

WEEK 11: THE WEDDING FEAST

Matthew 22:1–14



The Place of the Passage

Matthew 16:21 is a turning point in Jesus' ministry, for "from that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things . . . and be killed, and on the third day be raised." The focus in Matthew 21–23 is on the religious leaders' opposition to Jesus as he arrives in Jerusalem. Jesus responds by rebuking them in the form of parables (21:28–22:14), debating with them (22:15–45), and pronouncing woes upon them (23:1–39). This prepares us for the coming chapters, in which the conflict will climax with the crucifixion.

The Big Picture

In Matthew 21–23, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem amid praise but soon engages in conflict with the Jewish leaders about his own identity and their rejection of him.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Matthew 22:1-14. Then think through and write your own notes on the following questions. (See *ESV Study Bible* notes on pages 1868-1869; online at www.esv.org.)

The introduction to this parable reads, "And again Jesus spoke to them in parables." Who is Jesus' audience ("them")? What other parables has he told in this setting?

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Jesus' parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14 is a parable of judgment. Has Jesus said or made other verbal or physical judgments in Matthew 21? Does he do so in Matthew 23? What are they?

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In Jesus' parable (Matt. 22:1-14) he compares the "kingdom of heaven" to a "king who gave a wedding feast¹ for his son" and then "sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast" (vv. 2, 3). What does the king symbolize? His son? The wedding feast? If able, give support for your answers from elsewhere in the New Testament.

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List the actions of the king (see Matt. 22:2, 3, 4). What do these actions reveal about his character?

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Whom do the king's servants symbolize? How about those who were invited? How did they respond to the king's invitation and servants? What does their rejection of the invitation symbolize? Do you find that today people still respond in similar ways when invited to receive the good news about Jesus?

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In Luke 14:15-24 Jesus tells another parable about God's inviting people to a "great banquet," his sending out a servant to invite "many" people to it (v. 16), and their rejecting the invitation (vv. 18-20). Read the end of that parable (vv. 21-24) and then Matthew 22:7-14. How are the two conclusions similar? How are they different?

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In Matthew 22:7, how does the king respond to those who reject his invitation? Whom do "his troops" and "those murderers" symbolize, and what does the destruction of "their city" represent in history?

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The second half of the parable (Matt. 22:8–14) has a structure similar to that of the first half (vv. 1–7): invitations (vv. 2, 3a, 4; 8, 9, 11, 12a); responses (vv. 3b, 10, 12c), and judgments (vv. 7, 13b). We also find two of the same characters: the king and his servants. However, in the second half two new characters are introduced: “guests” (v. 10) and “the attendants” (v. 13). Based on their actions, do you have any educated guesses as to their identities? What are the reasons for your guesses?

How is the “man who had no wedding garment” judged? And *why* is he judged? Or, put differently, what does the “wedding garment” represent? If you need help, go to Matthew 25:31–46; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 3:12–14; or Revelation 7:9, 13–14, 19:7–8 for answers.

Jesus’ final statement (“For many are called, but few are chosen”; Matt. 22:14) can be confusing. The Greek word translated “called” is *klētos*, while “chosen” is from *eklektos*. What is confusing is that *eklektos* is translated elsewhere as “called” (e.g., Rom. 8:30). To Paul, the “called” are the predestined elect—those who are effectively called. In Matthew 22:1–14 what does Jesus mean by the word “called” (*klētos*)? Hint: Jesus uses a related word (*kaleō*, translated “call” or “invite”) elsewhere in this parable (vv. 3, 8, 9, 10). And what does he mean by the word “chosen” (*eklektos*) both here in verse 14 and also in 24:22, 24, 31 (there translated “elect”)?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

UNWORTHY WORTHINESS. Jesus compares his kingdom to a wedding feast that a king throws for his son. Those first invited refuse to come and are therefore pronounced “not worthy” (Matt. 22:8). The king then sends his invitation to the streets, and many come to the feast, “both bad and good” (v. 10). Apparently unworthiness is not about being bad, for those who finally come to the feast are “both bad and good.” Likewise, worthiness is not about being good, for the first invitees are judged unworthy simply because they refuse the invitation. Worthiness here is based not on moral performance but on a willingness to come to the king’s party. In other words, worthiness is about a willingness to receive grace. The kingdom’s entrance invitation does not say, “Are you good enough?” but asks, “Whether good or bad, are you willing to come?”

Whole-Bible Connections

COSMIC MARRIAGE. In the history of salvation, the initial relationship God establishes between Adam and Eve is that of marriage (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4–5). God identifies Israel as his wife on the basis of their covenantal relationship (Hos. 2:2, 16, 19). Yet Israel is found guilty of adultery as she seeks after idols (Ex. 34:15; Jer. 2:35–36; Hos. 3:1). This cosmic marriage results in divorce as the wife turns to other lovers (Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8; Hos. 2:2). The Lord alone makes provisions to receive back his wife (Hos. 1:10–11; 2:14–15). In comparing “the kingdom of heaven . . . to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son” (Matt. 22:2) and calling the church his “bride,” Christ intends for earthly marriage to display the hope of the heavenly marriage (Eph. 5:23, 27, 31–32). When the people of God are glorified, we all will enjoy marriage to Christ, rejoice in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7, 9), and enjoy the consummation of the eternal marriage forever and ever (Rev. 21:1–4).

Theological Soundings

GOD’S ANGER AND WRATH. In this parable we read of the king’s anger (“the king was angry”) and wrath (“he sent his troops” to those who did not accept his invitation, and his troops “destroyed those murderers and burned their

city”; Matt. 22:7); the king has those who attend the wedding “without a wedding garment . . . cast . . . into the outer darkness” (vv. 12, 13). This parabolic story is symbolic of God’s holy anger and divine wrath. While the doctrine of God’s holy anger and divine wrath is certainly a difficult one for many people to contemplate, it is presented throughout the Bible as the just and necessary response to evil and as one aspect of God’s righteous character. His wrath is his settled, judicial disposition against sin and evil. It flows out of his goodness, for he is unwilling to let evil and injustice go unanswered. God’s wrath ultimately highlights his glory, for it demonstrates his commitment to holiness and righteousness. And it measures the depth of his love, for he has determined to bear his own wrath fully in the person of his Son for the sake of his elect. It is this fury of God’s anger against human sin that Jesus suffers for us on the cross in order to save us (people born “children of wrath”; Eph. 2:3) from his judgment.

GENERAL AND EFFECTIVE CALLING. That many (Gk. *polloi*) are called means that many have been invited to the wedding feast. But not all those invited are actually the ones who are supposed to be there, because *few* are chosen. This has been described as the doctrine of “general calling”: the gospel is proclaimed to all people everywhere, both those who will believe and those who will not. However, Paul also mentions another kind of calling, an effective calling from God that comes powerfully to individuals and always brings a positive response. When the gospel is proclaimed, only *some* are effectively called—that is, those who are the elect, who respond with true faith (1 Cor. 1:24, 26–28). This is consistent with Jesus’ statement that “few are chosen,” for the ones “chosen” (Gk. *eklektos*) are “the elect,” a term used by Jesus to refer to his true disciples (compare Matt. 11:27; 24:22, 24, 31).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Matthew 22:1–14 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the *Personal Implications* for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) the passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Matthew 22:1–14

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Jesus’ parables. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.

Definitions

¹ **Wedding feast** – In this case, a countrywide seven-day marriage celebration (see Gen. 29:27; Judg. 14:12), that would feature singing (Jer. 7:34; Song of Solomon) as well as food and wine (John 2:1–11).