

## PONDERING THE PARABLES\_5

Continuing in our series entitled **“Pondering the Parables,”** we’ll consider yet another of the kingdom parables. This one is found in Matthew 22:1-14 and is referred to as **“The Parable of the Wedding Banquet.”** The text is on page 1534 in the pew Bibles.

<sup>1</sup> Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup> **The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.** <sup>3</sup> **He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.** <sup>4</sup> **Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.'** <sup>5</sup> **But they paid no attention and went off--one to his field, another to his business.** <sup>6</sup> **The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.** <sup>7</sup> **The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come.'** <sup>8</sup> **Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.'** <sup>9</sup> **So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.** <sup>10</sup> **But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.** <sup>11</sup> **'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?'** **The man was speechless.** <sup>12</sup> **Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'** <sup>13</sup> **For many are invited, but few are chosen.'** So what’s the kingdom of heaven like? It’s like **a royal wedding reception.**

Before we discuss that further, perhaps some background about Jewish wedding customs might help. First of all, couples became betrothed long before they were married. We might call it being engaged. During this period, they did not have close physical contact, keeping themselves pure for the wedding. Eventually, the day would approach for the ceremony and the bride would make herself ready for the groom who was to come for her. She would often have maids (*virgins*) in waiting to help her to prepare her for her groom. So far, some of this may sound a bit familiar even in our western culture.

As part of her preparation, Jewish tradition was that she would bathe in a *“mikveh pool.”* This was not just for physical cleansing. The Jews also saw this as a ceremonial cleansing, as she was baptized in water before being united with her husband. When he arrived, the bridesmaids would lead the way for the couple, lighting the path to the bridal chamber with lamps to some private quarters prepared especially for the consummation.

Then, after *“the two had become one flesh”*, they would make their grand entrance at a wedding feast provided by the groom’s father, who would have been the one who sent out invitations to friends and family.

He would also make preparations to open the gates of an outer court for the poorer people in the community to be fed. In a similar fashion, he also arranged for plenty of water for them to wash up and even provided clean robes to put on afterward. This was not an insult, but a welcome privilege. (*David in Scotland?*)

So, **back to the parable**. The king in our story is God the Father. His Son, the groom, is Jesus. Those invited first were the Jews, but guess what? They didn't come. It wasn't because they couldn't make it. They just chose not to. So, being the patient King that He is, He sent out a second invitation. Surprisingly, the response was the same. They refused because they were too busy with life to accept the Father's gracious invitation.

If that wasn't bad enough, they abused and even killed the King's messengers - His holy prophets. So the King said, "*Oh well, no big deal.*" Right? Not at all. Forecasting what would happen to Jerusalem in **AD 70**, the King in the story had their city destroyed along with everyone in it.

Then, the Father King sent His servants out again. This time, He invited everyone, good and bad. And these people? They came. The hall for the banquet was filled. And all was grand – well, at least until the King decided to mingle and greet His guests. When He did so, **he found a wedding crasher**. Now, if everyone was invited, what was wrong with this guy being there? All it tells us is that he wasn't wearing wedding clothes. He did not put on the garments the King provided. Why does that matter?

Ladies, though it's a man in our story, imagine a member of your bridal party coming to a formal ceremony in cut-off jeans, a dirty tank top, and worn out flip flops. This isn't the rehearsal dinner, it's the main event. You picked out her dress and shoes – even paid for them. What kind of an insult is this? The Jews insisted that they should be welcomed because of their good deeds or family history, but guess what? Those were not the conditions for entrance to the banquet. Yet, there's something even deeper here for us to consider as well, I think.

Imagine now, the groom's "ex" is the one crashing the wedding reception. She's wearing a low cut dress with a very short hemline and she's on the prowl. She thinks she's the one who should be the center of attention. She should be the bride – and she intends to make a scene. She even tries to take a seat with the wedding party. What would you do? I'll tell you what you should do - have her escorted out the door.

I think this illustration is also quite close to the situation in the parable. The Jews would insist for years to come that they were "*God's Bride*" and they would not acknowledge Jesus as His Son or the Church as "*the one*" He had chosen as His beloved. And that attitude, my friends, would get them barred from the banquet.

So, here we go again. What application is there for us?

Well, don't be like them. Understand **we're not going to enter the Kingdom dressed in our own self-righteousness**. Speaking of Israel, Isaiah said in 64:6, **"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags."** That's true for us, as well for **"All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There're none righteous, not a one."** (Romans 3:23)

So, where do I find **the wedding clothes**? I do not believe for a moment that it is mere coincidence that the Holy Spirit chose the words and terms that Paul used in addressing this issue. **Speaking of being immersed** in believer's baptism, he writes in Romans 6:5, **"If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection."** The concept of being united with Christ is akin to being wed to Him. Then, in Galatians 3:26-27, he says: **"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."**

It strikes me that the guests at the banquet would need to be washed and dressed for the occasion – and that this is also true for **the Bride**. In Isaiah 61:10 the Prophet said, **"I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns His head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."** Then the Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 5 that:<sup>25</sup> **"Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her<sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,<sup>27</sup> and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."** If that's not the image of being washed and dressed in a wedding garment, I don't know what is!

So, what are we to make of this? Maybe you're already part of the Bride of Christ. Maybe you've already accepted His proposal to wed Him for all time. If so, wonderful - but if you haven't yet been washed in the waters of baptism – as a symbol of God's cleansing us from our sins, then I'd say it's about time you did. If you have only been *"outwardly"* cleansed by a ceremonial washing, but have not truly accepted Christ as both Savior and Lord, then you have not truly **clothed** in His righteousness.

If you're refusing the invitation to celebrate with Christ and His bride, then I urge you to **accept the invitation** now. **"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."** (Revelation 22:17)

Come, be bathed in God's love and clothed in Christ.