

# Matthew 22:1-14

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-22/matthew-221-14/>

*Jesus tells a parable about a wedding feast of the king's son. But when the invitation is sent informing the invitees that the wedding is now, they refuse to come. Others among them kill the messengers. The king then sends an army to burn their city and invites anyone to come. At the wedding a friend of the king is there without his wedding clothes and is escorted out of the feast.*

A version of this parable is told by Jesus in Luke 14:15-26.

The chief priests and elders had previously confronted *Jesus* in the temple and He evaded their traps and rebuked them with parables (Matthew 21:23-44). They understood that He was speaking against *them*. They sought to seize Him but dared not arrest Him out of fear of how the people who had begun to believe that *Jesus* was the Messiah would respond.

Matthew reported that *Jesus spoke to them again in parables*. The *again* refers to the parables that He had already spoken, specifically, “the parable of the two sons” (Matthew 21:28-30) and “the parable of the vine-growers” (Matthew 21:33-41). It is not obvious whether *Jesus said* the following parable immediately following His rebuke about the chief corner stone at the end of the previous chapter, or if He simply *said* it sometime between that rebuke and His Passover celebration.

The fact that Matthew said *parables* (plural) suggests that *Jesus* may have shared additional *parables* at this time that Matthew did not record for us. This is the only parable recorded here by Matthew that *Jesus* taught at this time. The other Gospel writers: Mark, Luke, and John do not record this parable or any additional ones that *Jesus* spoke at this moment. But Luke supports what Matthew said when he reported that *Jesus* was “teaching daily in the temple” (Luke 19:47).

Interestingly, Luke also records a similar version to this parable in Luke 14:16-26, but he places its telling while *Jesus* was on His way to Jerusalem. This suggests that *Jesus* said this parable (and likely other *parables*) multiple times to different audiences. Each telling could also vary in its details depending on the audience or occasion.

Like many of His previous *parables* (Matthew 13:3-11; 13:24-30; 13:31-32; 13:33; 13:44; 13:45-46; 13:47-50; 18:23-34; 20:1-16; 21:28-30; 21:33-41), this one was about *the kingdom of heaven*.

The commentary for this section will attempt to explain the parable of *the Wedding Feast* according to the following outline:

## **The Story of the Parable**

## **The Main Point and Main Application of the Parable**

## **The Parable's Main Event—The Wedding Feast**

## Specific Symbols and Events in the Parable, their Meanings and Applications

### The Story of the Parable

*Jesus likened the kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. Royal weddings were major community events. And the feasts that celebrated them were among the largest parties of a king's entire reign. No expenses were to be spared, so to speak. Everyone who was anyone of note in the kingdom would be honored to be invited to the wedding feast of the king's son.*

In this parable, *the king* had previously *invited his* friends, received their intentions of acceptance, and made the according preparations. A double invitation was common for this type of event in ancient times. The first invitation determines who is coming so that the host can plan how much food is needed, especially meat, and to calculate other costs. The second invitation is sent to remind those who have previously agreed to come. It is sent after *the oxen and fattened livestock* have been *butchered* reminding the invitees of the great *feast* that night. This is where the story begins in Jesus's parable—on the morning of *the wedding* and *the feast*.

*The king sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast. But when the reminder was announced, those who had been invited were unwilling to come. This was strange and insulting behavior. Again, the king sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast."' The king was patiently trying to call everyone to their senses. He was pleading for them to come celebrate and enjoy the best meal of their lifetime which he had already prepared for them.*

*But they still paid no attention and went on their way as though they were oblivious to anything noteworthy happening at all. One man went to his own farm. Another man went to his business. The rest seized the king's slaves and brutally abused them before they killed them. The king's friends whom he invited to his son's wedding feast were behaving offensively oblivious or cruelly belligerent toward this generous king and his wonderful celebration.*

When *the king* learned this *he was enraged. He sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. But the king* was not going to let the wickedness of some prevent *his son's wedding* or to cancel *the celebratory feast*.

*Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.'* Just because some didn't come, did not mean that there would not be a party. *The king ordered his slaves to go invite anyone who was willing to come celebrate with him. The fact that his slaves were ordered to go and invite on the highways indicates that they were even to invite foreigners—as many as you can find—to the wedding feast.*

*Those slaves then went out into the streets and gathered together all they found. This phrase, all they found, does not necessarily mean that every single person they encountered responded by coming to the banquet. Among those they found were both evil and good. The phrase both evil*

*and good* indicates that there were all sorts of *guests* who were invited and who came. Some who came were good, i.e. the typical types of people one would expect to be at an event like this—some had good honor, good amounts of wealth, good social manners, etc. But some of these who are *invited* and who came were not the typical kinds of people one would expect to be *invited* at all—the poor, the unknown, the outcast, strangers, etc. Soon *the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests*.

After all this, the banquet celebrating *the king's son* was finally taking place. *The king* entered *the hall* to look over the dinner guests. He likely was making the rounds greeting each guest to thank them for accepting *his* invitation to celebrate this wonderful occasion. *When he* was doing this, *he saw a man who was not dressed in wedding clothes*. This *man* had entered *the wedding feast* unprepared for the event and its splendor. Weddings, then as now, were special events where the attendees were expected to dress for the occasion—and this was no ordinary *wedding*.

*The king* said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' *The king's* use of the term, *friend*, demonstrates that *the king* knew this *man* and that *he* was a *friend* of *the king*. The *friend* should have dressed appropriately and come in his *wedding clothes*, but *he* had not. *When the king* asked him about this, *he was speechless*. His reaction indicates that *he* knew *he* was wrong for coming improperly dressed, and that *he was* embarrassed about neglecting *his* appearance.

*Then the king* said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness. *The king* ordered *his servants* to arrest his *friend* and escort *him* out of the banquet. The Greek word translated as *throw* is "ekballo." It is used in a variety of ways including when Jesus casts out demons (Matthew 8:31; Luke 11:14). But the term is not necessarily violent. It is also used to mean "lead" or "sent." James used it when he mentioned Rahab the harlot who "sent out" ("ekballo") the Jericho spies by another way, saving their lives (James 2:25). Mark wrote that *Jesus* "sent away" ("ekballo") a leper after healing him. However, *the king* instructed his *servants* to *bind him* (the *friend*) *hand and foot*, indicating that the removal was quite insistent. The picture painted seems to emphasize the displeasure of *the king* with his *friend* for not being properly prepared to meet him.

Ancient Middle Eastern *wedding feasts* often took place at night, when it was cooler. Because it was dark, the festival was lit up by lights. The closer to the place of honor at the center of the banquet, the greater the light. The term *outer darkness* refers to the area completely outside the banquet, where there was no lighted area. Outside the banquet it was dark. This term might better be understood as "*the darkness* completely outside [*the wedding hall*]." That it is *outer* would indicate complete exclusion from the celebration.

*Jesus* said of the *outer darkness* that *in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. This indicates that this *place* is outside the banquet's glow of light. It describes a perspective from the outside looking in. *Weeping* shows that it is a sad *place*. It is a *place* of sorrow and regret. The people in *the darkness* outside are sorry that they are not enjoying themselves at the banquet. They are remorseful. They regret not accepting or preparing themselves for *the wedding feast* of *the king's son*. *Gnashing of teeth* shows that it is a place of bitter anger (Acts 7:54). The

people are likely angry at themselves for not taking the care to get themselves ready for *the wedding feast*.

### **The Main Point and Main Application of the Parable**

*Jesus* ended this parable with a statement: *For many are called, but few are chosen*.

This statement is the main point *Jesus* is making in this parable. His point is this: “Everyone is invited to *the wedding feast*, but only those wearing *wedding clothes* are chosen to partake in it and get to celebrate with *the king*.”

The parable’s primary applications are an exhortation to those who have accepted the invitation to follow through on their acceptance and to attend *the wedding feast* appropriately *dressed*.

This is a parable about *the kingdom of heaven* and how it relates to God’s covenant with Israel.

It begins in the Old Covenant which is represented in the first three invitations (read on for **Specific Symbols and Events in the Parable, their Meanings and Applications**). But it ends in a New type of Covenant which is represented by the fourth invitation.

### **The Old Covenant**

Israel was chosen by God because He loved them (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-8). They were given the grace of being chosen as His people. As He did when He called Abram from Ur to Canaan, God made a covenant with Israel when He rescued them from Egypt and called them to the Promise Land (Exodus 19:3-6; Deuteronomy 29:9-16). Israel agreed to accept God’s offer and entered into a covenant with Him (Exodus 19:8; Deuteronomy 26:17). This covenant, known as “the Old Covenant” clearly set forth what choices would bring blessings, and what choices would bring curses (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). If they agreed to follow God’s ways and love their neighbors as themselves, they would have the blessing of the natural consequence of a loving community, as well as supernatural blessings (Deuteronomy 30:16). If they chose instead to follow the pagan ways of exploitation, then they would have the adverse natural consequences of an exploitive community, and God would ultimately expel them from the land (Leviticus 18:26-30; Deuteronomy 28:63; 30:17-18).

It seems to fit the parable to consider Israel being represented by those who accepted the invitation (those who entered the covenant) then did not attend the banquet (follow through with what they promised). Israel promised to obey God’s covenant, which would lead to great blessings for obedience, but then failed to do so (Exodus 19:8). Their ultimate rejection of God’s covenant promise was to reject His Son, the second Moses sent to fulfill their own request:

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the Lord your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.’”

(Deuteronomy 18:15-16)

This is the prophetic aspect of the parable, because, now that very prophet Moses spoke of was standing in the midst of the leaders who represent Israel. And they were rejecting Him. In doing so they were rejecting God's covenant. Ultimately, they will murder Him. God will then follow through on His covenant promise, and expel them from the land. There will be terrible consequences for rejecting this prophet (Acts 3:22-23). A part of this expulsion will be that their capital *city* of Jerusalem will be set on *fire* and destroyed. These consequences came to fruition when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., roughly forty years after *Jesus* spoke this parable.

Israel, and its leaders accepted the invitation to enter God's covenant (Exodus 19:8). In doing so, they became God's people. God will never reject His people, because His gifts are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). And God has ordained that all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26). Because of God's faithfulness, Israel will always be accepted by Him as His people.

But Israel's rejection and murder of the Messiah triggered the severe consequences that God promised (Acts 3:22-23), just as the original invitees in the parable decided not to *come to the wedding feast* and subsequently *killed the king's* messengers. Israel chose this consequence for themselves. Therefore Israel did not receive a part of the Prize—an aspect of the promised blessing of God for Israel—which was tied to dwelling within their land.

### **The New Covenant**

Mysteriously, Israel's rejection is what opened the door for this new group to be blessed, allowing the Gentiles to also be grafted in to become God's covenant people (Romans 11:11-26). Even though this parable was spoken to Israel and primarily concerned Jews, it also foretells how the Gentiles will be invited to participate at the banquets of God's kingdom, even as some of the Israelites would miss this blessing. Within the parable, the term *Jesus* used to describe this state of missed blessing was *outer darkness*.

*Jesus* used this same description of *outer darkness* when he encountered the Roman Centurion of great faith (Matthew 8:5-13). In that encounter, *outer darkness* referred to "sons of the *kingdom*" who would be excluded from a *kingdom* banquet that seated Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the table of honor. In Matthew 8, "sons of the *kingdom*" referred to Israelite believers. (*Jesus* used "sons of the *kingdom*" in a similar way in His explanation of the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares—Matthew 13:38).

*Jesus* contrasted the lack of honor these "sons of the *kingdom*" would receive with the great honor that would be received by Gentiles from "east and west" because of their faith (Matthew 8:11-12). The faithful Gentiles (like the Roman centurion) would be seated at the table of honor in the *kingdom* banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, while the Jewish "sons of the *kingdom*" would be excluded in the *outer darkness* where there would be "*weeping*" (sorrow) "*and gnashing of teeth*" (anger, probably at themselves) (Matthew 8:11-12). *Jesus's* point then was to emphasize that the greatest rewards of the *kingdom* will go to anyone (Jew or not) who, like

Abraham, exercised great faith. *Jesus* appears to repeat this point here in His parable of *the wedding feast*.

The second group that seems to be represented in this parable are those who accept the invitation to join the New Covenant that *Jesus* will soon inaugurate at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:28). The New Covenant is *the king's* final invitation issued in verse 9 and carried out in verse 10 of this parable.

*Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast. Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good;*

This New Covenant refers to New Testament believers. It is not written on stone, as at Mount Sinai, but rather is written on the heart, as God had promised (Jeremiah 31:31). This indwelling Holy Spirit seals this covenant in our hearts (Ephesians 1:13) when we come to faith in *Jesus* as God's Son and our Messiah.

Unlike the Old Covenant, the way into the New Covenant is not through joining an earthly nation, Israel. Rather the way into the New Covenant is simply to accept the invitation. Israel accepted the invitation to enter into a covenant relationship with God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:8). Each New Testament believer can receive *Jesus* merely by having sufficient faith to look, hoping to be healed of sin (John 3:14-15).

*Jesus's* phrase, *many are called*, refers to the invitation for all, Jews and Gentiles, to receive the free gift of eternal life (Galatians 3:28). Everyone is granted the opportunity to accept God's invitation of eternal life through belief in Him. The invitation of eternal life is offered on the basis of pure grace (Ephesians 2:8-9) and it is received through simple faith in *Jesus*. Christ explained to Nicodemus that this required simply enough faith to look upon *Jesus*, hoping to be healed from the venomous poison of sin (John 3:14-16).

To accept this invitation all one must do, indeed the only thing one can do, is to believe that *Jesus* is the Son of God. There is no other way to accept the invitation of eternal life except through *Jesus* (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The expression *many are called* shows how the gift/invitation of eternal life is available and open to all people. Everyone who accepts the invitation of the New Covenant by faith is eligible to attend the banquet, but only those who are faithful to love God and love others will receive the honor to dine and celebrate with the King.

*Jesus's* phrase, *few are chosen*, refers to the prize or reward aspect of eternal life. Just as physical birth is a gift that cannot be lost, so is spiritual birth; gaining eternal life is a gift. However, just as with physical life, the experience of abundance in life depends on choices made.

The adverse consequence of disobedience in the Old Covenant between Israel and God involved losing their dwelling place of the land of Israel. That is likely why the adverse consequence of neglecting attention to *the king's invitation* in the parable is represented as a *city* being burned.

The adverse consequence for a disobedient believer in the era of the New Covenant involves loss of rewards. It is still a loss of all or part of the prize, or blessing. It will still have both an earthly

as well as heavenly manifestation. But it is not tied to the physical land of Israel, as is the Old Covenant.

Not all who believe in *Jesus* and enter into His family will choose to actively trust and follow *Jesus* in obedience to His commands. As a result, they will be like the *friend* who showed up to the banquet without proper *clothes*. In terms of who inherits the place in His *kingdom* that was assigned for them: *Few* do. The rich young ruler, whom *Jesus* loved (Mark 10:21), chose not to pursue his fullest eternal inheritance in *the kingdom of heaven*, even though *Jesus* “loved him” and would likely reward him accordingly (Matthew 19:16-24; Mark 10:21). The Apostle John indicates that believers have a reward stored up for them, but they can lose a part of it by not being faithful to walk in obedience to *Jesus*’s commands (2 John 1:8).

Even from among those who accept the invitation/gift of eternal life it may be that *few are chosen* to receive their full reward.

“For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

(Matthew 7:14)

Believers who follow the broad path and enter through the wide gate of destruction (Matthew 7:13) will suffer three painful losses at their future judgment:

- 1) A Harsh Reprimand (Matthew 10:33; 24:45-51)
- 2) Exclusion from the reward represented by the Messianic Banquet and the *Wedding Feast* (Matthew 8:12; 22:1-14; 25:1-13)
- 3) Loss of some or all of their Eternal Inheritance in *the Kingdom* (Matthew 7:21-23; 19:16-24; 25:14-30)

Nevertheless, each faithless believer “will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:15).

But for believers who “do the will of [His] Father” (Matthew 7:21); for any believer who “confesses [Him] “before men” (Luke 12:8); for believers who “take up their cross daily and follow [Him]” (Luke 9:23); believers who “suffer with Him” (Romans 8:17b); for believers who “endure [with Him]” (2 Timothy 2:12); for believers who “hold fast the confession of our hope [in Him] without wavering” (Hebrews 10:23)—these believers will receive their complete reward, their full inheritance in *His kingdom*, and dine with *the King* of the universe at *the wedding banquet of His Son*.

A significant part of the prize of eternal life is getting to participate with the king at *the wedding feast*. The way we figuratively dress appropriately and put on our *wedding clothes* is to trust and follow Him in how we live each day of our lives. We do this by relying on His gracious strength and trusting His wisdom and will over our own (1 Thessalonians 4:3). This is what it means to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

This participation at *the wedding feast* might represent a part of the greatest reward offered for faithfulness, which is to share Christ's reign with Him (Revelation 3:21; Romans 8:17b). It could be that the mystery of the church as being the bride of Christ is also somehow a part of reigning with Christ with the joy and intimacy a *king* might have with his queen (Matthew 25:21, 23; Ephesians 5:32).

If you have never accepted your invitation to eternal life, all you must do is believe in *Jesus*. If you do this, you are God's forever son or daughter (John 1:12; 3:14-16). You are His forever *friend*. Nothing will ever change this fact (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:31; 38-39). Christ encourages you to accept His invitation.

If you have accepted His invitation you are eternally saved from the penalty of sin, and are a child in God's family. You will never be rejected as a child. You are destined to live with Him in *heaven*.

But you also have a great responsibility. God will only give the reward of the inheritance to those found worthy. Therefore, do not take your inheritance to co-reign with Jesus in His *kingdom* or you place at His *wedding feast* for granted (2 Timothy 2:11-13; 2 Peter 1:10-11). Before the foundation of the world, Jesus designed and destined us to accomplish great works in His *kingdom* (Ephesians 2:10). But we must be found worthy of this *kingdom* responsibility by being willing to serve in obedience to Christ. We become worthy by His grace worked out through our obedient faith in Jesus as we follow Him, and adopt the same mindset toward obedience that Jesus adopted (Philippians 2:5-10; 12-13).

The expression *few are chosen* shows that *many* believers may not follow *Jesus* and will not receive their inheritance reward and other blessings of the prize, including having a seat of honor at *the wedding feast*.

The main exhortations of *Jesus's* parable are to keep the covenant so that you will inherit your great reward of having a seat of honor at *the wedding feast*.

### **The Parable's Main Event—The Wedding Feast**

The main event of this parable is a banquet for a *wedding feast*.

Banquet imagery was often used as a metaphor for God's blessing throughout the Old Testament (Psalm 23:5; Song of Solomon 2:4; Isaiah 25:6;). God designated certain holy days and festivals for the children of Israel to celebrate and observe. This had many benefits, part of which was to give them a foretaste of the future blessings to look forward to if they were faithful. Holidays such as *the Feast of Unleavened Bread* (Leviticus 23:6), *the Feast of Weeks* (Deuteronomy 16:10), and *the Feast of Booths* (Deuteronomy 16:13) were sometimes celebrated for several days.

Isaiah 25:6-12 prophesies of a banquet that the Lord of hosts will prepare and celebrate with all peoples. The passage is brimming with Messianic hopes and overtones. It was passages like Isaiah 25 that foretold of a banquet at the end of the age, when the Lord would celebrate with His



people. The Rabbinic tradition and Apocryphal literature that interpreted these Old Testament Bible passages suggests that there were two separate end-times *feasts*.

The first is a Messianic Banquet that will take place on earth during the Messiah's earthly reign. The second banquet will take place in *Heaven* or in the New Earth. The first banquet was thought to celebrate the Messiah's reunification of Israel (Ezekiel 37:21-22) and victory over his enemies (Ezekiel 39:18-20). The second banquet was thought to celebrate God's intimacy with His people (Psalm 45; Song of Solomon 2:4).

The idea of two banquets, one earthly and another heavenly were commonly held notions during *Jesus's* day. The Last Supper was a Messianic Banquet of sorts. Had Jesus been received as the King during His first advent, this banquet would likely have been too large to fill the upper room. And Christ Himself seemed to touch upon this two-banquet idea when He told His disciples during the Last Supper, "I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in *the kingdom of God*" (Luke 22:16) and "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until *the kingdom of God* comes" (Luke 22:18). As it was, the Lord's Supper was only a type, or foreshadow of the Messianic Banquet to come.

If there are two (or more) banquets during the end times, it is not perfectly clear which *feast* this parable represents. But it seems to correspond mostly with the second, heavenly/new earth banquet because its occasion is *the wedding feast of the king's son*. This heavenly/new earth *feast* is also described in Revelation as the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb:"

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.'"

(Revelation 19:7-9)

Once again, Jesus's point to His disciples in this parable of *the wedding feast*, is that though *many* have been *called* and accepted their invitation to the banquet, they should not take for granted being honored in *the kingdom* banquet. For only those dressed in their *wedding clothes* are permitted to stay. The Apostle Paul stated that the way to receive the "reward of the inheritance" was to do "our work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men" (Colossians 3:23). Faithfulness in daily living for Jesus may cost us the approval of men, but will gain us the reward of the inheritance. These parables of weddings and honor banquets seem to convey that honor will be given to those who live faithfully, and dishonor to those who do not live faithfully. The Apostle Paul states that the reward of "eternal life" awarded on the day of judgement to "those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality" from God (Romans 2:7).

Whether *the wedding feast* is a literal end-time event or is a metaphorical symbol for God's blessing and approval; and whether there is only one end-time banquet, two banquets, or many banquets, coronations, and feasts, the Biblical requirements to attend them are consistent. The

requirements are to trust God, repent and faithfully follow Him, walking in obedience to His commands and loving one another (Isaiah 25:9; Isaiah 55:1-7; Isaiah 65:13-17; Matthew 8:10-12; Matthew 25:1-13; Luke 13:23-30; Luke 14:15-24; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Revelation 3:19-20; Revelation 19:8).

### **Specific Symbols and Events in the Parable, their Meanings and Applications**

There are at least twelve figures and symbols of significance within *Jesus's* parable of *the wedding feast*. These figures and symbols are:

1. *the king and his son*
2. *the king's slaves/servants*
3. *the wedding feast*
4. the four invitations
5. those who rejected the invitation
6. *the king's* destruction of *their city by fire*
7. those who accepted the invitation
8. *wedding clothes*
9. *the king's* looking over *the dinner guests*
10. those who are well dressed
11. *the friend* who is not appropriately dressed
12. and finally, *the outer darkness*

#### **Symbol #1: *The king and his son.***

*The king* represents God. And *the son* represents the *Son* of God, who is Jesus (Matthew 16:16-17).

#### **Symbol #2: *The king's slaves/servants.***

In the parable, *the king's slaves* and *servants* represent God's prophets and messengers from the time of the Old Testament through John the Baptist. When the prophets told the children of Israel God's message warning them to repent and follow Him, they were often ignored. Sometimes they were beaten and *killed* (Matthew 21:32; 23:34-35). This is similar to how *the king's slaves* were treated by those *the king invited to the wedding feast* when they shared *his* invitation.

#### **Symbol #3: *The wedding feast.***

As detailed above, *the wedding feast* represents God's approval and blessing in the life to come for living faithfully in this life. *The wedding feast* could represent an actual end-time banquet (Isaiah 25:6-12; Revelation 19:7-9). Or it could be metaphorical of God's approval and blessings that will be manifested in His *kingdom*.

#### **Symbol #4: *The four invitations.***

All four invitations that are implied or mentioned in this parable are to *the wedding feast*. The first invitation is alluded to. The last three invitations are explicitly mentioned in this parable. We know there was an unmentioned initial wedding invitation from verse three, because *the king sent out his slaves to call those who had already been invited*. (Presumably, these people had indicated that they would like to come to *the wedding*.)

The first invitation represents God's initial call to the children of Israel, through Moses, to follow Him in the Old Covenant. The first invitation is inferred in Jesus's parable and is assumed to have been issued before the story began. It represents the Old Testament covenants that are described in great detail in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

This invitation was given on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6) and reiterated near the end of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 26:16-17). Through the Old Covenant, God *invited* the children of Israel to celebrate the abundant life with Him by following the edicts of the covenant to which they had agreed. Moses *called* Israel to set aside the ways of the other nations which led to death (Deuteronomy 28:15-68); and to follow God in holiness and love of others which led to blessing and life (Deuteronomy 28:1-14; 30:15-20). *Jesus* summed up the edicts of the Old Covenant with the commands to love God and love others as themselves.

Israel agreed to follow in God's ways and enter the Old Covenant with Him (Exodus 19:8; Deuteronomy 26:17). However, they did not keep it. Israel was unfaithful, and fell into the pagan/idolatrous ways of self-seeking and exploitation. As specified in the Old Covenant, they were exiled from the land due to their choices (1 Chronicles 9:1).

The second and third invitations (verses 3 and 4 respectively) to *the wedding feast* are represented by the Old Testament scriptures and the message of John the Baptist. They were God's repeated offers and warnings spoken through the prophets to obey His commands and keep the Old Covenant. John the Baptist's message was that the Messiah who was to be the fulfillment of the Old Covenant was about to arrive. Indeed, the urgency of *the king's* third invitation, *Behold I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast* is felt in the urgency of John the Baptist's message: "Repent, for *the kingdom of heaven* is at hand" (Matthew 3:2), and "The axe is already laid at the root of the trees" (Matthew 3:10).

The fourth invitation (verses 9-10) to *the wedding feast* represents the New Covenant. It is the extension of God's plan of redemption for anyone who will accept the gift by faith. Incredibly it includes the Gentiles and the social outcasts. The good news of the gospel would soon be offered to everyone (Romans 1:16-17). This New Covenant is written on the hearts of those who believe (Jeremiah 31:31; Ephesians 1:13).

*Jesus* may have had Isaiah 55 in mind when He spoke of this generous invitation to *feast*. All seven verses are worth reading but here are the highlights. Verses 1-3 call all peoples to gain great blessing by covenanting with God, as illustrated by these excerpts:

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters;

And you who have no money come, buy and eat.

Come, buy wine and milk

Without money and without cost...

‘Incline your ear and come to Me.

Listen, that you may live;

And I will make an everlasting covenant with you,

According to the faithful mercies shown to David.”

(Isaiah 1:1,3)

Then God specifically notes that He will call other nations into covenant with Him in verse 5, through the witness of Israel, which came through Christ and His disciples:

“Behold, I have made him a witness to the peoples,

A leader and commander for the peoples.

“Behold, you will call a nation you do not know,

And a nation which knows you not will run to you.”

(Isaiah 55: 4-5a)

The ultimate application of this passage in Isaiah is to accept God’s mercy.

“Seek the Lord while He may be found;

Call upon Him while He is near.

“Let the wicked forsake his way

And the unrighteous man his thoughts;

And let him return to the Lord,

And He will have compassion on him,

And to our God,

For He will abundantly pardon.”

(Isaiah 55:6-7)

**Symbol #5: Those who rejected the invitations summoning them to the banquet.**

*Those* who rejected *the king's* invitation to *the wedding feast* represent a disobedient Israel, who is violating its covenant with God by not listening to the prophet God sent, and one which they requested (Deuteronomy 18:15-16). Apparently, there were two groups in this parable that neglected to follow through on the invitation they had accepted. First, there were those who *paid no attention* [to the king's invite] *and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business*. This group was too preoccupied with the affairs of this world, however trivial they were, to pay attention to the splendor of the *kingdom*, however great it could be. They snubbed God's invitation of eternal life and the blessings of His reward.

The second group was outright hostile to God and scorned His invitation of eternal life and the blessings of His reward. These people are *those murderers* who *seized and killed the king's slaves*. King Herod had already executed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12). Even as *Jesus* spoke this parable, the priests and Pharisees were already plotting *Jesus's* execution (Matthew 21:45; Mark 11:18). *They* are comparable to the wicked vine-growers who *killed the landowner's slaves and son* in *Jesus's* parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-41). This group likely represents Israel's leaders and the Jews of *Jesus's* generation who identify with them against the Messiah (Acts 2:40). These leaders will crucify *Jesus*, the second Moses and Messiah whom God had promised—and *they* would be utterly *destroyed* for rejecting Him (Acts 3:22-23).

Some have seen this hostile group as representative for unbelievers. While this is possible, it is unlikely. There are admittedly aspects and descriptions of these antagonistic *murderers* and their fate which are very similar to the attitudes of unbelievers and their fiery fate (Genesis 19:24; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10, 15). Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that this group explicitly represents unbelievers for at least four reasons.

- First, this parable is about partaking in *the Wedding Feast*. Partaking in *the Wedding Feast* is not an automatic benefit of being a member of God's family. As mentioned throughout this commentary, it is a reward for faithfulness.
- Second, the parable never focuses or describes anyone who did not accept the first invitation. The parable automatically presumes that everyone the second and third invitations were sent to had previously accepted the first one. Since they had accepted the first invitation (the Old Covenant), with its promise of a Messiah, they had already been granted into God's covenant family. The gifts and calling of God cannot be revoked:

“From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

(Romans 11:28-29)

- Third, and in conjunction with the above points, this parable primarily concerns Israel. *Jesus* spoke it to the Jewish authorities in the temple. And He was not telling it to them so that they would believe in Him for eternal life. He was telling it to them so that Israel would recognize *Jesus* as their Messiah and receive Him, so that they would not miss out on the *kingdom* blessings.
- Fourth, God does not spare His disobedient children from discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11). If we as believers are faithless in this life and choose to identify with the powers of this world who are hostile to God—we will still be mercifully spared from eternal death (1 Corinthians 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:11)—but this does not mean we will escape stern and devastating rebuke that will be terribly painful (Matthew 10:35; 24:50-51; 25:12; 25:26-30; Mark 9:42-48; Timothy 2:12; Hebrews 10:26-31; 12:25-29). The wrath of *the king* does not seem any more severe than these terrifying losses which can befall believers who are unfaithful. It would be unwise to assume that the terrible outcome cannot happen to a believer merely on the grounds that it involves fire. Scripture is clear that God's judgment fire will apply to believers (1 Corinthians 3:11-17). However, amidst and/or after this outpouring of wrath, *Jesus* will be there to personally wipe away every tear shed by all believers (Revelation 21:4).

Given these key factors, it really does not fit to interpret this hostile group to represent unbelievers because that is not the concern of the parable. Despite the similarities, judgment has a completely different application for believers, in that it refines them and conforms them to the image of Christ, while unbelievers are consumed (1 Corinthians 3:11-17; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 10:27).

**Symbol #6: *The king's destruction of their city with fire.***

This event, the destruction of *their city*, was likely representative of a soon-to-be-fulfilled prophecy about the then future demolition of the *city* of Jerusalem. The Romans *destroyed* Jerusalem in 70 A.D. as a punishment for the Jewish revolt. By including *their* in the phrase, *their city*, infers a harsh meaning in this soon-to-take-place fulfillment of destruction. It is a rebuke that Jerusalem does not belong to God, but to the evil priests who falsely claim to represent Him. The *city* of Jerusalem is *their city*, not God's as it should be. Israel's rejection of *Jesus*, the promised Messiah and prophet like Moses, apparently triggered the covenant provisions relating to Israel's disobedience (Acts 3:22-23), including expelling them from the land (Deuteronomy 29:28; 30:3).

**Symbol #7: *Those who accepted the invitation and attended the banquet.***

This group of people likely represents believers in *Jesus* in the era of the New Covenant. It particularly represents Gentile believers who were traveling along *the main highways* when they heard the message. *Jesus* said that those who *gathered* were *both evil and good*. The phrase *both evil and good* indicates that there were all sorts of *guests* who were invited and who came. Some of these *guests* would be considered by the religious establishment of the Sadducees and Pharisees to be unacceptable members of society including the Gentiles, the poor, the unclean,

people of low morals like tax collectors and prostitutes. In the version of this parable recorded by Luke, the Master says *to invite* the poor, crippled, blind, and lame (Luke 14:21).

Even though the parable only mentions those who *were unwilling to come* during the second and third invitations, this does not necessarily mean that no one from this group of original invitees came. There were obviously some who did believe God in the Old Testament (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, Deborah, Boaz, Ruth, Gideon, Nathan, David, Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra, Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther, and Mordecai to name only a few.)

### **Symbol #8: The *wedding clothes*.**

*The wedding clothes* represent the believer's good works done in the power and purpose of *Jesus's* name. The apostle John wrote about *the wedding clothes* in his apocalyptic vision of "the marriage supper of the lamb" which the parable of *the wedding feast* likely describes.

"It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

(Revelation 19:8)

Notice how in both the parable and in John's vision it is the participant's responsibility to be properly attired. When confronted by *the king* about his *clothes*, *the king's friend* does not respond, "Please give me a *wedding garment*."

Similarly, Paul urged and reminded his readers to "put on Christ" (Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27). He told the believers in Colossae to "put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience... [and] beyond all these things [to] put on love" (Colossians 3:12, 14).

Jesus's message to the believers in Sardis echoes the believer's responsibility to be properly dressed.

"But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy."

(Revelation 3:4)

In the parable, *wedding clothes* were not a requirement to accept the invitation to believe in *Jesus* and enter the New Covenant. But they were a requirement to participate in *the wedding feast*, which is a picture of honor and reward. This makes clear that *the wedding clothes* do not represent the covering of righteousness that *Jesus* gives every believer upon their birth into eternal life on the basis of simple faith in Him (Genesis 3:21; Isaiah 61:10; Zechariah 3:4). We did nothing to receive His garment of righteousness but believe in Him. But *the wedding clothes* in this parable are each believer's responsibility to put on, by doing good deeds done in faith. *The wedding clothes* represent a believer's works of righteousness done in obedient faith and reliance upon God's strength, and these works are done after he has received the gift of eternal life.

*The wedding clothes* are a brilliant and highly visible symbol during *the wedding feast* of a believer's (possibly hard-to-see) faithfulness to *Jesus* in this life.

**Symbol #9: *The king's looking over the dinner guests.***

*When the king came in to look over the dinner guests* is a moment in the parable that likely represents Christ's future and final judgment of every believer. Every dinner guest is a believer who has accepted *Jesus's* invitation to receive eternal life by grace through faith in Him. This judgment of believers is sometimes called "the Bema," or "the judgment seat of Christ." During this judgment *Jesus* will personally and thoroughly evaluate the works of every believer. Believers will receive eternal rewards for good works and will suffer loss for worthless ones.

*Jesus* warned His disciples about this day of judgment of believers in Matthew 10:32-33 and 16:27. He described it in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). Paul explained the Bema in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 and 2 Corinthians 5:10, to name a few references to a topic that appears many times in scripture.

**Symbol #10: *Those who are well dressed.***

Those who are well dressed in this parable represent believers who have lived lives pleasing to God. They are dressed in fine linen, bright and clean, that are their works of righteousness (Revelation 19:8).

All *dinner guests* who are present at *the wedding feast* are believers who have accepted *Jesus's* invitation to receive eternal life by grace through faith in Him. But not all *dinner guests* are dressed the same. Some have prepared. They have dressed well for the occasion and are in their *wedding clothes*. Others have not. In the parable, *wedding clothes* (godly works) were not a requirement to accept the invitation. But they were a requirement to participate in *the wedding feast*.

Those believers who are dressed in their *wedding clothes* have trusted God and followed His commandments to love God and to love others. They have confessed Christ with their lives (Matthew 10:32) and not denied Him (Matthew 10:33; 2 Timothy 2:12). They have taken up their cross, followed *Jesus*, and lost their life ("psuche") for His sake (Matthew 10:38-39). They have put on Christ, His compassion, patience, and love (Romans 13:14; Colossians 3:12-14). And now on their day of judgment their works have endured the fire and they are enjoying their reward (1 Corinthians 3:13-14) part of which apparently is taking their place at *the wedding feast*.

These are the believers in the era of the New Covenant who win the prize of life. They gain the great reward of entering into the joy of their Master, and serving alongside and in harmony with Him when *Jesus* comes into His *kingdom* (Matthew 25:21, 23; Revelation 3:21).

**Symbol #11: *The king's friend who is not appropriately dressed.***



*The king's friend* who is not appropriately dressed represents a believer who did not live a life pleasing the Lord. We know he was a believer because *the king* [who represents God] called him friend, indicating that they shared a warm relationship.

However, even though he was part of the New Covenant and a Child of God, he did not have works of righteousness. He did not lay aside the garments of his old self with its *evil* practices and put on the new self which would have renewed Him into the image of Christ (Colossians 3:9-10). He was wearing a dirty, smelly “garment polluted by the flesh” (Jude 1:23).

All *dinner guests* who are present at *the wedding feast* are in covenant relationship with God. Those of the New Covenant are those who have accepted *Jesus's* invitation to receive eternal life by grace through faith in Him. Again in this parable, *wedding clothes* were not a requirement to accept the invitation and enter the covenant; but they were a requirement to participate in *the wedding feast*.

*The king's friend* did not have works of righteousness. He did not lay aside the garments of his old self with its *evil* practices and put on the new self which would have renewed Him into the image of Christ (Colossians 3:9-10,23).

*The king's friend* is like the believer whose works will be burned up at the Bema Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:15). He is like the one who will be denied an opportunity to be at the banquet by Jesus (Matthew 10:33). He is like the foolish bridesmaids in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-3). He is like the lazy slave in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). He is like Esau who was inconsolable upon realizing that he traded his birthright (reward of inheritance) for a bowl of stew (temporary pleasure) (Hebrews 12:16-17).

#### **Symbol #12: *The king's friend* being bound and thrown into the *outer darkness*.**

*The king's friend* being bound and thrown *into the outer darkness* represents a believer's tragic exclusion from meaningful *kingdom* blessings because of his lack of enduring faithfulness. It represents his loss of reward (Hebrews 10:35-36).

This *friend*, though loved by *the king*, was offensively faithless. His lack of faith and good works was apparent in his lack of *wedding clothes*.

*Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness. The king instructed his servants, "Please remove those who are not properly dressed for the banquet and escort them outside."*

The term, *outer darkness*, refers to the area outside the banquet. Ancient Middle Eastern *wedding feasts* often took place at night. Because it was dark, the festival was lit up by lights. Outside the banquet, it was dark. This term might better be understood as “*the darkness* just outside [*the wedding hall*].”

*The darkness* just outside *the wedding hall* does NOT refer to taking permanent residence in the lake of *fire*, along with the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10, 15). All

believers, including this faithless *friend of the king*, are spared this horrible punishment by the virtue of receiving the gift of eternal life by God's grace through simple faith in *Jesus* (John 3:16; John 10:28-29; Romans 8:31-39; 2 Timothy 2:11,13). Praise be to God that every believer is eternally secure in Jesus!

Nevertheless, this does not mean that believers are off the hook from experiencing other loss. Just as with the Old Covenant, the blessings of New Covenant believers depends upon our choices. If we are faithful we gain great rewards, beyond what we can even imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9). It is possible for believers to forfeit their eternal inheritance in the *kingdom* through making poor choices (Matthew 19:16, 23; 2 Timothy 2:12; 2 Peter 1:9-11; Colossians 3:23). Every tear will be wiped away, and there will be no more pain in the new earth, but that indicates that there will be a period of time that includes tears (Revelation 21:4).

*Jesus said in that place of outer darkness there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* This indicates that this *place* is just outside the banquet's glow of light. This indicates that believers like *the king's friend* just missed the reward of their eternal inheritance. *Weeping* shows that it is a sad *place*. It is a *place* of sorrow and regret. The people in *the darkness* outside are sorry that they are not enjoying themselves at the banquet. They are remorseful. They regret not accepting or preparing themselves for *the wedding feast of the king's son*. *Gnashing of teeth* shows that it is a place of bitter anger (Acts 7:54). The faithless friends of *the king* are likely angry at themselves for not taking the care to put on their *wedding clothes* for *the wedding feast*.

## Summary

This parable is a soon-to-be-fulfilled prophecy of Israel's final rejection of the Messiah who was the fulfillment of the Old Covenant, but its primary application is a warning for the New Covenant believers (those who have believed in Jesus as God and Messiah) to not take for granted their place at *the great wedding feast*. Being a child of *the king* is a great gift that comes with great responsibility. We must clothe ourselves in acts of righteousness that please the Lord if we want to enjoy the fullness of God's favor in *the kingdom*. Everyone is freely invited to have eternal life. *Many are called, but few are chosen*. But not everyone who accepts the invitation of eternal life is a faithful disciple who will celebrate with *the King*. Just as Israel is God's people whom He will never reject, and promises to restore, so are all New Testament believers. But, just as Israel bore the consequences of their decisions, to receive rewards or chastisement based on their decisions, so it is for New Testament believers also.

## Biblical Text

**Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, <sup>2</sup> "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. <sup>3</sup> And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. <sup>4</sup> Again he sent out other slaves saying, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast."<sup>5</sup> But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup> and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup> But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those**

murderers and set their city on fire. <sup>8</sup> Then he \*said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup> Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.’ <sup>10</sup> Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.

<sup>11</sup> “But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, <sup>12</sup> and he \*said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. <sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ <sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen.”