

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 10/15/2023



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, October 15th

Matthew 22:1-14

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Many are called but few are chosen

Jesus has entered Jerusalem and is now in open conflict with the Jewish authorities. When Jesus' authority was challenged by a delegation from the Sanhedrin, He responded with three polemic parables. The lectionary addressed the first two of these parables during the last two Sundays (21:28-43). This week's text addresses the third parable: The Parable of the Wedding Feast. Some argue this parable is in fact two separate parables or at least has two sections (22:2-10; 22:11-13). This parable, while building on the theme of the two preceding, represents a clear history of salvation and a concise summary of the Gospel.

Matthew 22:1-14 Commentary

¹ And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'" ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

Verse 22 is a reminder Jesus is responding to the Jewish leaders earlier hostile response in the preceding parable (21:41; 45-46) and this is a continuous dialogue. In a similar vein to the Parable of the Tenants, this parable compares the Kingdom to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son and sent his servants to call those who were invited but they would not come. Those invited by the king ignore his servants. The king does not give up. He sends other servants to convince those he invited to come to the feast. The invited guests focus on their worldly activities. Some seize and kill the servants. Marriage is a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel (Hosea 2:16-20; Isaiah 54:5-6; 62:5). The wedding feast is associated with the celebration of the covenant (e.g., Proverbs 9:1-2; Isaiah 55:1-3; 25:6-10). The king here is God, His Son is Jesus. The servants are God's prophets. The invited guests represent the rulers of Israel.

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

This verse perhaps refers to the destruction of the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70.

⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

The king notes how the original invitees were unworthy and invites others from across the whole land. The same theme of unexpected people being invited to take the place of those who failed to respond is consistent with both preceding parables (21:31-32; 41-43).

¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."

The second part of this parable may seem a little strange at first. The wedding hall is full of guests who were unexpectedly invited. The king sees a man who is not dressed in the proper attire and calls him out. The man was speechless – much like Jesus' adversaries will be shortly in the same passage. The king has the man bound and thrown out. At first it may seem to western eyes that the king acted harshly. After all, the king invited street people and they did not ask to come. An understanding of the cultural background reveals that the host provides the wedding garment.¹ Thus the man singled out must have intentionally refused to wear the garment he was provided. This is an example of one being called but not being worthy. "Outer darkness" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" have previously been used in connection with judgment (8:12; 13:42; 13:50) and thus this scene has eschatological implications.

Reflection and Application

In the first part of the parable, the first invitees (Israel) were called but they chose to focus on their farms and businesses, and even put to death the messengers of the king (the prophets). As the first invitees were supplanted by the street people (the Gentile church), the man refusing to wear the wedding garment the king provided him is an example of those who are extended an invitation and provided with the means of entry but refuse to accept the provision. Perhaps the wedding garment provided by the king to enter the banquet (the Kingdom) is an allusion to the need to accept Christ as our Savior and be dressed in His cloak of righteousness – a provision provided by God's grace to reconcile humanity back to Himself. To refuse Christ means one day being thrown into the outer darkness. In both parts of the parable, the fault lies with those who refuse.

No doubt those blinded by Marxist theology will preach this text as God taking away the Kingdom from those who are wealthy and giving it to the street people and miss the actual Gospel. Some may focus on the worthiness of those who are chosen. How quickly we forget grace and *sola gratia*. The king in the parable extends both the invitation and the means of entry. There may even be others who see this parable as justification of why one must wear "Sunday best" clothes and refuse entry to those who fail to meet the human-imposed standard.

Ultimately, we are provided with an invitation and the means. What we do with this call is up to us. Do we arrogantly focus more on the self-sufficiency of our worldly life rather than attend to the purpose God has called us to? Are we too proud to wear the garment that the King has provided (repentance, faithfulness, humility, and forgiveness)? Many are called but few are chosen!

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¹ Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 117.