**WESTMINSTER BIBLE SCHOOL; THE PARABLES AND METAPHORS OF OUR LORD - THE TEACHING OF G. CAMPBELL MORGAN**

**23. THE MARRIAGE FEAST**

*"Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, who made a wedding feast for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner. My cattle and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding feast!" ' But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise, and the rest grabbed his servants, and treated them shamefully, and killed them. When the king heard that, he was angry, and sent his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burnt their city. "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited weren't worthy. Go therefore to the intersections of the highways, and as many as you may find, invite to the wedding feast.' Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who didn't have on wedding clothing, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding clothing?' He was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and throw him into the outer darkness. That is where the weeping and grinding of teeth will be.' For many are called, but few chosen."*

*Matthew 22:1-14*

THERE is an intimate connection between the forty-third verse in the previous chapter, and this parable. That verse read, "The Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." This chapter begins, "And Jesus answered and spake again in parables unto them, saying, The Kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, which made a marriage feast." The linking of those two verses help us to see the immediate significance of what our Lord was saying, and to discover the fact that it had a wide application, wider perhaps than we have been accustomed to think.

This chapter begins in a strange and arresting way. It says, "Jesus answered." Answered what? No question had been asked Him. There is no account of anything that had been said immediately to Him. Yet Matthew, going straight on with his account, says, "And Jesus answered." Again we go back and look at the verses at the close of the previous chapter. The forty-fourth verse reads, "And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust. And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He spake of them. And when they sought to lay hold on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet. And Jesus answered," that is, He answered their attitude, answered the question in their minds, which had now become a conviction, perhaps suddenly and startlingly so.

Our Lord had spoken the two parables of the sons and of the vine-yard; and they had expressed their opinion upon the stories He had told them; and by so doing they had found a verdict against themselves, and passed sentence upon themselves. Then they suddenly awoke to the fact of what they were doing, and their anger was stirred, and they would have liked to kill Him. And the Lord answered. It was the result of their frame of mind. It was an answer to this mental attitude of those who were His enemies, of those rulers whom He had now come to Jerusalem thus to condemn.

These were the final days in the life of our Lord on earth, and these parables all move in that realm. On this third day, He was there in the Temple as the great Prophet of God, the King, and Prophet, dealing with the nation in august majesty and dignity. The two parables we have considered had dealt with responsibility. Now He gave them a parable which dealt with privilege. In the former two parables, labourers were in view, and the vineyard was the background. Now guests are in view, and the background is a marriage feast. In the former, two commandments were laid upon men to fulfil obligations. In this, an invitation is offered to men to accept hospitality. So there is that difference between this parable and the two former, though they are all linked together.

As He had been dealing by parabolic illustration with the fulfilment of the responsibility of the rulers, and consequently of the nation, He now gave to these selfsame rulers a parable which dealt with the refused invitation, which had come through His ministry. Still further, glancing at the whole of these fourteen verses, we see their structure. The parable He now uttered was, in a remarkable way, predictive. He was looking over the whole fact of His own ministry, to the ministry of His servants that should follow to the end of the age. That is clearly seen if we study this carefully. Three invitations are offered. The marriage feast is in the background, to which men are asked, but there are three distinct invitations.

The account of the first invitation is in verses two and three. The call was given, and those invited would not come. In the second invitation (four to seven) the call is renewed, and we have the response of indifference and hostility. Then the third invitation, commencing, "Then saith He to the servants," runs to the end of the parable. Our Lord was referring to three events, resulting from His own mission.

The first was that of His own mission. The second referred to His mission as it would be carried on by His servants, and that ended with judgment and the destruction of the city, a literal prediction of what happened a generation after, when Jerusalem was destroyed. The third invitation applied to the period from the destruction of Jerusalem to the consummation of the age in which we are now living.

If we apply this parable in detail, this first section has no application to us now, save as we look back and learn from what happened. The second section also has no application to us, except as we watch and see what happened. But we are living in the third section, and our responsibility is revealed in that part of the parable. The first invitation was the call that had already been given, in the ministry of Jesus. The second invitation was the call which was repeated by His servants, from the time of His death to the destruction of the city. The third began when He sent out no longer to them that were bidden, but into the highways and byways, that all might be called in. There is perspective in this parable, and in that sense it is distinctly predictive.

Glance at the three sections. "The Kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, which made a marriage feast for his son." The marriage feast is a figure of speech, and here our Lord was using an Eastern picture. We need not go into any details. We are not concerned with them, save as we remember that the figure was borrowed from the Old Testament ideal of God's relationship with man. The Old Testament symbolism was often strange and wonderful. Hosea, speaking the words of God to the people, had said, "I will betroth thee unto Me forever." Our Lord now took that symbolism of the betrothal and marriage when illustrating the Kingdom of heaven.

In what sense can that be said to illustrate the Kingdom of heaven? We have seen in the previous parables how they had failed to fulfil responsibility, and that judgment would follow later. Now our Lord turned definitely from responsibility to privilege. The Kingdom of heaven which He had come to proclaim, and to be proclaimed, and which He is still continuing to proclaim, He likened it to a marriage feast, something characterised by all joy, gladness, and merriment. So the Kingdom of heaven.

This Gospel of Matthew is peculiarly the Gospel of the King. Jesus is seen therein as King. When He first came to His work, He enunciated the laws of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount. After that He gave an exhibition of the benefits of His Kingship and the Kingdom of God in the wonders He wrought (chapter 8 - 9:35). In those chapters we see Him moving in every realm of human dereliction, material, mental, moral; healing the sick, casting out demons, forgiving sin-sick souls. First the laws of the Kingdom and then its benefits. From that point we see Him constantly enforcing the claims of the Kingship of God. Keeping that in mind, then imagine a community wholly and absolutely yielded to those laws, and sharing in the benefits of the power of that Kingdom, because themselves obedient to the claims of the King, seeking first the Kingdom of God. Imagine that community, what have we? The best answer is to let Paul speak. "The Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking." What is it? "Righteousness, joy, peace." Those are the issues of the Kingship of God, when it is recognized and yielded to. The Kingdom of God is not a place of sombre gravity and dread solemnity. It is that, but it is infinitely more. It is the place first of righteousness, then of joy, and of peace. Like the marriage feast, it is filled with gladness and song; to use a word the father used when the prodigal came home - merriment. The privileges He offered men were all there in the Kingdom of heaven. He had been revealing that Kingdom, calling men into it. The king sent his servants to call to the feast with the son.

What happened? They would not come. Here our Lord declared the national response. Of course individuals were answering the invitation. There were those within the nation who had heard, who had seen the joy and blessedness; the righteousness, joy, and peace of the Kingdom, and had yielded to it so far as the light had come; that little band of disciples, and the larger band seen in the upper room later, and the five hundred brethren at once to whom our Lord appeared in Galilee. There was the elect remnant of the nation. But He was dealing with the nation and their rulers, and with the national outlook, and response as revealed through those rulers. They would not come. So our Lord here declared, on the human level, the failure of His own mission. He, the Son, had come to bring men into that marriage feast, the marriage of men with God, that issues in righteousness, joy, and peace; and they had refused it. "They would not come."

"Again." There is tremendous force in that word. Following through the historic sequence, we know what they did with the Son. We saw that in the previous parable. "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance." He knew He was on His way to that death. The Son Himself was cast out, and cast out to death. But there was no failure from the Divine standpoint. The failure was of the nation to accept the invitation to enter into the glad joy and peace and merriment of the Kingdom of God.

Again, beyond His rejection, He sent forth other servants. The apostolic age began, the preachers went forth everywhere, as Mark says. We know all the story. They were still to go to them that were bidden, to the people who had rejected Him; even to the rulers who had rejected Him, the privileged, bidden people; and they were to say, "Behold, I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come to the marriage feast." Here is an account of the sending out of invitations to come into all the blessedness of the Kingdom again, after the first apparent failure. We see them going, and as we watch them, they are going with the same message. Notice the simplicity, and yet the sublimity of it. What were they to say? "All things are ready," "Killed," is a figure of speech here, which meant that God had done everything to provide for the joy, peace, and gladness of humanity in the proclamation of His Kingdom. He had done everything. By the time when these went out, the Cross was accomplished, and the hatred of men was transmuted by His grace into something that provided for that very righteousness, joy, and peace. " All things are now ready."

Go back again to those that were bidden. Go even to those who would not come in the days of My own ministry, as though the Lord had said, Give them another opportunity. Go to them that were bidden. Tell them that all things are ready, that everything is done to create the joy, happiness, gladness, singing, and rapture of My Kingdom; and bid them come.

What was the response? Again we necessarily go back to the centre of things where Jesus exercised His ministry. Our Lord said that the invitation would be treated with indifference by each one. "They made light of it, and went their ways." Mark the process, "one to his own farm, another to his merchandise"; and then by definite rebellion. Then the ill-treatment of the messengers, and their beating and casting out. All that happened in that earlier apostolic age. Jesus clearly revealed what the result would be of the second refusal by those who were bidden.

Then "the king was wroth, and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." That happened a generation afterward. As the Lord God Almighty in the past had girded Cyrus for the carrying out of the punitive action against His own people, so surely He girded the Roman armies, under Titus, as they swept upon the city that for the second time had rejected the call; first the actual call of Jesus, and secondly the call of Jesus by the Holy Spirit, through the messengers. The King was standing there, talking to these rulers, and He clearly saw the things that were about to happen.

What then? "Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy"; because they were blind, they did not see; and they were evil and self-centred, turning everyone to his own way, and ill-treating the very messengers of the king because they were blind to the meaning.

What is to be done now? "Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways." - a great phrase that, "the partings of the highways." The words were uttered by our Lord in that Roman world, celebrated for its highways. Perhaps nothing more remarkable was done by that Roman empire than the building of those highways. We have them still here in Britain. They beat out from Rome over all the known world, and along them Roman cohorts passed, and Greek merchant-men travelled. They were the great media of travel throughout the known world. Therefore go there to the partings of the highways. Overleap the boundaries which are merely geographical. Those who were bidden, who had the privileges of nationality, and who lived in the land where My ministry was conducted, are not worthy. Their city will be destroyed. It will be burned with fire. Then the larger invitation will begin. Go to the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. When the bidden were demonstrated unworthy, then the invitation to the marriage feast, to the benefits and beneficences of the Kingdom of God, were offered to all men. Go where the highways part, where they divide. Stand where the crowds will press and throng and cross each other; and into those highways pass, calling men everywhere. to this great Kingdom.

Moreover He said, "Those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was filled with guests." That does not mean that there was to be no further reference to moral conduct or standing in the Kingdom. But if men in the highways have no character, no moral standing, if they are bad, call them in. If they are good, by the standards of the world, true to the light in them, and in that way they are good, call them in, good and bad. The servants brought them in, guests of the King, admitted to all the great privileges of the Kingdom of God.

That solemn word of Jesus at the end shows how true it is that there is moral discrimination in the Kingdom, notwithstanding the use of the word "bad" there. We must interpret that by this. "When the king cometh in to behold the guests," to inspect them, "he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment, and he saith to him, Comrade, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" A man had found his way in, but he lacked the true insignia of relationship. He was violating the true order of that Kingdom. This man has been described in modern parlance as a gate-crasher. It is a very suggestive description. Yes, he had gone in, and the fact he had not on a wedding garment showed indifference, carelessness, or objection. He was not of that company. He had not a wedding garment.

Matthew says, The King "saw there a man which had *not* on a wedding garment." Then he said, "Friend, how camest thou in hither *not* having a wedding garment?" The little word not appeared twice over, but it is not the same word on those two occasions. The first word, *Ou* simply marks a fact; he had not it on. But when the king asked him the reason, Jesus used a slightly different word for "not", *Me*, which suggested not merely the fact that he lacked the wedding garment, but that he did so definitely, of his own thought, and will, and intention. When the man came in not having a wedding garment, and the king talked to him, he said, It is not only a fact that you have not a wedding garment; you did not intend having one. Your "not" is the *not* of definite willing. You are determined *not* to have it on. Your presence in here is the supreme sign of your rebellion against the order set up, of which this marriage feast is the great symbol. "And he was speechless"; he had nothing to say.

Then follows the terrible sentence. "Cast him out into the outer darkness," where there shall be sorrow and rebellion; "there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth." This was His revelation. That is the continuity of sin. "Cast him out into the outer darkness."

The Kingdom of God has its responsibilities. They rest upon all of us who profess to belong to that Kingdom. The vineyard and the two sons revealed to us our responsibilities. This picture shows us all the glory and beauty of the Kingdom, resulting from its presentation by our Lord Christ.

We ask, How does this apply to us as to responsibility? The fruit of the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom of heaven, I do not want to waste time discussing the difference between those terms. There is no difference, except that the Kingdom of heaven - a phrase Matthew mostly used, and used as employed by Jesus - expresses the result. The Kingdom of heaven is the realization of the Kingship of God. We are praying that His Kingdom may come on earth as it is in heaven. When the prayer is answered, we have the Kingdom of heaven. The measure in which it is answered in our life, in the community of souls loyal to Him, that is the Kingship of God. The Kingdom does not merely mark a territory, but it marks the fact of authority, and the exercise of it; the Kingdom of God sought, yielded to, realized. Then look abroad, and the result is the Kingdom of heaven. Are we realizing it?

That drives us back to another question. How far are we really submitted to the Kingdom of God? If we are, we know what it is to live in the Kingdom of heaven, righteousness the foundation, joy the result, and quiet peace the issue. It is the marriage feast, The bells are always ringing, and the music always sounding.

But there is a stern necessity for the wedding garment. The call is to all, but there must be the wedding garment. Jesus ended with that strange and wonderful word in connection with this parable, "Many are called, but few chosen." Many years ago, at a great meeting in London, Moody was speaking on this parable. Sitting on the platform by him was one of the great scholars of the Church, and a theologian, a mighty man. When Moody got to that point in his address, "Many are called, but few are chosen," he stopped, and said, "Hold on, what does chosen mean?" He turned to Dr. L., this scholar, and said, "I would like to read it like this, Many are called, but few are choice." Dr. L. said, "You are quite right, Mr. Moody, that is the whole intention of it." It is good to have such an authority. Jesus did not say, I am calling people, and choosing some, who are the chosen ones, those who accept the call. Those who do not accept, will return to their own imaginings and their own affairs. Those who obey, and fulfil the responsibility of the vineyard, and accept the invitation, will go in as guests in the festive house of God, to the feast which He has spread in His great Kingdom. Many are called, but few are chosen, choice in that sense.

This is a great vision, sweeping over the centuries. Our Lord saw the Kingdom not only as a vineyard, having to be cultivated, but as a feast, a marriage of merriment, and of peace.