**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-110**. **TWO WAYS OF DESPISING GOD'S FEAST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, 2. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, 3. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. 4. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. 6. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; 6. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. 7. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. & Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. 9. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. 10. 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. 11. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: 12. And he saith unto him, Friend, how earnest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. 13. 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. 14. For many are called, but few are chosen."*

*Matthew 22:1-14*

This parable, and the preceding one of the vine-dressers, make a pair. They are closely connected in time, as well as subject. Jesus answered. What? Obviously, the unspoken murderous hate, restrained by fear, which had been raised in the rulersminds, and flashed in their eyes, and moved in their gestures. Christ answers it by repeating His blow; for the present parable is, in outline, identical with the preceding, though differing in colouring, and carrying its thoughts farther. That stopped with the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles; this passes on to speak also of the development among the Gentiles, and ends with the law many called, few chosen, which is exemplified in Jew and Gentile. There are, then, two parts in it: verses 1-9 covering the same ground as the former; verses 10-14 adding new matter.

**I. The judgment on those who refuse the offered joys of the kingdom.**

In the previous parable, the kingdom was presented on the side of duty and service. The call was to render obedience. The vineyard was a sphere for toil. The owner had given it indeed, but, having given, he required. That is only half the truth, and the least joyful half. So this parable dismisses all ideas of work, duty, service, requirement, and instead gives the emblem of a marriage feast as the picture of the kingdom. It therein unites two familiar prophetic images for the Messianic times--those of a festival and of a marriage. As Luther says, He calls it a marriage feast, not a time of toil or a time of sorrow, but a time of holiday and a time of joy; in which we make ourselves fine, sing, play, dance, eat, drink, are glad, and have a good time; else it would not be a wedding feast, if people were to be working, mourning, or crying. Therefore, Christ calls His Christianity and gospel by the name of the highest joy on earth; namely, by the name of a marriage feast. How pathetic this designation of His kingdom is on Christ's lips, when we remember how near His bitter agony He stood, and that He tasted its bitterness already! It is not the whole truth any more than the vineyard emblem is. Both must be united in our idea of the kingdom, as both may be in experience. It is possible to be at once toiling among the vines in the hot sunshine, and feasting at the table. The Christian life is not all grinding at heavy tasks, nor all enjoyment of spiritual refreshment; but our work may be so done as to be our meat--as it was His--and our glad repose may be unbroken even in the midst of toil. We are, at one and the same time, labourers in the king's vineyard, and guests at the king's table; and the same duality will, in some unknown fashion, continue in the perfect kingdom, where there will be both work and feasting, and all the life shall be both in one.

The second point to be noticed is the invitations of the king. There had been an invitation before the point at which the parable begins, for the servants are sent to summon those who had already been called. That calling, which lies beyond the horizon of our parable, is the whole series of agencies in Old Testament times. So this parable begins almost where the former leaves off. They only slightly overlap. The first servants here are Christ Himself, and His followers in their ministry during His life; and the second set are the apostles and preachers of the gospel during the period between the completion of the preparation of the feast (that is, the death of Christ) and the destruction of Jerusalem. The characteristic difference of their message from that of the servants in the former parable, embodies the whole difference between the preaching of the prophets, as messengers demanding the fruit of righteousness, and the glad tidings of a gospel of free grace which does not demand, but offers, and does not say obeyuntil it has said eat, and be glad. The reiterated invitations not only correspond to the actual facts, but, like the facts, set the miracle of God's patience in a still brighter light than the former story did; for while it is wonderful that the lord of the vineyard should stoop to ask so often for fruit, it is far more wonderful that the founder of the feast, who is king too, should stoop to offer over and over again the refused abundance of his table.

Mark, further, the refusal of the invitations: They would not (or "did not wish to") come. That is Christ's gentle way of describing the unbelief of His generation. It is the second set of refusers who are painted in darker colours. We are accustomed to think that the sin of His contemporaries was great beyond parallel, but he seems here to hint that the sin of those who reject Him after the Cross and the Resurrection, is blacker than theirs. At any rate, it clearly is so. But note that the parable speaks as if the refusers were the same persons throughout, thus taking the same point of view as the former one did, and regarding the generations of the Jews as one whole. There is a real unity, though the individuals be different, if the spirit actuating successive generations be the same.

Note the two classes of rejecters. The first simply pay no attention, because their heads are full of business. They do not even speak more or less lame excuses, as the refusers in Luke's similar parable had the decency to do. The king's messenger addresses a group, who pause on their road for a moment, to listen listlessly to what he has to say, and, when he has done, disperse without a word, each man going on his road, as if nothing had happened. The ground of their indifference lies in their absorption with this world's good, and their belief that it is best. His own farm, as the original puts it emphatically, holds one man by the solid delight of possessing acres that he can walk over and till; his merchandise draws another, by the excitement of speculation and the lust of acquiring. It is not only the hurry and fever of a great commercial city, but the quiet and leisure of country life, which shut out taste for God's feast. Strange preference of toil and risk of loss to abundance, repose, and joy! Savages barter gold for glass beads. We choose lives of weary work and hunting after uncertain riches, rather than listen to His call, despising the open-handed housekeeping of our Father's house, and trying to fill our hunger with the swine's husks. The suicidal madness of refusing the kingdom is set in a vivid light in these quiet words.

But stranger still is the conduct of the rest. Why should they kill men whose only fault was bringing them a hospitable invitation? The incongruity of the representation has given offence to some interpreters, who are not slow to point out how Christ could have improved His parable. But the reality is more incongruous still, and the unmotived outburst of wrath against the innocent bearers of a kindly invitation is only too true to life. Mark the distinction drawn by our Lord between the bulk of the people who simply neglected, and the few who violently opposed. He does not charge the guilt on all. The murderers of Him and of His first followers were not the mass of the nation, who, left to themselves, would not have so acted, but the few who stirred up the many. But, though He does not lay the guilt at the doors of all, yet the punishment falls on all, and, when the city is burned, the houses of the negligent and of the slayers are equally consumed; for simple refusal of the message and slaying the messengers were but the positive and superlative degrees of the same crime--rebellion against the king, whose invitation was a command.

The fatal issue is presented, as in the former parable, in two parts: the destruction of the rebels, and the passing over of the kingdom to others. But the differences are noteworthy. Here we read that the king was wroth. Insult to a king is worse than dishonesty to a landlord. The refusal of God's proffered grace is even more certain to awake that awful reality, the wrath of God, than the failure to render the fruits of the good possessed. Love repelled and thrown back on itself cannot but become wrath. That refusal, which is rebellion, is fittingly described as punished by force of arms and the burning of the city. We can scarcely help seeing that our Lord here, in a very striking and unusual way, mingles prose prediction with parabolic imagery. Some commentators object to this, and take the armies and the burning to be only part of the imagery, but it is difficult to believe that. Note the forcible pronouns, His armies, and their city. The terrible Roman legions were His soldiers for the time being, the axe which He laid to the root of the tree. The city had ceased to be His, just as the temple ceased to be My house, and became, by their sin, your house. The legend told that, before their destruction, a mighty voice was heard saying, Let us depart, and, with the sound of rushing wings, His presence left sanctuary and city. When He was no longer the glory in the midst, He was no longer a wall of fire round about, and the Roman torches worked their will on the city which was no longer the city of our God.

The command to gather in others to fill the vacant places follows on the destruction of the city. This may seem to be opposed to the facts of the transference of the kingdom to the Gentiles, which certainly was begun long before Jerusalem fell. But its fall was the final and complete severance of Christianity from Judaism, and not till then had the messengers to give up the summons to Israel as hopeless. Perhaps Paul had this parable floating in his memory when he said to the howling blasphemers at Antioch in Pisidia, Seeing ye ... judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us. They which were bidden were not worthy, and their unworthiness consisted not in any other moral demerit, but solely in this, that they had refused the proffered blessings. That is the only thing which makes any of us unworthy. And that will make the best of us unworthy.

**II. Verses 10-14 carry us beyond the preceding parable, and show us the judgment on the unworthy accepters of the invitation.**

There are two ways of sinning against God's merciful gift: the one is refusing to accept it; the other is taking it in outward seeming, but continuing in sin. The former was the sin of the Jews; the latter is the sin of nominal Christians. We may briefly note the points of this appendix to the parable. The first is the indiscriminate invitation, which is more emphatically marked as being so, by the mention of the badbefore the good among the guests. God's offer is for all, and, in a very real sense, is specially sent to the worst, just as the doctor goes first to the most severely wounded. So the motley crew, without the least attempt at discrimination, are seated at the table. If the Church understands its business, it will have nothing to do in its message with distinctions of character any more than of class, but, if it makes any difference, will give the outcast and disreputable the first place in its efforts. Is that what it does?

The next point is the king's inspection. The word rendered beholdimplies a fixed and minute observation. When does that scrutiny take place? Obviously, from the sequel, the final judgment is referred to, and it is remarkable that here there is no mention of the king's son as the judge. No parable can shadow forth all truth, and though the Father has committed all judgment to the Son, the Son's judgment is the Father's, and the exigencies of the parable required that the son as bridegroom should not be brought into view as judge. Note that there is only one guest without the dress needed. That may be an instance of the lenity of Christ's charity, which hopeth all things; or it may rather be intended to suggest the keenness of the king's glance, which, in all the crowded tables, picks out the one ragged losel who had found his way there--so individual is his knowledge, so impossible for us to hide in the crowd.

Mark that the feast has not begun, though the guests are seated. The judgment stands at the threshold of the heavenly kingdom. The king speaks with a certain coldness, very unlike the welcome fit for a guest; and his question is one of astonishment at the rude boldness of the man who came there, knowing that he had not the proper dress. (That knowledge is implied in the form of the sentence in the Greek.) What, then, is the wedding garment? It can be nothing else than righteousness, moral purity, which fits for sitting at His table in His kingdom. And the man who has it not, is the nominal Christian, who says that he has accepted God's invitation, and lives in sin, not putting off the old man with his deeds, nor putting on the new man, which is created in righteousness. How that garment was to be obtained is no part of this parable. We know that it is only to be received by faith in Jesus Christ, and that if we are to pass the scrutiny of the king, it must be as not having our own righteousness, but His made ours by faith which makes us righteous, and then by all holy effort, and toil in His strength, we must clothe our souls in the dress which befits the banqueting hall; for only they who are washed and clothed in fine linen, clean and white, shall sit there. But Christ's purpose here was not to explain how the robe was to be procured, but to insist that it must be worn.

He was speechless,--or, as the word means, muzzled. The man is self-condemned, and, having nothing to say in extenuation, the solemn promise is pronounced of ejection from the lighted hall, with limbs bound so that he cannot struggle, and consignment to the blackness outside, of which our Lord adds, in words not put into the king's mouth, but which we have heard from Him before, There shall be the [well-known and terrible] weeping and gnashing of teeth--awful though figurative expressions for despair and passion.

Both parts of the parable come under one law, and exemplify one principle of the kingdom, that its invitations extend more widely than the real possession of its gifts. The unbelieving Jew, in one direction, and the unrighteous Christian in another, are instances of this.

This is not the place to discuss that wide and well-worn question of the ground of God's choice. That does not enter into the scope of the parable. For it, the choice is proved by the actual participation in the feast. They who do not choose to receive the invitation, or to put on the wedding garment, do, in different ways, show that they are not chosenthough called. The lesson is, not of interminable and insoluble questionings about God's secrets, but of earnest heed to His gracious call, and earnest, believing effort to make the fair garment our very own, if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.