Matthew 22 11-14 The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Those four verses from Matthew's gospel; what can you say; how do you approach them?

I have to say that I struggled a lot with this passage, first to try to understand what it is saying and then once I started to sit with it; to let it start to ferment in me; it brought into sharp focus the wrong thoughts, attitudes and actions that are present within me.

It has not been a comfortable couple of weeks.

Most of you will recognise that these are the final verses of The Parable of the Wedding Banquet.

So, to set some context.

This is where Jesus is saying the Kingdom of heaven is like…; the king sends his servants, because the banquet for his son is ready; to those who are invited but they refuse to come, so he sends more servants but they paid no attention and went about their daily business, some seized and ill-treated his servants and killed them. The king was enraged; his army destroyed them and burned their city.

The king then tells his servants to invite those who do not deserve to come; so, they went out gathered good and bad and the hall was filled with guests.

And so, we then arrive at today's gospel reading. We can attempt and maybe succeed in explaining away the first ten verses as not applying to us, that was for Jesus's immediate audience the Jews at the time, some of those verses might even be prophetic looking forward to when the Roman's destroyed Jerusalem.

However, you cannot get away with that for the verses we heard today.

We might say, well there is an alternative version of the same parable in Luke's gospel (Luke 14 15-24). It doesn't have the same anger and violence nor does it have anyone being thrown out; the master tells his servants to make sure his house is full.

That's so much more comfortable, we can live with that.

But these verses are still here! and just glossing over them I think would be a copout.

Remember this is a parable and it is disturbing. It is meant to be disturbing. You read this and say, "Wait a minute! How did this person get in if he didn't have any wedding clothes? And why was he thrown out? Does this mean we can get thrown out?"

Well, the answer to the first question, "How did he get into heaven?" is he didn't. Not everything in a parable necessarily lines up with reality. Parables are meant to surprise us or even shock us into grasping important truths. The idea here is if someone could get into the kingdom of God without Jesus, they couldn't stay there.

Let's think for a moment about wedding clothes and the man being speechless. He has nothing he can say in his own defence. When God confronts us with our sin, we are speechless, what can we say? God's light exposes our darkness, and there can be no excuses, no bargaining, no negotiations.

The man with no wedding clothes is a warning and a reminder that not all who seem to come to God truly accept him and want to come on their own terms.

If you think about it references to clothing begin very early in the bible, sewing fig leaves together to cover nakedness (Genesis 3 v7). God making a more durable garment (Genesis 3 v21) Dirty clothing in the Bible is often used as a symbol for sin, whereas clean clothing is a symbol for righteousness.

(See; Isaiah 61:10, 64:6)

Zechariah 3:3-4

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.

The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you."

And so, the wedding clothes in the parable are a symbol of the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. When you come to faith in Christ, God does two things. First, he gives you the perfect righteousness of Jesus, so that when you come before him, he sees Jesus' righteousness instead of your sin. The phrase for this is "imputed righteousness". It's not your righteousness; it's Jesus' righteousness, but God treats you as if it were your own.

Galatians 3:27

those baptized into Christ have "clothed yourselves with Christ".

And then, God not only gives you Jesus' righteousness, but he also begins to make you righteous yourself. The Holy Spirit to help you to grow in righteousness. This is the "imparted righteousness" of Christ.

So, what was wrong with the man who tried to enter the wedding banquet without any wedding clothes? Is it that he thought his own clothes were good enough. He thought he didn't have to change. He thought he didn't need Jesus. He trusted in his own righteousness instead of Jesus' righteousness.

He serves as a warning to examine ourselves to see if we are really in the faith. Are you trusting in Jesus' righteousness or in your own good works? Because only those who put their trust in Jesus will be saved.

Let's look at the final verse, verse 14. This is also tricky.

"For many are invited, but few are chosen."

There are two parts to what Jesus says.

The first part is that many are invited. Scripture tells us all are invited. The gospel call goes out to all.

We read in Revelation 22:17:

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

So, that's the first part: many are invited; easy.

But the second part is this: few are chosen. In other words, the invitation goes out to all, but not everyone who is invited responds, which brings us to the question. Why is that? Why do some people respond while others do not? The Bible tells us that none of us can respond on our own. Jesus says in

John 6:44:

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Remember the guests in the first part of the parable? Jesus said, "They didn't want to come." Their wills were set against it. That is all of us. Our wills are set against God. We don't want to come. And so, when the gospel invitation comes, we make all sorts of excuses. We put our own plans and priorities first. Some of us even get hostile. Our wills are set against God, and so God needs to draw us to himself. Just as none of the original guests in the parable came to the wedding, so none of us can come to Christ unless the Father draws us.

John 6:37:

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

Jesus also says

John 15:16:

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."

Put it all together, and this is what Jesus is saying. No one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him, and everyone who the Father draws will come. We did not choose him, but he chose us. Many are invited, but few are chosen.

How many has God chosen for salvation? The Bible sometimes seems to say only a few will be saved, but then at other times it seems to say a great number will be saved. Comparing the various passages together, probably the best way to understand this is that compared to the many that are invited, only a few are chosen. But those few will still be a great multitude. The wedding hall will be full of guests. There are many who will be saved, many who will bring great glory and honour to Jesus for all of eternity, beginning with the great wedding feast of the Lamb.

So, this is the meaning of the parable. The gospel call goes out to everyone. No one is excluded. There is a paradox here. Whoever will, may come, but no one comes unless the Father draws them. We love God because he first loved us. We did not choose Jesus, but he chose us. No one enters the kingdom without receiving the righteousness that only Jesus can give.

Think about what you are hearing today. Are you being drawn? How are you going to respond? Maybe you need to ask him to open your blind eyes. You need to ask him to overcome your stubborn heart and draw you to Christ so you may be saved.

And if you are saved, it is not because you are somehow better than somebody else or that you had less sin to overcome. You are saved because God chose you. The Bible says God chose you before you were born. In fact, it goes back even further than that. The Bible says God chose you before he created the world.

(Ephesians 1:4)

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight”

This is the doctrine of election (which I am not really going to go into; not enough time); it is not always an easy doctrine to understand, but the Bible teaches it in many places and in many ways. I found this from Charles Spurgeon. He wrote:

“I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love.”

And so, God should get all the glory for our salvation. We could not save ourselves, so God sent Jesus to save us. Our hearts were hardened against God, so God softened our hearts and drew us to himself. We should be humble and grateful. Why did God choose you for salvation? Not because you were better than anyone else, but simply because he loves you. Many are invited, but few are chosen. Give God the glory for your salvation.