

## Come to the Wedding

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I think that of all the events that we go to in this life, the wedding is the favorite of most if not all people. A man and a woman devoting themselves to each other, vowing to love each other in every circumstance for the rest of their lives and then riding off together into the sunset. Romantic, isn't it? How many movies have been made that include this theme? Probably hundreds.

Marriage is a covenant. Recall that a covenant is an agreement between two parties that includes a promise, a sign, an obligation, and a fulfillment. Marriage unites the man and the woman within the covenant. They become a small covenant community, really. Marriage really helps us to understand the relationship between God and His people.

In Old Testament times, God's covenant community, Israel, and later both Israel and Judah, were united to God through the covenants of the Old Testament. And we even see the marriage language in the Old Testament. We will look at two of them. The first is in Hosea 1:2, "When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD.'" Hosea took a harlot for a wife according to the command of the Lord as a sign to the people that their idolatry was, in effect, harlotry towards the Lord God. The obligation in marriage is to remain faithful. Israel and Judah's obligation was to obey God's commandments and to remain faithful to Him as their God. But they instead turned to idols and foreign gods.

The second is in Jeremiah 31, a very significant prophecy in the Old Testament. We will look only at verses 31-32. "'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD." The people, not every individual but as a whole, were unfaithful to the Lord God. They broke the commandment to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength by worshipping foreign gods. That was why the Lord rose up Assyria to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel, and later Babylon to conquer the southern kingdom of Judah. The people were unfaithful. God was and is always a faithful husband to His people as He has said.

The children of Israel during Jesus' earthly ministry would've been well acquainted with the significance of the wedding parable that we see Jesus relating in Matthew 22. They would have understood the parallels between earthly weddings and the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah who would rescue his people, his bride from their oppressors. However, most of the Jewish leadership did not recognize that Jesus was the Messiah. They forgot Jeremiah 31:33-34,

"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I

will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup>They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The Messiah would not be about overthrowing the Romans, which is what the Jewish leadership wanted. The Messiah would rescue His bride, His people from the real enemies, which are sin, death, and Satan. Jesus Christ defeated all of them by His death, resurrection, and ascension.

But the Jewish leadership missed Him. And Jesus told a number of parables after entering Jerusalem triumphantly, one of which we read today. It is important to understand that this is one of three parables that Jesus told. They are connected. To understand the fuller meaning, we have to look at all three. And I will reference the other two as we look at the third parable in Matthew 22.

"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.'" Those who were invited refers to the children of Israel. Remember, at that time they were the people of God. They were the covenant community. They were the vine-growers in the parable of the landowner in Matthew 21.

They were the second son in the parable of the two sons in Matthew 21. The son that said he would go work for the father but did not go. When someone was invited to a wedding, there was some amount of preparation they had to do in order to attend. There were travel plans to be made. Attending meant dropping whatever it was you would otherwise be doing so that you could be there. That is what you would do if attending was a priority. But these people were not willing to make attending a priority. They were like those people of whom Isaiah prophesied, and Jesus quoted in Matthew 15, saying, "They praise Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me."

Verses 4-6,

Again he 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.'" <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.

These people were really against changing their ways in order to attend. Some even mistreated and killed the slaves. This is what happened to the prophets. They were mistreated and killed because they were calling people to account. Overall, the people the prophets were sent to were unwilling to return to faithful obedience to the Lord, choosing instead to walk according

to the flesh. Jesus related this in the parable of the Landowner also. In that parable they even killed the son. These people were not willing to honor the Lord.

Who are these slaves? Generally, they are faithful servants of God. They do represent the prophets, who we know were mistreated and killed. But I believe that Jesus was foretelling what would happen in the future also. From where we are in history, we could say that the slaves also represent the Apostles and early Christians because there was a persecution of Christians authorized by the Jewish leadership.

Verse 7, "But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire." God raised up Assyria and Babylon, as I've already said. God also raised up the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem in A.D.70.

Verses 8-10, "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." In Acts 10, Peter had a vision of the sheet with all sorts of animals both clean and unclean, and he was told to eat, and he refused to eat the unclean animals. He heard a voice say to him, "What God has cleansed no longer consider unholy." And then Peter preached to Cornelius and his household. He told them, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him." (Acts 10:34-35). Later in Acts 13, we read that Paul told the Jews, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Christ died for the sins of the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike.

Verses 11-14,

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."

Judgement. The Lord will sort everything out. Jesus also relates this in the parable of the landowner recorded for us in Matthew 21 when He tells the Pharisees, "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it." Yes, many are called, but only those wearing wedding clothes will remain. What are these wedding clothes? Nowadays only the bride wears white, and those who dare to wear white are looked down upon. But back in those days, everyone wore white to weddings. White is the color of purity and righteousness, and celebration.

In Revelation 7, John sees a vision of a great multitude made up of all tribes, peoples, and tongues clothed in white robes. And an elder asked him who the people were and then

said that they, “are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Wedding clothes. They are in Christ having been cleansed by His shed blood. But they also obeyed Him as their Lord. The tribulation is a difficult time. It is hard to obey Christ when times are tough. Yet these people did just that. They produced the fruit of the kingdom of God and have come out of the great tribulation. They have, as Paul said, fought the good fight, they have finished the race, they have kept the faith, and have received the crown of righteousness that is given to all who have loved the appearing of the Lord (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

For much of the Jewish leadership, this parable served as a rebuke. It was good news for those that the leadership would have written off as sinners as it shows us the kindness of the Lord not wanting anyone to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). For us this parable calls us to not judge others because God knows the hearts of all. He will separate the sheep from the goats as He has said. It serves as a call as God’s faithful servants to extend His invitation to all we meet. And it encourages us to continue on in the faith, to continue to wear wedding clothes and bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

Going to a wedding requires something of ourselves. If we are serious about the Lord Jesus Christ it should show up in our fruit. And if we are going to make a difference in this world for Jesus Christ, for the kingdom of God then our fruit should reflect kingdom principles.

Such was not the case with the Jewish leadership in Jesus’ day. Such was not the case in Israel and Judah in the days of the prophets. They had idols and foreign gods that they worshipped. Yet, God was still faithful to them. He restored them to the Holy Land after their exile in Babylon and Persia and Assyria. He kept His word, as He always does.

It must be true for us that we love the Lord our God and serve Him only. There is a lot in this life that can distract us from producing the fruit of the kingdom of God. We can get hung up on trying to live comfortably. There are trials and tribulations that can pull us away from serving God. But God is always faithful to us. We need to be faithful to Him through Christ Jesus the Lord. Life is difficult, but in Christ we can overcome the trials and tribulations of this life and remain faithful to Him. Remember His words to the Church in Sardis in Revelation 3:5, one of the seven promises of God found in the book of Revelation, “He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My father and before His angels.”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!