

A Tragic Wedding Feast

Thomas Robinson, *Jesus and the Presence of God* 4, June 28, 2015

Matthew 21:42 – 22:14 (ESV Adapted)

⁴² Jesus said to them (chief priests and elders), "Have you never read in the **Scriptures**:

*'The **stone** that the builders **rejected** has become the **cornerstone**;*

*this was **the Lord's doing**, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'* [Ps 118:22-23, cf. Isa 28:16]

⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the **kingdom of God** will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. ⁴⁴ *And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will grind him to chaff."* [Isa 8:14-15; Dan 2:34-35]

⁴⁵ When the **chief priests** and the **Pharisees** heard his **parables**, they perceived that he was speaking **about them**. ⁴⁶ And although they were seeking to **arrest him**, they **feared** the crowds, because they held him to be a **prophet**.

22:¹ And again Jesus spoke to them **in parables**, saying, ² "The **kingdom of heaven** may be compared to a human **king** who made a **wedding feast for his son**, ³ and sent his servants to **summon** those who were summoned to the wedding feast, but they **did not wish to come**.

⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are summoned, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and fattened animals 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**. ⁷ The **king was angry**, and he sent his troops and destroyed those **murderers** and burned their **city**.

⁸ Then he said to his servants, '**The wedding feast is ready**, but those summoned were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and **summon** 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 was **full of reclining guests**.

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 **throw him out** into the **darkness outside**. There there'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

¹⁴ For many are summoned, but few chosen."

Isaiah 52:7-8

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who publishes peace (*shalom*), who brings good news, who publishes salvation (*yeshuah*), who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." ⁸ ... your watchmen lift up their voice; they sing for joy; for in plain sight they see the return of the LORD to Zion.

Matthew 4:17

¹⁷ Jesus began to preach, "Repent (change your thinking), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

2 Chronicles 36:15-16

¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people ¹⁶ But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

Matthew 7:21

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

Temple Fortress against the Invasion of God's Kingdom

Mt is leading us into and through the conflicts that led to Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus from the start proclaimed the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God/Heaven [Mt 4:17-23], like the herald of Isa 52. But the Jerusalem temple was already under control of chief priests (Caiaphas and others), powerful aristocrats, politicians, playing powers off against each other. They have no place for a strange, army-less, money-less prophet like Jesus, defining God's rule.

Remember the journey: Sign of the humble king on a donkey, branches, children [21:1-16].

Sign of the fruitless fig tree, moving the mountain [17-22]. Question of Authority from priests, John the Baptist [23-27]. Parable of Father & 2 Sons, tax collectors, prostitutes [28-32]. Parable of Vineyard Planter and Tenants, they say put them to miserable death [33-41].

Jesus holds two ideas in tension: A powerful invading kingdom, overthrowing corrupt, old structures. A radically different kind of power, of God. The son dies, transforms, reconciles. There was no ready language, no prepared images for Jesus' way of the Sermon on the Mt.

Rejected Stone – Disdained Kingdom

Jesus uses a scripture parable of the Stone (from the Psalm the crowds sang, Ps 118). Rejected, but placed by God as the cornerstone. As a warning to the Priests, he combines it with images from Isaiah 8 and Daniel 2 of God's stone that destroys human structures of power. The chief priests hear this prophetic judgment and begin trying to arrest Jesus, but their fear about their Roman power-base opposing the people makes them timid, not prophetic.

Jesus tells another parable of a human king holding a royal wedding for his son. [Note that Jesus uses the same basic story-type to tell a very different parable in Lk 14:16-24.]

It's no ordinary wedding: A state occasion, the future king and queen. The king invites/summons, not everyone, but the elite of the cities and regions of his kingdom. All okay.

But everything goes awry. The invited ignore the great occasion, the king's authority, the meaning of the event. They don't want to come. But the king is gracious. He sends servants to describe the festivities in terms of all that is prepared for these disdaining subjects. They pay no attention. Indeed, they insult and kill the king's messengers. Full-fledged rebellion has broken out, the king and kingdom are attacked by these elite.

Jesus is describing the temple leaders in terms that echo the scriptural indictment of the Jerusalem leaders before the Babylonian exile and destruction of the temple [2Ch 35:15-16]. He describes their fate in destructive terms they understand. The kingdom won't stop.

The Summons to All and the Missing Wedding Garment

But Jesus adds another element that touches his indictment that *"tax collectors and prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you"* [21:31]. Servants are sent to the main roads to bring in as many as they could find. They bring in *"both bad and good"* and the wedding is full. Many of us wish that Jesus had stopped the story there: Jesus welcomes sinners!

But Jesus doesn't stop. He adds the difficult element of the guest with no wedding garment. His plight seems reasonable given the way the outsiders were brought in. But parables are almost always strange in ways the challenge the listener. This kingdom not only changes old structures, but transforms the disciples themselves: thus the wedding garment.

Jesus has repeatedly emphasized how his teaching must change disciples in distinct ways. The whole Sermon on the Mt describes the *"wedding garment"* – being light and salt, rejecting anger, seeking reconciliation, rejecting possessiveness, speaking truth, not reacting to evil, loving enemies, trusting God, seeking his rule, not judging, acting with love toward others.

God's kingdom is a stone that breaks up everything and rebuilds with God's transforming grace.