- Like the OT prophets, Jesus used this parable to condemn the self-righteous leaders (first guests) who will incite God’s wrath and welcome the despised sinners (second group of guests) into God’s joy.
- Jesus’ message to his Jewish contemporaries: God is both merciful and just. Repent and accept the good news of the KG (Mt 3:2; 4:17)

2. Meaning in Matthew’s Gospel: Jesus’ Authority

- 1) Narrative Context points to Jesus’ authority.
- This is the final of the three parables answering the challenge from the chief priests and elders in Jerusalem: “By what authority are you doing these [in the Temple]?” (21:23).
- Jesus answers with three parables: two sons (21:18-32), wicked tenants (21:33-41), and wedding banquet (22:1-14).
- 21:42, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes?” (Ps 118:22-23)
- For Matthew, this parable is not only about the KG but also about Jesus. He is the Son of the King. He cleansed the Temple by his authority as the Messiah and the Son of God.
- 2) Historical context points to unbelieving Jews.
- After Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus in 70AD, Matthew’s readers would recognize Jesus’ prophecy (burning of the city 22:7) as fulfilled.
- The “unworthy guests” who despised God’s call and murdered Christian preachers like Stephen would be identified as the unbelieving Jews who continued to oppress the church in Antioch.
- The banquet now filled with guests from “main streets” would be understood as the church populated by the believing Gentiles.
- For Matthew, this parable justified the legitimacy of Gentile believers in the church. Like the Jews, they were also called by God and welcome into the KG. [vs. Judaizers, Gal 2]
- 3) Three acts/scenes of the story reveal a “history of salvation.”
- (1) Election of the Jews. God sends the prophets to invite the Jews, the chosen people, to enter the KG made possible by Jesus the Messiah and the Son of God, but unbelieving Jews, especially the leaders, rejected the call and murdered God’s messengers (22:1-7).
- (2) Grace to Gentiles. Invitation to salvation was then given to all nations, and the apostles were sent out to invite anyone who wishes to come into the KG, which is the church (22:8-10).
 - 21:43: “Therefore I tell you. The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.”
- (3) Final judgment. The king will come and the guest without wedding robe will be thrown out of the banquet (22:11-14).

- For Matthew, this parable becomes a salvation history to show God's grace "first to the Jews but also to the Greeks" (Rom 1:16) and to understand the relationship and difference between the Jews and the Gentiles in God's providence.
- 4) The final scene issues a warning about final judgment.
- Matthew cited a saying of Jesus to conclude: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (22:14). It is not a "cheap grace."
- Believers in the banquet (church) should wear a "wedding robe" (22:12) to honor Jesus their King. Salvation is gifted by the grace of God alone, yes, but final judgment will be rendered according to one's "fruits" of faith and righteousness (5:20; 25:34, 45).
- What does the "wedding robe" represent in Matthew's view?

3. Meaning in Church History

3.1 Early Church

- Allegorical interpretation:
 - King = God
 - The Son of the King, the prince = Jesus
 - Wedding banquet = blessings of the KG
 - Servants = prophets, JohnB, twelve disciples
 - Two rounds of guests: Jews and Christians
- Main questions:
 - Who are the first round of guests that refuse the invitation?
 - Who are the guests from the main streets who come in?
 - Why both "good and bad" are invited (22:10)?
 - What does the crucial "wedding robe" (22:12) refer to?

Irenaeus: Jewish-Christian relationship

• God was kind to the traitorous Jews: "Now, by these words of His, does the Lord clearly show all that there is one King and Lord, the Father of all, . . . and that He had from the beginning prepared the marriage for His Son, and used, with the utmost kindness, to call, by the instrumentality of His servants, the men of the former dispensation to the wedding feast; and when they would not obey, He still invited them by sending out other servants, yet that even then they did not obey Him, but even stoned and slew those who brought them the message of invitation." (*Against Heresies*, IV, 36)

Irenaeus: Works of Righteousness

- God invited all nations into grace: "He accordingly sent forth His armies and destroyed them and burned down their city; but He called together from all the highways, that is, from all nations, [guests] to the marriage feast of His Son."
- Wedding robe: "Still further did He also make it manifest, that we ought, after our calling, to be also adorned with works of righteousness, so that the Spirit of God may rest upon us; for this is the wedding garment, of which also the apostle speaks, Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up by immortality."

3.2 Medieval Church

- 1) Literal and historical: It is a courtesy of invited guests, indeed the duty of loyal subjects, to honor the host their King to attend the banquet on time with proper dress code.
- 2) Allegorical and mystical: This is a story of salvation history involving God, Jesus, Judaism and Christianity.
- 3) Moral or topological: One should honor God, believe in Jesus, join the church, and live by righteousness.
- 4) Anagogical or eschatological: God offers salvation to God's people; we should accept Christ by faith and honor God with righteousness that we may be ready for the judgment at the end times.

3.3 Reformed Church

- The "first guests" that reject the king's call to the banquet were interpreted as Jews who rejected Jesus, not simply their leaders (Pharisees and priests) or their religion (Judaism vs. Christianity). Unfortunately, this interpretation encouraged anti-Jewish interpretation and anti-Semitic movement in Christian Europe.
- Wedding robe: Reformers were aware of the interpretation of the wedding robe as the "deeds of righteousness" in the Orthodox Church and "the virtue of charity" in Roman Catholic Church, but they wanted to emphasize the doctrine of "grace and faith" so that Christians don't try to win God's favor in the final judgment by any good works. Thus, the wedding robe is often interpreted as "grace of God" and "faith in Christ."

4. Meaning for Today

4.1 German historical approach: divine reality

- Focus on the King: God prepared the joyful gospel of the Messiah and invited the first "chosen people" to accept it. They refused God's call and the gospel was opened to all nations. Same idea in Rom 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
- Truth about God:
 - God's generous love: sending prophets repeatedly to call the Jews.
 - God's inclusive love: sending servants to invite all nations "on the streets."
 - God's fair love: sending insolent people out for judgment.
- Spiritual lesson: Do not disregard God's grace. Join the KG and live a new life to honor God.

4.2 American Literary approach: human existence

- Focus on the two groups of invitees: the first rejected the king's invitation, the second dishonored the king's banquet.
- Truth about two ways of human life:
 - First group represents ungrateful and rebellious way of life
 - Second group represents indulged and disregarding way of life
- Spiritual lesson: How do you respond to God's grace and call?

4.3 Gospel narrative approach

- Matthew's narrative context: this is the last of three parables to answer the priests' challenge to Jesus' authority in the Temple (21.23).

• Three key points to be noted in the parable:

(1) Jesus has authority as the Son of God. God has prepared and called for God's people to join the messianic banquet to celebrate Jesus the Son of God who will take God's people as bride in union.

(2) Salvation history: God has offered by grace the joy of salvation for Jews and Gentiles so the church has legitimacy in the KG and God will demand honor and justice (22:12) when Christ comes back at the end of times.

(3) Warning for the church: Holy City was burned and the guest without wedding robe was thrown out. Be prepared for the justice of God. Church membership does not guarantee eternal blessing, for "many are called, but few are chosen" (22:14).

4.4 History of Effects contextual approach

• In the history of interpretation, every one interprets the parable allegorically, and the most consistent question is: What does the "wedding robe" (22:12) represent?

Chrysostom: God, Jews and Gentiles (*Homily 69 on Matthew*)

• Three key themes: "Do you see both in the former parable [wicked tenants] and in this [wedding banquet] the difference between the Son and the servants? Do you see at once the great affinity between both parables, and the great difference also? For this also indicates God's long-suffering, and His great providential care, and the Jews' ingratitude.

• But this parable has something also more than the other. For it proclaims beforehand both the casting out of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles; and it indicates together with this also the strictness of the life required, and how great the punishment appointed for the careless.

• Wedding Robe: "Then in order that not even these should put confidence in their faith alone, He discourses unto them also concerning the judgment to be passed upon wicked actions; to them that have not yet believed, of coming unto Him by faith, and to them that have believed, of care with respect to their life. For the garment is life and practice."

Augustine: action of charity (*Sermon 45 on the NT*)

• Wedding Robe: "If, says he [Paul], I have not charity, nothing profits me. See, the wedding garment; put it on, you guests, that you may sit down securely.

profits me. See, the wedding garment; put it on, you guests, that you may sit down securely.

• Do not say; we are too poor to have that garment. Clothe others, and you are clothed yourselves. It is winter, clothe the naked. Christ is naked; and He will give you that wedding garment whosoever have it not. Run to Him, beseech Him; He knows how to sanctify His faithful ones, He knows how to clothe His naked ones. That ye may be able as having the wedding garment to be free from the fear of the outer darkness, and the binding of your members and hands and feet; let not your works fail.

Luther: Christ by faith (*Church Postils for Trinity 20*)

• Wedding Robe: "Now the wedding garment is Christ himself, which is put on by faith, as the Apostle says in Rom 13:14, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." Then the garment gives forth a luster of itself, that is, faith in Christ bears fruit of itself, namely, love which works through faith in Christ.

•These are the good works, that also flash forth from faith, and entirely gratuitously do they go forth, they are done alone for the good of our neighbor; otherwise, they are heathenish works, if they flow not out of faith; they will later come to naught and be condemned and be cast into the outermost darkness” (First Church Postil).

Yieh: salvation and righteousness

- 1) One may ask: Is it reasonable for the King (God) to demand a wedding robe for guests unexpectedly invited from the streets?
 - Jewish custom: the wedding host would normally provide proper robes for guests traveling from afar or without robes. So, the guest without a robe is someone who does not wear or refuses to put on the robe from the host.
- 2) Matthew cites and alludes to Isaiah many times to characterize Jesus.
 - Isaiah 61:10
I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my whole being shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
 - “Salvation” comes from God, but “righteousness” is done by people.

Summary of Messages for Today

- 1. Jesus’ message: The Kingdom of God is a joyous celebration of the union between God and people, Christ and Church. God’s love is inclusive. Salvation is offered to the pious and the sinful, Jews and Gentiles. All should accept it with gratitude, and honor it with righteousness.
- 2. Matthew’s message: God’s plan is to offer salvation to the Jews first, and also to the Gentiles. Those who accept the grace of salvation should bear fruits of righteousness in order to be ready for the final reckoning before God.
- 3. History of Interpretation: Wedding robe represents deeds of righteousness, action of charity, and faith in Christ. Matthew might have thought of it as the “garment of salvation” and “robe of righteousness” of Isaiah 61:10. To wear the wedding robe means to be justified by faith and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
- 4. Message for today: God has offered salvation and called us into the joy of the KG. In gratitude to God’s grace and in view of the final reckoning, let us live our life in righteousness to glorify God.