
The Wedding Banquet

SCOTT HOEZEE

The closer Jesus got to the end of his life, the more edgy his parables got. Indeed, many of the last parables Jesus told in a gospel like Matthew were what we often call parables of judgment, and they could really be stinging. As Jesus prepared to fulfill all righteousness by dying for our sins on the cross and fully inaugurating his kingdom, he had to make it clear that that kingdom would become the ultimate dividing line. You were in or you were out. And much of the time, if you were out it was because you were willfully blind to the things of God. Today on *Groundwork*, we consider the parable of the wedding banquet. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, here is program number five in our seven-part series on some of the parables. Jesus told about thirty-six...it depends how you count them. We can only look at seven in this series, but we have tried to take samples from some of the various categories. We had two parables of the kingdom, two parables of grace, now we are going to have two parables of judgment, and conclude with kind of a catchall parable, the parable of the good Samaritan.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, we have plenty more if we ever want to come back...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And do parables two or parables three. This wonderful idea of grace...it so warms our hearts to see God, who lavishes his love without regard to our deserving it. Supremely, the parable of the prodigal son, where this boy, who has gone off and offended his father and wasted everything, now is welcomed back with open arms and God throws a party.

Interestingly, there is another party in today's parable, but it has a little bit different take to it, or tone to it. I do think it is worth pointing out before we get into that, that one of the commonest images for heaven, or for the kingdom of God, is not, you know, sitting on the clouds or strumming harps or doing nothing. One of the most common images is a party...

SCOTT HOEZEE

A party, yes.

DAVE BAST

Which is great; it is something to look forward to.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the prophets Isaiah and so forth predicted it. They often depict it as a great feast—a great banquet—where all the best of food and drink flow very freely. The thing is, though, as you were saying, Dave, we all love grace; we all love the parable of prodigal son and the grace that was lavished on this undeserving boy and so forth; but of course, the flip side is that if people resist grace, or if they don't believe in Jesus, or just don't accept that he is the one who tells us the true things of God, well then we have to face the prospect of judgment, which nobody likes...nobody enjoys; and in fact, as we have noted in other programs in the past, Dave, even in some parts of the Church today we really do not want to talk about hell. We really do not want to talk about judgment. We just assume that is kind of a downer. It is a turnoff. When guests come to your church if they hear that they are not going to come back, so we will talk about happy things and smile a lot; but you know, Dave, in the New Testament nobody mentions judgment and nobody mentions hell or hades as much as Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; and he could do it. He could pull it off. I think we struggle with it sometimes because it is hard not to sound self righteous or condemnatory of people, and who are we to condemn. I think of a line from the great evangelist, D. L. Moody of the 19th Century, who said once that nobody should ever talk about hell without tears in their voice...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

Tears in their voice. So, you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and we are going to think about that, too, in this program.

DAVE BAST

Yes; this is serious, and we don't say this out of some position of pleasure, anger, or hatred against people; so it is hard to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and of course, we also should make clear that judgment was not Jesus' primary message. He did mostly talk about the love and the grace and the compassion of God. Actually, when he is tempted to talk about judgment, it was not when he was faced with the sinners of the world, but his own people: The Pharisees, the religious leaders. They are the ones who upset Jesus because they kept drawing the boundary lines of God's kingdom ever narrower and narrower until it was finally just people like them, and they had no room for the prodigal sons; they had no desire to go find that one lost sheep out of a hundred...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or look for that one coin out of ten. They had no interest in that. It was a members-only religious club; they were in it, and so please don't bother us; which is part of why they also could not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and that rejection of Israel—of God's true Messiah—is what is behind this parable in Matthew 22.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; so, let's get right to it. It is Matthew 22, the beginning of the chapter. We will start with the first verse:

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴Then 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.’ ⁵But they paid no attention, and went off, one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes, ¹²and he asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. ¹³The 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.’ ¹⁴For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

DAVE BAST

Yes, there is an interesting tagline. I think the first thing to say about this parable is it has some similarities with other parables Jesus told. There is one in Luke 14, which is also set in a wedding banquet...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, you might remember some of the details of that, or mix them up a little bit. This has some elements in it that we are not as used to, I think; and it is tempting to read it allegorically, which is always a tricky thing when it comes to parables.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; in an allegory, you take every person, character and event in the parable and you try to make a one-to-one correlation with somebody in real life; that would be an allegory. Parables really are not allegories. You can get into trouble with certain parables if you only treat them that way; however, clearly there are some allegorical elements here. God is the king throwing the banquet for his Son, who is clearly Jesus; and those who were invited but refused to come are the Jews; the people of Jesus’ own day; his own people—his own brothers and sisters in Israel. They are the ones who were invited. They were told long ago: The Messiah is coming; and now they are being told: He is here; and they don’t buy it. They don’t believe it, and they say: Yeah, right; I’ve got a few other things to tend to, so don’t bother me; and they won’t come in; and so, others will take their place.

DAVE BAST

So, these insiders are really the focus here of this story, and their reaction, and they don’t come off very well; and we really want to explore that a little bit further. Why is that the case? What is Jesus getting at? There are definitely some elements of allegory here, where things stand for other things. We will dig deeper into it in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. So Scott, we just read the parable of the wedding banquet from Matthew 22—that version of it—and we said that some of these details are symbolic; so clearly God is the king, Jesus is the Son. The banquet is his wedding feast. It is all about his people being gathered to himself, celebrating forever and ever; but the original invited guests was Old Testament Israel; the Jewish people; and again, that comes through in a little detail, where the story says that they mistreated some of the servants God sent to invite them; and some of them they even killed; and you think of the other evidence from Jesus' teaching in the New Testament about how Israel mistreated the prophets...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So often; many...Jeremiah and others who had really hard lives because they were rejected...their message was rejected.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and Jesus said in at least one other parable where that same imagery is used, referring to the prophets, and maybe even John the Baptist, who was, you know, rejected by the scribes and the Pharisees as well. He was killed by Herod, not by the Jewish leaders, but nevertheless, that is the symbolism.

So in the ancient world...to get back to the imagery of the parable...in the ancient world, wedding invitations or banquet invitations were always two tiered. First you would be told there is going to be a party and you are invited, but you were not told when it was going to be; so, it is on your calendar, as it were, in general; but then you would get a second invitation when it was ready: Tomorrow it is going to be done. We have the barbeque pits lit and we have the animals slaughtered and we are slow-roasting the cows; and so, tomorrow at 5:00. Fine; but as soon as that second invitation gets issued, they all come up with excuses: No, I have other things to do, you know; and when those servants pester them a little more, they start beating up the servants: I am not coming at all! I am so serious about not coming, I am going to beat you up for even inviting me a second time.

DAVE BAST

So, this is unreasonable behavior...inexplicable behavior...inexcusable behavior, because a wedding banquet, especially one thrown by the king, that was a big deal; and again, I think it is so interesting to think our way back a little bit into the culture of that day. Most people didn't get to eat meat very much...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

They had no refrigeration. They had no way to store it. So, a feast was a momentous occasion, and it would be the best meal you had all year. They are invited, and yet they fall all over themselves finding excuses when the moment comes; when the big day finally arrives: Huh uh, no thanks. I have... You think of the other version of this parable in Luke 14: I have bought a field. I have a cow I have to go check out. The excuses keep coming.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are told in this parable, in verse 7, that the king was enraged. Now, on all levels, if you have ever had a dinner party where somebody didn't show up, or if you had a dinner party and people showed up late, and you know, the food is ready to go; you know as a host that gets...you know, it makes you really antsy: Why aren't they here?! But in this case, of course, it is a much deeper insult to the king; and the king is enraged. We are told he sent off an army to destroy and burn their city. This must have taken a while. The timing... I

guess we shouldn't think too much about the details of this. Jesus is making a point, although some commentators do think that the burning of the city refers to the sacking of Jerusalem...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In 70 AD, which is something Jesus talked about at other times, too, including...

DAVE BAST

Right; he is prophesying this, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In Luke's version of the triumphal entry, before Jesus enters Jerusalem he predicts its downfall; so that may have actually happened in future history; but what we have here, Dave, is...it is a parable of judgment against God's chosen covenant people, who should have known better...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Who should have known that this was God's Messiah when he was in their midst, but they didn't. Now, it is relatively easy for us to sit back and say: Well, you know, too bad for them...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But at least we got in, you know. We got in because we were the people who got invited, you know...highways and byways and the good and the bad; we got scooped up with that, so at least lucky us; but this is a tragic picture; and that comes out in different ways in the New Testament, including in the Apostle Paul.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely. I think we have to make a couple points about this. I think we have to be very careful, living in the time that we do, in what we say about the New Testament teaching about Israel's rejection of the Messiah because of the terrible history of anti-Semitism...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Throughout Christian history, and culminating in the 20th Century with the Holocaust. So, we are very cautious about that. There is no justification in any way, shape or form for anti-Semitism; and as you just said, Scott, there is a tragic note about this that Paul sounds to the depth himself—a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as he describes himself—but writing in Romans, in Chapters 9 through 11 he wrestles with the problem. The great apostle is focused on the question of how could Israel reject the Messiah?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; now what?

DAVE BAST

Yes; and how did that happen? Where is it going to all end? So, he writes, and he writes with pain in his heart...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

So, listen to this, from Romans 10:

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ²For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³Since they did not know the righteousness of God, and sought to establish their own (he is talking about righteousness through faith in Christ), they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴Christ is the culmination of the Law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

^{11:1}I ask, then, did God reject his people? (And he answers) By no means!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, God is not done with them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, Dave, you were saying that despite the rejection of the Jews of Jesus as the Messiah that that in no way, shape or form licenses or authorizes anti-Semitism. Indeed, what should our Christian attitude toward Jewish people be? This! Paul's attitude right here. You pray for them and you just yearn for them to be saved; but, you know, in the end Paul has hope. He doesn't think God will finally reject them. He doesn't know how it is going to go, but somehow or another, God's covenant people are going to have a place; Paul is just sure of it, but he cannot be totally sure, and it is agonizing; but the point is, the rejection of Israel of God's true Messiah that we see in this parable of the wedding banquet is the truth. They missed the Messianic boat.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jesus came; they said he isn't the one, and pious Jews to this day are still waiting...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

For the Messiah to come. That is a tragedy, and we don't want to ever be smug about that or say: Well, yes, they have been judged, but what are you going to do? No; we should have great compassion.

DAVE BAST

Well, Paul actually has a little, mini parable of his own in Romans 11, where he talks about an olive tree, where the natural branches have been broken off so that wild ones could be grafted in; and if you overlay that with Jesus' parable of the wedding feast and the kingdom, you can see it is making the same point; that it was the rejection of the original invitees—the people of Israel—that opened the door for Gentiles—for us—people like us to come in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right; if you cannot trace your heritage back somehow to a Jewish ancestry and the people of Israel and of Abraham's descendants and so forth, well then you are one of those last invitees; but you know, Dave, we already read it, but we are going to review it again. For those of us who see ourselves in this parable in that way, that is no reason just to sort of sit back and feel smug, because there is a surprise ending to this story that introduces another layer of judgment that is properly sobering for all of us, and we will take that up as we close the program next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are looking at the parable of the wedding banquet from Matthew 22; and so, we have read this story and we have seen who is who...a little bit of who stands for whom and what is what; and those who are originally invited to the great banquet have refused to accept the invitation. They have even mistreated the servants—the messengers—the prophets who have come to them. A party is a party, though. The king has all this food on his hands. You don't slaughter oxen every day, and the meat won't last for very long; so out he sends his servants again into the wide world to invite strangers and random people; the Gentiles...to come in.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and Jesus throws in that it is the bad *and* the good, right? I mean, the people you might look at as good candidates to come to your wedding party, and the people you might look at as sort of the dregs of society who would be *very* unlikely candidates to come; it doesn't matter...just scoop them all up.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is such a great picture. You have rented the ballroom of the best hotel downtown...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And you have all the tables set up and there is hardly anybody there because the invitees didn't show for one reason or another. So he sends the waiters out and says: Just scoop them in off the sidewalk. The people holding up the cardboard signs and the tourists who are strolling up...it doesn't matter. Bring them in! That is the lavishness of God's invitation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there is great joy in that because of course you didn't expect it. Sort of like winning the lottery; I mean, you were just walking down the street and all of a sudden somebody came and said: Want a free dinner? Well, most people would say: Well, who wouldn't? And so, not only do they get a free dinner, but yes, right, they go into the grand ballroom of the Plaza Sheraton Hotel and it is crystal chandeliers and real lead crystal goblets of the finest of wine; and people had to have just sort of looked at each other grinning, saying: How did this happen? What great joy there is to have been at the wedding feast after all, when you had no idea that it was even happening, much less that it was going to include you; because these were the people, unlike God's people, who hadn't been looking for any Messiah because they weren't Jewish. They hadn't read Isaiah...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jeremiah; they weren't looking for anything; but now that Messiah has found them.

DAVE BAST

In a sense, this sort of universal invitation serves to break down all the walls and the barriers that humanity divides itself up into; so, Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, as Paul will say famously in Galatians; none of that matters anymore. In Christ, all that matters is the new creation. So, all those divisions are drowned in the waters of baptism, we might say.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; we are all one people; and of course, again as we said, I think in the previous segment, Dave; those of us who are Gentiles, if you will, we are the ones who are grafted onto the tree of salvation, and we can feel pretty good about that, and feel pretty happy about that; except there is this wrinkle that comes from out of nowhere in this parable.

So, the king comes in now. Everybody is having a good time and the king, you would assume, is happy to see the people...

DAVE BAST

Yes, the wine is flowing; the food is being served...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nothing is going to waste.

DAVE BAST

Big platters coming out of the kitchen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But he surveys the ballroom and there is somebody at one table who catches his eye, and he goes up to that person.

DAVE BAST

Matthew 22:11¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. ¹³Then 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.’ ¹⁴For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

Okay, Jesus; first of all, what is this wedding garment? You hadn’t mentioned anything about that. We weren’t told anybody was wearing any wedding garments before. Now all of a sudden there is somebody *without* one. Where did this come from; and it will be no surprise to our listeners that this has puzzled Bible commentators for centuries...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there have been a lot of theories.

DAVE BAST

Well, and how can you expect somebody to have a wedding garment on when you just swept them in off the streets and they weren’t planning to come because they didn’t get the invitation originally? This is why you cannot press too closely the details of the story. Everything doesn’t necessarily mean something; but now Jesus clearly wants us to focus our attention, not to the guests who refused, but to the guest who came, but came unprepared, or came without the proper garment—the proper clothing on. So, what does he mean by that?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Within the confines of the story, you might say: Well, they must have been given garments, and if they were serious about attending, they put on what the king gave them; and everybody else did except this one person. What does that mean? Again, lots of theories, but it seems to mean this is like being clothed with Christ. Paul will use that imagery later. You know, clothe yourself; put on Jesus Christ like a sweater. Clothe yourself with his righteousness. Be arrayed in the garments of salvation. That seems to be the idea here, that those who are serious about celebrating the grace that got them to the banquet want to live into that now; and that means it will show in how you live, in that you are clearly wearing Christ's own righteousness; but there was one person who didn't get it; who just kind of thought he would go along for the ride, but didn't really change how he lived or how he dressed or how he acted; and that is not good enough.

DAVE BAST

Well, clearly Jesus says some kind of response is required from us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

Because the tendency for us it to hear about grace and see this wonderful big party and think: Well, everybody is in; everybody is in; you don't have to do anything. You don't even have to know about it. We talked about judgment and hell at the outset of this program; and there is such a strong temptation...it is such a horrible thought that we would love to think that everybody somehow will get in. It doesn't matter what you do. It doesn't matter whether you believe in Jesus or not. It doesn't matter whether your life has changed; and Jesus wants to warn us once again with this little stinger at the end: There is an outer darkness...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

There is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Those are images for hell. You have to do something. You need to respond to this grace in order to avoid that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the early Church, when you got baptized you were stripped naked, plunged under the waters of baptism, and you were given a new garment on the other side of baptism, symbolizing your new life. When grace comes to you from out of the clear blue sky, as it did for all of these people invited to the wedding banquet, it needs to transform you and change you. That kindness of God will change you, and the righteousness of Christ himself is going to show in how you live. That is essentially the wedding garment: Every day showing the watching world our savior and his holiness and his righteousness.

DAVE BAST

Well, God give us grace to make that necessary response.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we hear the sobering reality regarding the timing of God's judgment, and heed the warning found in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. Please connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and let us know what passages or topics you would like to hear next on *Groundwork*.

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