

Bible Study Guide: Week of 10-5-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Matthew 22:1-14

1 Once 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. ³ He 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. 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. 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."

1 Once more Jesus spoke to [the chief priests, elders, and Pharisees] in parables, saying:

The audience here is the same as the preceding two parables we have looked at together the past few weeks—the parable of the two sons and the parable of the vineyard workers. Here we have the parable of the wedding banquet. All three of these parables are part of Jesus' response to the leaders of the people who challenged his authority back in chapter 21. The leaders fail to see Jesus' ministry and mission as a continuation and fulfillment of the covenant God made with their ancestors. Jesus tells these parables to explain why the leaders of the people find themselves (at least for a time) outside of the kingdom he came to bring.

² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

Like the first two parables in this series, this one involves a motif of a father and son. In the first parable, remember, "A man had two sons"—one said he would work in the father's vineyard and didn't go; the other said he wouldn't go but then went and worked. It was the one who did the work who did the will of the father. In the second parable, the vineyard workers repeatedly rebelled against the landowner (a father) and killed his servants and his son. Here, a king (who is also a father) gives a wedding banquet in honor of his son. Like the ones preceding it, this parable is somewhat allegorical. Therefore, this reference to the wedding banquet of the son becomes one of many references in the gospels to Jesus as a bridegroom. The interconnectedness of father and son here makes it clear: Those who fail to respect or recognize the son also dishonor the father. The religious leaders Jesus is talking to are trying to trap and arrest Jesus; Jesus is pointing out that in their eagerness to do away with him, they are in fact turning away from God.

³ He 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.'

The wedding guests would have been highly honored to have been singled out for invitation to a prince's wedding. Nobody invited would dare refuse such a request in that day and age. Those invited were thus not just invited, but had already "RSVP'd" as we would say today. The natural and expected response would be for the invitees to drop everything and attend the celebration. The wedding invitation here is allegorized as the covenant and the prophets who called the people of God back to the covenant. Now that Jesus has come—the main event, so to speak—these particular religious leaders suddenly refuse to acknowledge him.

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.

Here Jesus makes no distinction between those who violently resist the invitation of the king (v. 6) and those who simply get busy doing other things and neglect the invitation (v. 5). This leaves no excuse for those who fail to attend to the king's call simply because of the busyness of life or the cares of the world. The one who does this is no better than the one who violently rebels against the king. Neither, ultimately, participates in the banquet. Both exclude themselves from the grace of the king.

⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

There is some debate whether this verse is merely a literary device to show the displeasure of the king or whether it refers to the impending destruction of the temple in 70 AD (remember Matthew was probably written sometime around 70-90 AD, so Matthew would likely have been aware of the temple's demise). We should be careful not to jump to conclusions that "God caused this disaster to happen" or "God punished this person or group by bringing about this calamity" when reading about any act of destruction or disaster. More to the point, we should be careful about avoiding a reading of this gospel that results in an anti-Jewish viewpoint or agenda against our neighbors.

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.

Extending the allegory here, the third group of slaves represents early Christian missionaries and/or the first disciples who go to obey the Great Commission (Matthew 28) and gather in a new kingdom people. Unfortunately, we know all too well that the church is often filled with both the good and the bad. The great thing about this wedding banquet is that all are invited and welcomed in; the bad thing about this wedding banquet is that not all will comport themselves appropriately.

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.

The imagery of a wedding robe calls to mind the rite of Holy Baptism, which has often included a special garment or the changing of clothes to symbolize the inward change God brings about through the sacrament. Here, apparently a guest as been admitted without making the change required. This robeless guest allegorically represents someone who has found themselves as part of the church, but who has not been living in a way that reflects the mercy and goodness of God. When called out for his lack of propriety, the guest has nothing to say—there is no excuse. The wedding robe also indicates that one has come properly dressed (and, therefore, properly prepared) to the celebration. The improperly dressed guest would have been a "party pooper." We must remember that the invitation is to a festive event; for one to show up dressed somberly would imply that one was not really there in spirit, but in body only.

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.'

The phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is one of Matthew’s favorite phrases and is used to talk about the coming judgment on the last day—God’s ultimate act of reckoning with the lingering evil in the world. So the instruction to the attendants here is not Jesus’ way of saying to the church, “purge the evil from among you” so much as it is a promise that God will, in the end, sort out the good from the bad.

¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Jesus’s final phrase here is a reminder that we are to be about the work he is calling us to—the work of the vineyard; the celebration of the wedding feast. Not all those who are invited will make it all the way through the festivities. Some may fall away or fall asleep or otherwise fail to attend to the matters of the kingdom.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. What might it mean for us that “both the good and the bad” are invited to the wedding feast Jesus describes?**
- 2. Which character do you most relate to in this parable? Why do you think this is the case?**
- 3. What might it mean for us to accept the invitation to the banquet of the kingdom of heaven?**