

The Parable of the Marriage Feast

Many Called, Few Chosen

And they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.—Revelation 17:14

By Richard Evans

"And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding" (Matt 22:1-3).

Translators use both bid and call in this parable to render *kaleo* (#2564). Because call has such special significance in Scripture, the use of bid introduces a vagueness not present in the original. It is better to use call throughout.

The Jews

"And they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are called, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were called were not worthy."—Matthew 22:3-8

These verses describe the reaction of the Jews, the called people of God, to the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. They did not come to the marriage feast; and, consequently, as a people, they suffered greatly.

The Gentiles

"Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, call to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless."— Matthew 22:9-12)

The sending of the King's servants into the highways depicts the call going out to the Gentiles. Paul wrote of this call, "I say then, Have they [the Jews] stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:11).

Many Gentiles responded — the banquet hall filled; but, as indicated in the parable, entrance into the hall is not sufficient. It is necessary for each guest to put on a wedding garment.

The Lesson

"Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen."—Matthew 22:13, 14

Many versions punctuate these verses so the clause "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" is related with "cast him into outer darkness." This obscures the lesson. The casting of the unrobed guest into darkness is the conclusion of the parable's narrative. A period, a full stop, should follow the word "darkness". The subsequent words are the lesson of the parable. In today's idiom, they are the bottom-line. They state the point of the parable, a danger the Lord was making manifest.

The text would be better as "... Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for many are called, but few are chosen."—Matthew 22:13,14 corrected

This construction gives meaning to the conjunction. For (because) few are chosen, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This is the lesson of the parable!

Two Crises

In the parable Jesus dramatized two crises his followers must experience. The first is God's calling (1Pet 5:10). This crisis is resolved in the parable by entering the banquet hall. In the Christian walk it is resolved by consecration to holy living and obedience to the will of God. Typified by the general consecration of the Levites, the believer sets his mind to follow righteousness in all of life's affairs. As with the Levites, this consecration does not entail sacrifice. God has the right to demand that all his creatures love righteousness and hate iniquity, but he does not demand that all sacrifice.

A life of righteousness sooner or later brings about a tension. A sincere response to God's call results in conflict with earthly interests, earthly ambitions, earthly friendships (1 Pet 3:20,21). In the "present evil world" (Gal 1:4) the path of righteousness ultimately requires sacrifice. The resolution of this second crisis, the putting on of the garment, is a second consecration—a consecration as a priest for sacrifice. Typified by the special consecration of Aaron and his sons as sacrificers or priests, this consecration is made by only a few (Luke 22:14).

All who desire to follow Jesus should be aware of these crises and understand the inherent hazard. Having turned to God and his ways of righteousness, having made the first consecration, there is a strong temptation to stop, to believe all that is necessary has been accomplished. There is a grave danger of not going on to the second consecration.

This perilous snare was made evident in Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-5). The Apostle found there disciples who knew only of John's baptism, the baptism of repentance, the first consecration. Paul quickly set about teaching the need for a second baptism.

This pitfall is also evident in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Hebrews were in the same provisional condition as the Ephesians.

"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as

have need of milk, and not of strong meat."—Hebrews 5:12

Repeatedly the writer implored the Hebrews to go forward. "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest . . ." (Heb 4:11); "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest . . . Let us draw near with a true heart." (Heb 10:19-22); "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp . . ." (Heb 13:13).

In each of these requests the Hebrews were being urged to go on to the second consecration.

To illustrate this hazard the writer used the Exodus of Israel. Every Christian who has left his Egypt, consecrated to righteousness, and followed God to the spiritual Jordan, comes to this critical juncture. There is a second baptism, a baptism unto Joshua—a second consecration, a consecration unto sacrifice!

The Ephesians heard and accepted Paul's message. They were baptized into Christ. They crossed their Jordan. Of the reaction of the Hebrews little is known. They were standing on the banks of the Jordan. The epistle was written to encourage them to crossover (Heb 3:12,19).

From this picture given by God, we know "few there be" (Matt 7:14) that make that crossing. Of the hundreds of thousands of Jews over twenty years of age who left Egypt, of all that were baptized into Moses at the Red Sea, only two were baptized in the Jordan (Num 14:30). That is the danger! All who desire to be "more than conquerors" (Rom 8:37), all who desire to destroy the enemies in the land, must not only leave Egypt, but must also leave the wilderness. They must cross the Jordan. The great battle in which each Christian must engage takes place in Canaan, not in the wilderness!

The Wedding Garment

A crucial point in the parable is the absence of a wedding garment. There has been much speculation as to the source of the wedding garment. Some declare it was the custom in Jesus' day to present wedding guests with garments. There is little evidence to support such a claim. The parable leaves the source in the background, and simply indicates that a suitable robe was necessary, however obtained. Adding to Scripture what is not given is unwise.

The verb "had on" in verse 11 is translated from *enduo* (Strong's #1746). This verb is used often in the New Testament and has the meaning "to put on." "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 13:14); "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24).

The unrobed guest had accepted the call and entered the banquet hall, but he had not "put on" a proper garment. The meaning of this expression was given by Paul. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27)

Many are called by God and respond by consecrating to righteous living. They receive John's baptism; but, like the Ephesians and the Hebrews at the time of their enlightenment, they are not "baptized into Christ." They have not "put on" Christ. Though many are called, few go on to the second consecration.

All who respond to God's drawing (John 6:44) are fed spiritual meat and drink (1Cor 10:3,4). Just as was Israel at Mt. Sinai, they are enlightened of God's

requirements.

The Hebrews were "illuminated" before they were urged to enter God's "rest." "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;" (Heb10:32). The Ephesians were first edified by Paul—teaching preceded baptism (Acts 19:4,5).

After entering the lighted hall, after enlightenment, there must be a second response. Those who fail to "put on" the garment, who fail to "put on" Christ, who fail to make the second consecration, are rejected. Just as the unrobed guest, they are taken from the bright lights of the banquet hall and cast into the darkness outside. They join those called ones who refused to leave their farms, their merchandise. Those who enter the hall and fail to "put on" a garment suffer the same fate as those who made light of the call.

There is an important nuance apparent in the Greek which is completely lost in the English translation. ". . . he [the King] saw there a man which had not [Strong's #3756] on a wedding garment ..." (Matt 22:11); ". . . how camest thou in hither not [Strong's #3361] having a wedding garment?" (Matt 22:12)

The little word "not" in these verses is translated from different Greek words. In verse 11 the word used denotes a fact—the guest had not put on a garment. The word in verse 12, on the other hand, signifies intention—the guest had willfully not put it on. The King asked in effect, "is it your willful intention not to have a garment?" The guest knew the garment was required, but was not willing to put it on.

The Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth

The ultimate consequence of not responding to the call, and not putting on a wedding garment, is "weeping and gnashing of teeth." This difficult phrase appears seven times in the New Testament — six times in Matthew, once in Luke. The account in Luke provides important insight.

"And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able . . .'"—Luke 13:22-24

Again, there is the comparison between many and few.

". . . When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth . . .'"—Luke 13:25-28

Those standing without, knocking at the door, are the same ones who, in the parable, refused to go to the feast—the called of the Jewish nation.

This text makes manifest the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is to occur in the Kingdom, after the Lord's return and the Church is complete. Only in the Kingdom will those who were called realize the great privilege they rejected. It is

then they cry "Lord, Lord, open unto us." When they hear the answer "I know you not," then "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The prophet Ezekiel wrote of this lament. "Then shall ye [Israel] remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations" (Ezek. 36:31).

Zechariah also foretold of it. "... they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech 12:10).

In the Kingdom those Jews who rejected God's call shall weep and gnash their teeth.

The parable reveals a similar destiny awaits the Gentiles who reject God's call. This was confirmed by the writer of Hebrews.

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby [the] many be defiled"—Hebrews 12:15

"Many" has the definite article, "the many"—the many who are called as contrasted with the few who are chosen.

"Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."—Hebrews 2:16, 17

The Gentiles who do not respond to the call will suffer rejection and, in the Kingdom, will weep as did Esau.

Many Called, Few Chosen

The Parable of the Marriage Feast dramatically demonstrates the need for understanding the two crises in the Christian experience. All who consecrate to righteous living enter the banquet hall without a wedding garment. If they remain in that provisional state they receive the grace of God in vain (2Cor 6:1), as did Esau.

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."—John 12:48

The failure to be chosen is directly related to not "putting on" a garment, not making the second consecration. Many Jews and Gentiles, as individuals, follow the path taken by the Israelite nation. They leave their Egypt and pass through the antitypical Red Sea. They come to Mt. Zion (Heb 12:22). They are nourished with spiritual meat and drink (1Cor 10:13,14). They are brought to the border of their Canaan; but, as did Israel, they choose not to enter. They refuse to pass through the Jordan. They willfully refuse to put on the wedding garment!

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it" (Heb 4:1); "... for many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt 22:14).