

Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:15-24

In Matthew, the context of the parable is judgement; the previous parable is the Parable of the Wicked Vine-dressers, Matthew: 21:33-45. In Luke, the context is wedding etiquette; the previous verses were about the self-important wedding guest and tips on wedding guest lists, Luke 14:7-14. The emphasis on these two accounts of this parable differ accordingly.

Let's read Matthew 22:1-14. It starts off with the kingdom of heaven. What is the kingdom of heaven? Is it a place? Where is it? How do we get there? Note that in all translations, the k and the h are lower case, which indicates that it's not a place like say, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for instance. The kingdom of heaven, aka the kingdom of God, is a concept, being the rule of God in your life. To be a part of that kingdom requires repentance, Matthew 4:17. It also requires rebirth, John 3:3 and righteousness, 1 Corinthians 6:9. Jesus tells me, the kingdom of heaven is within me, Luke 17-21. This is what's unique about Christianity; there's no central temple or holy place or city. No, that's all within us, 1 Corinthians 6:19.

The introduction to this story is a king (representing God) planning a celebratory feast. What's the celebration? The wedding of His son (representing Jesus). The king sends out invitations to those that were bidden. Now, who might they be in this parable?

Now we have the king, the groom and the invited wedding guests, but what about the bride? Where is the bride in this story? Jeremiah 3:14, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:7.

The king hits a problem; the invited guests and dignitaries all snub him. Can you imagine how the king felt when the news was broken to him that none of the guests were coming? This was an important state occasion. Nobody was coming to this long planned, extravagant celebration and feast. What emotions were going through him?

The king decides he's going to give it another try, only this time he's going to send more pushy and persuasive servants to deliver his invitations telling the invitees about the big slap up meal that awaits them. Yet still, the servants returned with a big no accompanied with lame excuses, some servants returned with injuries from violence and others never made it back at all. Let's look at some of these excuses in Luke 14:18-20 -

18. I have bought some land.

19. I've bought 5 oxen.

20. I've just got married.

Can we suggest some modern-day equivalent excuses for rejecting Jesus's salvation?

Revert back to Matthew for the King's response - But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Matthew 22:7 NKJV

It goes without saying the invites are all withdrawn. But then, the king takes drastic steps to ensure his son's wedding is fully attended by telling the servants to -

Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. Matthew 22:9-10 NKJV

Let's keep in touch with the meaning or the lesson behind the parable; what's the meaning behind, 'both good and bad?' Spot the differences between the first guest list and the second.

Then in Matthew's account we read,

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ “For many are called, but few are chosen.” Matthew 22:11-14 NKJV

In the context of this parable, what is a 'wedding garment'? Zechariah 3:4-5. This invitation to the riff-raff (the Gentiles) is, come as you are, but you don't stay that way, you still need to get changed. We need to put on righteousness to party in the wedding feast. Notice that the king doesn't instantly call in the bouncers because he's spotted a breach of the dress code. No, he challenges the offender -

So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ The correct answer was, 'I'm so sorry, let me go and get changed.' But no, this guy claims the fifth amendment, he's speechless. Then the king calls in the bouncers and the offender is tied up and thrown out. Jesus gives us a brief insight into what it's like outside of the wedding feast -

.... and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

In Matthew, this parable was aimed at both Jews and Gentiles. To the Jew, Jesus acknowledged that they were 'dignitaries', God's chosen race; but He was giving them a wake-up call, that that's not a shoe in to heaven. Matthew 3:9. To the Gentiles Jesus was saying, you can become dignitaries too, but you need to change. This parable squashes the notion that; God is so loving, He couldn't bear to see anyone go to Hell - Heaven is for everyone. That's the doctrine of universalism, God is a fluffy God. Would you want to go to a heaven that was full of thieves, murderers, psychopaths, rapists, drug dealers and paedophiles and chat with the likes of Herod, Stalin, Hitler and Pol Pot?

In Luke's account, the reserve wedding list comprises of, those in, 'the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' He's telling the self-important that the Gospel is for those in the words of Isaiah -

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; Isaiah 61:1 NKJV and not the Jewish dignitaries.

In the following verses, Luke goes on to talk about the cost of discipleship.

One parable; two different lessons behind it. Possibly, it was two parables rather than one with two different audiences.

What lessons can we draw from this parable?

Gentiles are on God's reserve list, the Jews are His preferred 'guests'. We should feel the same way about the Jews and pray for Israel. 1 Samuel 12:22.

Let's not repeat the mistakes of the unbelieving Jews.

Make sure that having entered the kingdom of God, we dress appropriately and not try to merge our previous life with our new life in Christ.