

The Parables of Jesus Lesson 25

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

In lesson 20 we looked at the Banquet Parables from Luke 14:1-23. The Parable of the Places of Honor (Luke 14:1-13) was unique to Luke, but the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-23 is also told in Matthew 22. In the Parable of the Places of Honor, Jesus was teaching the Pharisees about humility and rejecting religious superiority, as he noticed that people were picking the places of honor to sit, but the danger is they would easily be 'demoted' by showing such pride. Jesus then encouraged them to not call those to the banquet that could repay them, but to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and they would be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

In the Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke, we saw that it dealt with the '*who*' that would actually *enter* the Kingdom over those '*who*' that were initially *invited*. While we briefly mentioned the Matthew text in the previous lesson, we will now revisit this parable from Matthew's perspective and dive deeper into its meaning.

The Text of the Parable

Matthew 22:1-14 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' ⁵ "But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸ "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Background and Context

We've been looking at the events happening from the triumphal entry to the Olivet Discourse, so far we have seen:

Matthew 21

- The Triumphal Entry: Jesus enters Jerusalem with the praise of the people.
- The Cleansing of the Temple: "You have made my Father's house a den of thieves "
- The Cursing of the Fig Tree: "My no fruit every grow on you forever more"
- The Parable of the Two Sons: "The tax collectors and the prostitutes will go into the kingdom before you"
- The Parable of the Vineyard: "The Kingdom will be taken from you and given to another nation"

Matthew 22

- The Parable of the Great Banquet: "He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city", "throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth", and "many are invited, but few are chosen."
- Jesus debates with the Pharisees (v. 15-46): Taxes, Marriage, Greatest Commandment, Messiah's Son

Exegesis of the Parables

v. 2-3 “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come”

- The banquet of the King “for his Son” makes the Messianic reference explicit. The already-invited is Israel, but the response is they ‘refuse to come’.

v. 4 “Then he sent some more servants and said, “Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”

- Here is a second invitation. “Everything is ready” means the messianic banquet is prepared, the Messiah has come. Echoes Isa 25 and the “fullness of time” motif.

v. 5-6 “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.”

- Here we have two forms of refusal: Apathy: “they paid no attention” and went to field and business. Ordinary life becomes an excuse that blinds to responding to the kingdom. Then there’s Hostility: others seized, mistreated, and killed the servants. This recalls the fate of the prophets and anticipates the treatment of the apostles.

v. 7 “The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city”

- Here is a picture of judgement involving “armies” and the destruction of the wicked, specifically, ‘burning their city”

v. 8-10 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

- Now there is a change in invitation, those originally invited ‘do not deserve’ to attend, so the call will go out into the ‘streets’ to ‘invite anyone. This is a reference to the Gentiles being invited to the wedding. Gathering ‘all’ (the bad and good) is that the call will not just be for ‘the righteous’ but to all... sinners included. No one is disqualified from being invited.

v. 11-12 “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.”

- These verses are about those who were already invited—Israel’s covenant people, especially the religious leaders, who refused to put their faith in Christ, yet still assumed they had a guaranteed place at God’s banquet. “Wedding garment” symbolizes being clothed in Christ’s righteousness.

v. 13 “Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

- This verse is often used at a literal description of ‘hell’ after this life, however, in context it is a metaphor about covenant rejection and exclusion from the kingdom.

v. 14 “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

- This in its context describes those in Israel who would not receive Christ. They were invited, but they were not a part of those ‘chosen’. The word “*chosen*”, usually means those who truly belong to God’s covenant family, not just outwardly, but inwardly. (*Eph. 1:4, ‘he chose us in him...’* those chosen are those in Christ.)
- In this parable, the chosen are those who: accept the invitation, come to the banquet, and wear the garment (Christ’s righteousness).

The two phrases I want to deal with in a little more depth are from verses 7 and 13:

Sending His Armies to Burn Their City

v. 7 ***“The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city”***

This line fits perfectly into the long pattern of covenant curses laid out in the Old Testament. Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel’s blessings were tied to obedience, and her curses were tied to rebellion.

In Deuteronomy 28 Moses warned that if the people rejected God’s covenant:

Deut. 28:49–52 “The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, ⁵⁰ a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. ⁵¹ They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or olive oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. ⁵² They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the Lord your God is giving you.”

Throughout the Old Testament, whenever God’s people broke covenant and refused to repent, He didn’t usually rain down fire from heaven Himself — He raised up foreign nations as His instruments of judgment. He called them *His sword, His rod, His servant*, even *His army*. This is covenantal language — it shows that God is sovereign not only over Israel but over the nations, and He uses them to discipline, correct, or judge His people when they turn from Him.

- **The Assyrians — God’s Rod of Anger against Israel:** Isaiah 10:5–6 *“Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me.”*
- **Babylon — God’s Servant to Judge Judah:** Jeremiah 25:8–9 *“Therefore the Lord Almighty says this: ‘Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,’ declare the Lord, ‘and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.*

So here, Jesus is using covenantal judgment as his basis for saying this in this parable. He even warns very specifically in Luke’s Olivet Discourse, *“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city.” For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.* Luke 21:20-22

These statements in Luke 21:20 and Matthew 22:7 are two of the most direct references to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD70. Leaving very little doubt as to what Jesus is referring to in this parable. Rome literally burned Jerusalem and the temple in AD70, the fire here is not symbolic, but a real historical event well-documented by first-century historians.

- Jewish Historian Josephus:
 - *“Caesar [Titus] ordered the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground... Nothing was left except the tallest of the towers.” (War 7.1.1)*
 - *“The Romans, when they entered in numbers, set fire to the porticoes and the houses... the flames advanced, devouring everything.” (War 6.4.5)*
- Roman Historian Tacitus:
 - *“The temple was set on fire by the soldiers; the blaze became general, and the city was laid waste.” (Histories 5.12–13)*

Outer Darkness, Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth

v. 13 **“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”**

This description is one of the most misunderstood verses in the whole parable. This phrase has come to be associated with Hell in the afterlife. And while one can argue this *could* fit the modern view of hell, *is it what Jesus is describing here?* Again, this is when the King discovers a man in the banquet without a wedding garment, referencing the audience Jesus was speaking to, the Pharisees and religious leaders. The interpretation is that those religious leaders in Israel who rejected Christ and refused to be clothed in His righteousness, would not be included in the Messianic Kingdom that Jesus was bringing and their nation would be covenantally judged for it. It is a picture of ‘spiritual exile’ and exclusion.

The phrase has been used previously in Matthew 8:12 (as well as Luke 13:28-29) when Jesus marvels at the faith of the Roman Centurion, and he compares the faith of an ‘outsider’ to the lack of faith of the Jews and their leaders.

Matthew 8:10-13 *“When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, ‘Truly I tell you, I have not found **anyone in Israel** with such great faith. ¹¹ I say to you that **many** will come from the **east** and the **west**, and will **take their places** at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob **in the kingdom of heaven**. ¹² But **the subjects of the kingdom** will be **thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth**.’” ¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.”*

Here we see the same message, those who think they are ‘included’ in the kingdom, because of their lack of faith, will find themselves ‘excluded’. And the vivid imagery Jesus uses is the imagery of darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus here combines two common Hebrew expressions, which Put together describe a scene of grief mixed with fury; people suffering loss, but still hard-hearted, not repentant.:

- Weeping (Hebrew: bakah): the sound of mourning, lamentation, and loss.
- Gnashing of teeth (Hebrew: charaq shinnayim): a physical expression of anger, rage, or scorn.

Throughout the prophets, **weeping** accompanies national catastrophe, especially when God’s people experience covenant curses and loss.

- Isaiah 22:12–14 “The Lord, the Lord Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail...”
- Jeremiah 9:1 “Oh that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.
- Lamentations 1:2 “She weeps bitterly in the night, tears on her cheeks...”

In Hebrew idiom, “**gnashing of teeth**” was not a sign of pain, but of *rage*. It’s what someone does when furious, resentful, or resisting an enemy.

- Psalm 35:16 “Like profane mockers at a feast, they gnash their teeth at me.”
- Psalm 37:12 “The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them.”
- Psalm 112:10 “The wicked will see and be angry; they will gnash their teeth and melt away...”
- Lamentations 2:16 “All your enemies open their mouths wide against you; they hiss and gnash their teeth.”
- Job 16:9 “His anger tears me and he hates me; he gnashes his teeth at me.”

When Jesus joins these two ideas: *weeping* (grief) and *gnashing* (rage). He paints a picture of covenant judgment that fits Israel’s prophetic story perfectly: People mourning what they’ve lost, yet still angry and resistant to the very God who judged them.