

Pentecost XXI: Matthew 22:1-14: The Parable of the Wedding Feast

1. The lectionary for Series A lists this text as Mt. 22:1-10 (11-14). This assumes that we have two parables, not one. We have noted the text as Mt. 22:1-14, assuming that it is only one parable. Note that the Nestle/Aland Greek text does not begin vs. 11 with a subparagraph. Furthermore, vs. 14 surely covers vs. 1-10. Why do some say that we have two parables? Look at the margin at Mt. 22:1 in the Nestle text. There we read: 1-10; Lk. 14:16-24. Nestle is not necessarily suggesting that Lk. 14:16-24 is parallel to Mt. 22:1-14. But to regard Mt. 22:1-14 as two parables shows the subtle influence of the higher critics. Form critics, at the suggestion of Strauss and B. Weiss, regarded Mt. 22:1-10 and Lk. 14:16-24 as the same parable, but the tradition assumed different forms. Redaction critics in our day follow this lead. In his *Commentary on Luke*, 1978, Marshall (pp. 584-587) sums up their findings thus: "A very similar parable (to that of Lk. 14:15-24) appears in Mt. 22:1-14, but with considerable alteration and addition. It is generally accepted that the two parables are variants of one original theme, and considerable progress can be made towards reconstructing a basic form of the parable (which turns out to be very close to the Lucan form)." Then Marshall summarizes the work done by Jeremias, Hahn, Schlatter and Derrett. That clearly implies that Jesus is not the author of the two parables, spoken on different occasions. But what Ylvisaker wrote nearly eighty years ago still holds: "This parable (Mt. 22:1-14) must have been spoken considerably later and from a different point of view, for it has a wider application, by far. In the former parable (Lk. 14:16-24) it was an ordinary man who made a supper; here it is a king who prepared a wedding for his son. The man was content to issue the one invitation; the king repeats his call to those that are invited. There the single servant is dismissed with empty excuses; here numerous messengers are despised and mistreated in return for the invitation they bring. But for this reason a bloody punishment follows in the parable of the wedding feast, whereas a mere exclusion is the result in the other." Form and redaction critics practically say: "Jesus did not speak both parables as we have them, but the church, or members thereof, developed both parables from different traditions." Under the guise of great learning these so-called scholars attribute to the church or redactors what Jesus actually said.
2. From Mt. 21:23-22:14 we have a series of three parables. It is Jesus' final answer to the arrogant questions asked at Mt. 21:23. Furthermore, as Fahling points out: "The threat that the kingdom of God 'would be given to a nation to bring forth the fruits thereof' (21:43) is followed by a parable which repeats the truth. It is a reply to the hostile thoughts and plans of Christ's enemies, warning them that, unless they cease their enmity, judgment will come upon them." In His great patience and mercy Jesus heaps parable on parable as a final call of repentance to His enemies and their followers.
3. Vs. 1: ἀποκριθεὶς means "in response", not to something which the Sanhedrists had said, but obviously to what they were thinking. It clearly indicates Jesus' divine omniscience. πάλιν, though they harbored murderous thoughts, He added another parable. ἐν παραβολαῖς is adverbial, manner. Why use the plural for one parable? Evidently because in this parable there are many points of comparison. Perhaps we might paraphrase: "in extensive parabolic language." αὐτοῖς, His enemies mentioned at 21:45, but very likely includes a crowd of people as well.
4. Vs. 2: Here "the Kingdom of Heaven" denotes the grand sweep of the preaching of the Gospel among both Jews and Gentiles until the end of time. βασιλεὶς denotes God the Father. γάμους includes the Atonement, the means of grace and the work of the Holy Spirit applied equally to all men. υἱός is the incarnate Son of God.
5. Vs. 3: ἀπέστειλεν, used also in vs. 4, denotes a sending with a special commission. Does τοὺς δούλους include the prophets? Very likely not. It likely denotes the Apostles. καλέσαι, an infinite

of purpose denotes the call of the Gospel. τοὺς κεκλημένους means "the invited". The Apostles called those who had already been invited. This fits both figure and application. Fahling says: "This second invitation is extended to the prospective guests, and an elaborate meal is prepared. At the appointed time a second invitation to the already invited guests is sent out (the words mean 'to invite the invited'). . . . This second invitation seems to accord with Eastern custom. Indeed, we are told that among the distinctions of the inhabitants of Jerusalem is mentioned that none of them went to a feast till the invitation had been given twice." In application we think of the fact that the Jews had already been invited under the Old Covenant. Fahling goes on to say: "In this banquet no details of proper etiquette are overlooked, so as not to offend the most sensitive of the important, the rich, and the powerful of the invited guests." Throughout the Old Covenant and especially when Christ came, God, in Christ, humbled Himself deeply and treated the Jews most courteously in the Gospel. That is the point. καὶ οὐκ ἤθελον ἐλθεῖν "but they were refusing to come." Jesus said at Jn. 5:40: "But you do not wish to come to Me to have life."

6. Vs. 4: Note that πάλιν occurred in vs. 1. It denoted Jesus' great patience. Here, in vs. 4, we have it again. Under ordinary circumstances a king would certainly not have extended another invitation after the first had been rejected. ἄλλους δοῦλους more Apostles, missionaries, evangelists. The parable is heightened by the fact that the messengers are given the very words which they are to say. The audience is the same as in vs. 3. Ἴδοὺ calls attention to something important. It's an appeal in this case. On ἄριστον Bengel notes: "Dinner with regard to the Jews in the early time of the NT dispensation, but supper with regard to the saints at the actual consummation of the spiritual marriage. See Rev. 19:9. This parable embraces the history of the Church from the one time to the other." Note μου, either possessive or subjective genitive. It is wholly of His making. ἡτοίμακα is perfect with lasting results. "My bulls and my fatted animals have been slain and everything is in readiness," denotes the fullness of the Gospel. Now comes the second invitation: "Come to the marriage-feast."
7. Vs. 5: Note that we have two classes of people, one in this vs. and one in vs. 6. The first denotes total disinterest, the second hostility. ἀμελήσαντες is variously translated "made light of it, merely laughed, paid no attention, were not interested, took no notice." This group is divided into two subgroups. Both denote sophisticated people of earthly means. The point is that they are sunken in mere material and earthly matters, materialists who care not about their own souls.
8. Vs. 6: Here we have the second group. We are not told which is the larger group. τοὺς δοῦλους is again the Apostles, missionaries, evangelists, all those sent to announce the feast of the Gospel. Note that all three verbforms are violent: κρατέω, to grab; ὑβρίζω to treat in an insulting manner; ἀποκτείνω to kill. We think immediately of the Baptist, Stephen, James. It is said that all the Apostles died a violent death, with the exception of John. The Book of Acts is not only an account of the Apostles preaching justification by faith but also an account of how the people treated God's messengers with violence and death.
9. Vs. 7: The King is God the Father. ὀργίσθη is a very strong verb, He was filled with wrath. The violent verbs in vs. 6 are met with stern justice in this vs. καὶ "and therefore". Here we have a form of πέμπω, not ἀποστέλλω. It was a sending of justice, not a sending of announcing good news. τὰ στρατεύματα αὐτοῦ is plainly a prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus, the son of Vespasian, in the year 70 A.D. So historic was the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that the Romans built the Arch of Titus which can still be seen in Rome today. The destruction of Jerusalem was recorded by Josephus. It is an awful account. Fahling says, with reference to Jesus' prophecy of this destruction at Lk. 21:20-24: "With the destruction of Jerusalem the curtain falls. In certain respects there has been no history since 70 A.D., only a wind-up." True. It was God's severe

judgment on those who disregarded His invitation to the forgiveness of sins. The verb ἀπώλεσεν "destroyed" is stronger than the verb ἀπέκτεινον in vs. 6. Take for example the death of Stephen. It must have been painful, but lasted only a little while. But read Josephus on the destruction of the unbelieving Jews in 70 A.D. It is a gruesome story. τοὺς φονεῖς ἐκείνους "those murderers". Those whom God had invited again and again, became murderers. Meditate on that thought. "And burned down their city." A precise prophecy. Josephus tells us that two factions developed in besieged Jerusalem. They began burning each other's grain supply. So violent were they that they themselves helped bring about God's judgment upon themselves.

10. Vs. 8: τότε denotes a turning point. τοῖς δοῦλοις are again Apostles, evangelists, missionaries. God did not cease to send missionaries. Note the μὲν-δὲ construction. God did not abandon the marriage-feast of His Son. Man's indifference toward the Gospel or even his destruction of God's messengers in no way inhibits or stops the progress of the Gospel. In fact, it's the other way around. Think on that when you consider all your labor in vain. "But the invited were not worthy." Read Acts 13:46-47 at this point. Note οὐκ ἄξιους in vs. 46. What caused the unworthiness? They themselves. It reminds us of Luther's words: "He is truly worthy and well-prepared who has faith in these words 'Given and shed for the remission of sins'." Faith in the promises of God makes a man worthy. Rejection makes him unworthy.
11. Vs. 9: οὖν "in view of this rejection". πορεύεσθε reminds us of Mt. 28:19. It is a present imperative referring to the whole NT era. τὰς διεξόδους τῶν ὁδῶν has received a variety of translations: "highways, main highways, where the roads leave the city, street corners, thoroughfares, main streets, crossroads, main thoroughfares." All of these get at it in one way or another. It means "where people are congregated". ὅσους ἔαν εὑρήτε means "no matter whom you find".
12. Vs 10: The turning point came at the time of Pentecost. From that point on, no distinction between Jew and Gentile was to be made. Ylvisaker notes that this had been prophesied: Is. 2:2ff; Jer. 3:17ff; Micah 4:1ff; Ps. 45:13; 72:10; 87:4ff and numerous other passages. πονηροὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθοὺς "both bad and good" from the human standpoint. But Rom. 3:23-24 tells us how it is from God's standpoint, all have sinned but all have been freely justified by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. The 25th ed. of Nestle reads γυμνῶν, the 26th reads γάμος. The former means "feast" the latter "wedding". The meaning is the same. The verb πρὶς πλημὴν requires the genitive as object. The original guests who rejected the invitation did in no way frustrate the final purpose of the king. The hall was filled with guests. When the total number of the elect has been gathered in, the end shall have come.
13. Vs 11: Note that ἐκεῖ occurs both in this vs. and also in vs. 13, the first denoting everlasting life, the second everlasting damnation. οὐκ ἐνδεδυμένον ἔνδυμα γάμου requires a few remarks: a) οὐκ with a participle makes the negative more emphatic. (The participle usually has μή.) b) The participle is in the perfect tense denoting permanence. c) Note the cognate accusative "dressed in a dress". d) γάμου is adjectival genitive. According to Oriental custom, guests were furnished with robes when they arrived at the feast. Furthermore, people who had been invited indiscriminately could hardly have furnished their own robes in every case. And, finally, the word πάντα in vs. 4 indicates that even in the case of people who knew in advance that they were invited, robes were provided by the king.
14. Vs. 12: Ἐταῖρε is never used in a friendly manner. It denotes criticism. The question: "How did you get in here without a wedding garment?" does not mean that judgment will take place inside heaven. In application Jesus is talking about a hypocrite. He seemed to accept the invitation but did not in reality. ὁ δὲ ἐφίμωθη is very strong: "He was speechless." The verb is passive. Lutheran

commentators are unanimous in saying that the text is speaking of the righteousness of faith, not the righteousness of life. Read Philippians 3:7-14. First Paul speaks of the righteousness of faith which leads to everlasting life, then of the righteousness of life. It is true, of course, that Jesus said: "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt. 5:20) where He speaks of the righteousness of life. It is true, of course, that Paul could speak of both the righteousness of faith and the righteousness of life in one verse, for example Gal. 2:20. It is true, of course, as the *Formula of Concord* points out, that good works are necessary, not as requirement of merit, but as a fruit of justifying faith. Jesus speaks about that in Jn. 15:1-15. Even the good works are a gift of God in Christ Jesus. Read Eph. 2:8-10. In the parable the robe was a gift from the king. What is the robe which admits us into heaven? No true Christian would say that it is of his own making. It's as we sing in a hymn: "dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before His throne." All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. But Christ is our garment of righteousness. Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27; Is. 61:10. Without that imputed righteousness a man will be muzzled on Judgment Day.

15. Vs. 13: In vss. 3, 4, 8 the human messengers are denoted by the word δοῦλοι. Here we have δῆκονοι, plainly the angels. The figure of "binding one with reference to both feet and hands" denotes the total loss of freedom, total helplessness, imprisonment, and the utter opposite of being a guest at a wedding-feast. The imagery is stark. Furthermore, the outer darkness, the total lack of any and all light, the cessation of mercy. ἐκεῖ, in hell, in contrast to the ἐκεῖ of vs. 11. The weeping and gnashing of teeth is strong imagery for the remorse of the damned. Jesus is speaking of the damnation of the hypocrite, the man who passed among people as a Christian, but was not truly so. By the way, only one person (ἄνθρωπος) is mentioned in vss. 11-13. Jesus, of course, does not mean that there is only one hypocrite. In view of vs. 14 there must be many. Jesus mentions only one to make each of us search our hearts with the question: "Is it I?"
16. Vs. 14: γὰρ is explanatory "I say this because." "Many are called but few are elect." This vs. is quoted only once in the *Book of Concord, Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. XI, Election, paragraphs 14-32*, where Chemnitz beautifully discusses the doctrine of election. The doctrine of election, truly taught and truly understood and believed, is the most comforting doctrine of all. Election is purest Gospel. It should never be presented as an arbitrary decree or as fate. It should never be pitted against the universal atonement. It should always be presented to the believer as the blessed assurance that what has happened to him in time (conversion and regeneration through the means of grace) is of God's eternal purpose and grace in Christ Jesus to preserve him in the true faith unto eternal life. Mt. 22:14 tells us that more will be lost than those who are elect. Why? Because they rejected what God, in Christ, had done for them.
17. In application, vs. 14 applies to the entire parable. Vss. 1-7 apply to the Jews, the Covenant people. The majority of their leaders and the people who followed them rejected the call to repentance. But the elect were found among them, both leaders and people. Vss. 8-13 apply to both Jews and Gentiles. The elect were and are still found among both Jews and Gentiles. The preacher should stress two points: a) To reject the call (vss. 2-7) is fatal; b) To be a hypocrite, to appear to have accepted the call but to reject the imputed righteousness of Christ (vss. 8-13), is likewise fatal. There are hypocrites in the visible Christian Church. Every hearer must examine himself.