

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the wedding banquet** in Matthew 22:1-14. This is a parable concerning THE CONDITIONS FOR ENTERING GOD'S KINGDOM.

(S) Let me read Matthew 22:1-14. "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 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.' But they paid no attention and went off - one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. 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.'" "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

This parable is full of significance and its three parts could even be viewed as *three parables rolled into one*. Let us take turns to explain the true-to-life elements of the story of this parable.

The first part of the story is about the rejection of the king's invitations. A king planned a wedding banquet for his son. Three times the king extended his invitation to his guests. Firstly, he invited them to the wedding banquet. Secondly, he called those invited to come to the wedding banquet. Thirdly, he sent to say to them that everything was ready and that they must come to the wedding banquet. Among the Jews it was not unusual to send out a general invitation first and later to call those who had been invited to come to the wedding banquet. In those days, the rejection of the king's invitation was regarded as unacceptable and was severely punished. Therefore, Jesus says, "The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."

(S) The second part of the story is about the filling of the wedding hall. The king did not regard the original invited guests as worthy of any further special attention. But he was determined to have a good wedding feast for his son. So he sent his servants to all the possible places where people passed by in order to invite to the banquet anyone they could find. The wedding hall filled with people. *The king's plan would not and could not fail.*

(T) The third part of the story is about the person not wearing wedding clothes. When the king came to view his guests, he noticed one man who did not have wedding clothes on. There is historical evidence that even in post-biblical times in the Near-East a person who wished to enter a king's presence was required to wear a robe sent to him by the king. In this parable, the king expected each wedding guest to wear the wedding robe that he provided! The man without a wedding robe had no excuse for not wearing it! The king ordered that this man be thrown outside into the darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(S) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

The context of the parable may consist of *the setting* and *the explanation or application* of the parable.

The setting of this parable is found in Matthew chapters 21 and 22, during Jesus' last week before his crucifixion. Jesus had entered Jerusalem and the crowds had welcomed him as the coming Messiah. He had cleansed the temple from all the merchants, who probably paid money to the priests to be allowed to sell their goods in the temple! In the temple, he had healed the blind and the lame and the children shouted that he was the coming Messiah. Only the chief priests and the teachers of the Jewish law did not welcome Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, in the temple or in their hearts. After cursing the barren fig tree and facing the questioning of his authority by the chief priests and elders of Israel, Jesus told three parables: the parable of the two sons, the parable of the wicked tenants and the parable of the wedding banquet. It is therefore clear that the setting of the parable of the wedding banquet is *the bad attitude and opposition of the religious and political leaders of Israel against Jesus Christ*. They and their followers rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah, they regarded his miracles of healing as the work of Satan, and they rejected him as a preacher and teacher of the gospel of the kingdom. And at that time they had already plotted to kill him!

(T) The story of this parable is contained in Matthew 22:2-13.

The explanation or application of this parable is contained in Matthew 22:14, which says, "For many are invited, but few are chosen." Although the gospel is preached far and wide and reaches very many people, still most people will be like the man in the parable: they hear but do not believe or obey.

(S) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to describe which of the details of this parable are relevant:

Whenever Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is like ..." he wants to teach what will happen when the reign of God in its final phase is unfolded at the second coming of Jesus Christ. On the final judgement day, events described in the parables will certainly take place. This means that people living today are also included in the events described in the parables! Each parable of Jesus Christ has a message for you and me today!!!

(T) The wedding banquet represents the great blessings of the kingdom of God in its final phase at the second coming of Jesus Christ. It is a picture of the joy of living in the new heaven and new earth, where the reign of God in Christ will be exuberantly acknowledged by everyone there. The blessings are symbolised by the picture of guests reclining together on couches at tables loaded with food, and where there is joyous communication with each other and with the host in a spacious banquet hall flooded with light.

(S) It is not certain if the son represents Christ. The parable does not say and one would have expected the son to play a more significant role in this story if he represented Christ. More likely is that the mentioning of the king and his son intends to emphasise the fact that this was a very important banquet, a royal banquet.

(T) The three invitations are relevant. As we have seen, the context of the parable of the wedding banquet was the bad attitude and opposition of people in Israel against Jesus Christ. Therefore, the king's original invitation strongly suggests God's calling of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants and to a certain extent of Moses. Nobody rejected this invitation. The people who were invited represent God's old covenant people, Israel.

The king's second invitation through the first group of *servants* naturally suggests God's speaking to Israel again and again through the Old Testament prophets like Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the other prophets, just as in Matthew 21:34-35.

The king's third invitation through the second group of *servants* naturally suggests God's speaking to Israel through John the Baptist, Jesus himself, the disciples of Jesus and later Stephen and Paul. These repeated invitations to the wedding banquet emphasises God's great love and immense patience with both the nation of Israel and later with the Gentile nations.

(S) The king represents God, who first calls and then invites those who have been previously called. The fact that the king sent three invitations to the first group of people shows his enormous *patience* towards wicked people. These invitations represent God's invitations throughout the Old Testament period to his old covenant people, Israel, right up to the time of the first coming of Jesus Christ. They represent *the enormous patience God had with Israel*. This detail is relevant.

(T) The response of the invited, namely that they paid no attention to the king's invitation, is relevant. In the context of the parable, it represents Israel's attitude of indifference and active hostility against Jesus Christ and his invitation to God's kingdom. The people of Israel were more interested in earthly, material matters like agriculture and commerce than in heavenly, spiritual matters like salvation. The fact that they mistreated and killed the king's servants is relevant. It represents Israel's treatment of the Old Testament prophets, just as in Matthew 21:35-36. This attitude of indifference and hostility towards Jesus Christ, whether it is of Jews or non-Jews, will also be the reason why all unbelievers will be punished at Christ's second coming.

(S) The punishment of the rejecters is relevant. The king concluded that the original invited guests did not deserve the honour. The destruction of those murderers and the burning of their city by the king's soldiers are relevant details. These events were literally fulfilled. In 70 A.D. the Roman general, Titus, captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and much of Jerusalem, and killed more than one million Jews, so that Israel stopped to exist as a political unit. Nevertheless, all Jews that responded and entered the wedding banquet were saved.

(T) The invitation of anyone who cared to listen is relevant. It shows the king's *perseverance* with regard to fulfilling his purpose to have a wedding banquet. These invitations represent God's invitations to the despised people in Israel, like the tax collectors and sinners and to the Gentiles, who were also despised in the eyes of Israel's religious and political leaders. Since the first coming of Jesus, the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins has been preached to all the nations in the world. The king persevered until his wedding hall was absolutely filled with people! The king was

determined that his plan could not and would not fail! Also this detail is very relevant. It represents *God's determination that his purpose and plan to save many from the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations cannot and will not fail!*

(S) The filling of the wedding hall with good and bad people is relevant. Since the first coming of Jesus Christ, the gospel of salvation has been preached to everyone in the world, regardless of their race, nationality, sex or social standing. From then on, no single ethnic nation in the world has any special standing before God anymore, as Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11 clearly teaches. Many Jews and many Gentiles were brought into God's kingdom. But these people were not all genuine believers. As also the parable of the weeds among the wheat and the parable of the dragnet teach, the gospel of the kingdom continually catches people, both good and bad people. The *good* and the *bad* may be *as people are viewed by purely human standards*. In the eyes of the people in the world, they may be very respectable or they may be thieves, prostitutes, tax-collectors and murderers. Or the *good* and the *bad* may be *as God views people, being with or without wedding clothes*. Christians as well as name-Christians, who claim to have a share in the kingdom, live together in the kingdom in its present manifestation until the second coming of Christ. At the end of the age, that is, at the great harvest at the final judgement, Jesus Christ and his angels will separate the wicked from the righteous, that is, separate the nominal Christians from the genuine Christians!

(T) The wearing of wedding clothes is relevant. Although in the parable there is no mention of offering a wedding robe to the entering guests, there is enough evidence that this was the practice in those days. Guests from the underprivileged people did not themselves have such a wedding robe and could not have obtained it in any other way. The king expected each guest to wear such a wedding robe at the royal wedding. The man without a wedding robe was not able to offer any excuse for not wearing one.

The Bible has some significant passages about the figurative meaning of clothes. For example, in Ephesians 4:24 the wedding robe represents *the righteousness and holiness* that Christ earned and gives to believers. Finally, the king himself ordered the man without a wedding robe to be punished severely. Thus, the wearing of a wedding robe is an essential detail in the parable. It represents *God's condition for entering his kingdom*.

(S) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

The parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew 22:1-14 teaches about *the conditions for entering God's kingdom*. The main message of the parable is the following. "People must respond to God's invitation to enter into his kingdom. And they must enter God's kingdom, not on their own personal terms, but on God's terms!" Every person is exhorted to accept God's gracious invitation, lest while others enter into glory, he be lost. But he must remember that membership of the visible church does not guarantee his membership of God's kingdom, that is, it does not guarantee his salvation. Conducting certain religious ceremonies or doing good works is not the condition for entering God's kingdom. What is really needed for salvation is putting on Jesus Christ, which results in both justification and sanctification, that is, in complete renewal.

(T) *Entering God's kingdom on God's conditions* is a fundamental characteristic of God's kingdom. The people of God's kingdom have given up their own conditions like keeping the law, doing good works, following the national self-styled religion or depending on a good personality. The people of God's kingdom have submitted to the condition of the God of the Bible, that is, they have clothed themselves with Jesus Christ, not only in order to enter God's kingdom, but also to live in God's kingdom.

(S) **POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLE WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES.**

Some Bible passages have helped me to understand the meaning of the wedding clothes: We have evidence that in biblical times it was the custom to wear wedding clothes to a royal banquet. 2 Kings 10:18-22 relates that king Jehu organised a great assembly for the servants of Baal and ordered the keeper of the wardrobe to bring *robes* for all these servants to wear.

Revelation 19:7-8 shows *the bride* at the wedding of the Lamb after the second coming of Christ. She represents all the genuine Christians and has made herself ready. She was given fine, bright and clean linen to wear. Most of the guests who attended this wedding banquet were drawn from the underprivileged ranks in society and did not own such a robe. Nevertheless, the king expected each guest to wear a wedding robe. Therefore, the man who was not wearing a wedding robe *had refused to wear the wedding robe that the king offered to him*. He had no excuse and was severely punished!

(T) The wedding robe cannot signify our moral goodness or good works as a prerequisite or condition for salvation, because according to Isaiah 64:6, our human righteous acts are like *filthy rags* in the eyes of God. The people wearing a wedding robe probably signify "those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb", Jesus Christ (Rev 7:14), "those who have put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:24), that is, "those who have put on Jesus Christ", as Romans 13:14 and Galatians

3:27 teach. The wedding robe signifies *putting on the righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 5:21). It signifies being made righteous by grace through faith, which results in a life of living righteous. In short, it signifies complete renewal! *The wedding robe signifies God's righteousness, which is imputed and imparted. The wedding robe is the symbol that God regards and treats those who believe in Jesus Christ as righteous and gives them his righteousness so that they may live a righteous life!*

**(S) POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.**

The conditions for entering God's kingdom is determined only by the God of the Bible. He invites people to enter his kingdom. He urges them patiently and persistently to enter his kingdom. People must respond to God's invitation to enter into his kingdom. If they fail to respond, they will be lost forever. And when they enter God's kingdom, they must enter God's kingdom, not on their own personal terms, but on God's terms! In all the other religions in the world, people try to save themselves on the basis of human terms or man-made rules and conditions, like good works, a moral life, or by religious observations required by other prophets or religious leaders. God's conditions or terms of entering his kingdom is that each invited person must wear the wedding robe, which represents *the righteousness, which God imputes and imparts by grace to all those who believe in Jesus Christ*. There is no other way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)!

**(T) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parables of the two sons and the barren fig tree. As preparation, please read Matthew 21:28-32 and Luke 13:47-50.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom and [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net).

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".