

# The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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## CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

### MATTHEW 21:45-22:14

IN our previous study we found the solemn words of the King in which He declared the Hebrew nation to be rejected: **“Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”**

There is the most intimate connection between that declaration and the parable which we have now to study.

There is a difference between this parable and those already considered which we must notice at the outset. In the former two the King was dealing with the rulers' responsibility concerning the Kingdom of God in the world. In this it is no longer responsibility, but privilege which is under consideration.

The figure changes from that of a vineyard into which laborers are sent, to that of a marriage feast to which guests are bidden; and if we interpret the figures from the Eastern view point, we at once see the contrast.

On the one hand, we have toil and service; and on the other, rejoicing, and gladness, and merriment. Then notice that running through all these parables there is an identity, not declared, but most evidently claimed, between Christ and His Father. Whatever we may think of the meaning of these parables, it is quite evident, as Matthew tells us, that the chief priests and the Pharisees knew that He was applying them to themselves.

It is quite evident that our Lord intended to teach the proprietorship of God, the fact that these men owed allegiance to Him. Moreover, by the second parable it was perfectly evident that He intended to teach that He had come as the Sent of the Father; they having refused the messengers, He had come with the final message as the Son.

In the three parables there is a growing movement. In the first He showed what the attitude of these rulers had been toward God.

- They had said, I go, and had failed to go; the attitude of disobedience and disloyalty.
- In the second He showed what their attitude would be toward Himself, **“This is the heir; come, let us kill Him, and let us seize on His inheritance.”**

His inheritance of rule and authority and influence shall be ours.

In the third parable He revealed to them what their attitude would be toward His messengers, those who are sent to bid them to the privileges. So long as He was dealing with their attitude to the Father, and to Himself, the parables moved in the realm of responsibility. When He began to deal with their attitude toward His messengers, His parable moved in the realm of privilege.

There are three distinct movements in the particular parable we have now to consider, indicated by the three invitations sent out. The King was very near the end of His ministry, and was in Jerusalem for the specific purpose of casting out from privilege and responsibility the people that had refused His Kingship. Thus all His parables become more intensely suggestive, and need examination in the light of that fact. To take this parable, and to preach the Gospel from it, is to strain its meaning. There is not a word here concerning the preaching of the Gospel.

Remembering that our Lord was in Jerusalem definitely for the purpose of dealing with the rulers and the nation, notice how these three invitations exactly cover the fact of His ministry in the world, concerning the Kingdom of God.

In the first invitation He was referring to the call already given by Himself and His disciples in their journeyings throughout that whole district.

By the second invitation He was referring to the work which His disciples would do from that moment until, the nation rejecting the message for the second time, God would send His armies and destroy their city, a definite prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem.

We have therefore in the second movement, a reference to the call to the Kingdom, from the point of His rejection, until, rejecting not merely Jesus, but the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jerusalem was destroyed. That took place a generation afterwards.

Thirdly, we have in the parable a movement which follows that. After the destruction of Jerusalem the messengers would be sent forth into the highways; that is, beyond the places of covenant, beyond the people of privilege, beyond those who were originally bidden; and they were to go forth with the same message. But the difference is that, instead of bringing to the marriage feast the bidden ones, they were to bring bad and good together, in order that the house might be filled, in order that the ideal might be realized.

In that third invitation, then, we have a picture of the call which His messengers were to utter after the destruction of Jerusalem until this time. It is a reference to work which we have to do.

Turn, then, to the first of these invitations, “**The Kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son.**”

What is the Kingdom of heaven? Exactly what this Gospel has revealed.

In order to understand the phrase here, we must:

- First, behold the King;
- Secondly, listen to the laws which are in His Manifesto;
- Thirdly, observe the facts of His Kingship as revealed in His authority in the realms of the material, mental, and moral.

If we would know the claims of the Kingdom, let us listen to the King as He demanded of men that they should submit and obey, and yield to Him their allegiance.

- If it were possible for us to lift out of this Gospel the great ideal which Jesus presented;
- If it were possible for us for a moment to forget these particular men that crowded about Him;
- If it were possible for us to forget popular interpretations of the meaning of the Gospel;
- If we could appreciate the ideal of the Kingdom, apart from the refusal, and apart from the local circumstances, what would it be?

God absolutely enthroned. It is the Kingdom of God.

Under His enthronement character is the supreme thing. Individualism consists of the realization of character that harmonizes with the character of God. People of character, harmonizing with the Kingdom of God, living in mutual interrelationship, would constitute a great theocracy of souls loyal to the Throne of God, and serving each other, and thus bearing testimony to those outside, concerning the graciousness and goodness of the government of God. That was the ideal that filled the heart and mind of Jesus.

When He taught us to pray the prayer, Thy Kingdom come on earth, He saw the ideal conditions of life in the world. It is not a prayer that anything may come in Heaven; it is a prayer that things may be here as they are there. Wherever we take the words of Jesus, and apply them simply, we see that to have been His ideal. **“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, . . . and . . . thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”**

Now said the Master, the Kingdom of heaven is likened unto a marriage feast.

As our Lord, in dealing with responsibility, chose the figure of the Old Testament, the vineyard, so here, in dealing with the privileges of His Kingship, He employed the prophetic figure; **“I will betroth thee unto Me for ever.”** That was the word of God to the people whom He had chosen to represent Him in the world. And yet Hosea uttered those awful prophecies of his! He charged Israel with having broken the relationship between herself and God, between husband and betrothed.

Spiritual adultery and harlotry, said Hosea, is the sin of the chosen people.

That figure of the Old Testament, Christ now employed, and said, God has made a marriage feast for His Son, a day of gladness and rejoicing. But this is Christ's picture of the Kingdom of God as to its righteousness and peace and joy. **“The Kingdom of God is . . . righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”**

The first call to the Kingdom went out “**to them that were bidden,**” to those who were under authority, to those who ought to have heard, and understood, and answered. With what result? They would not come.

Jesus and His twelve disciples had through that whole neighborhood, for about three years, preached that Kingdom, preached its principles, preached its privileges, preached its responsibilities, and the people would have none of it.

They had, as His previous parables revealed, declined the responsibilities, and so they had rejected the privileges. They would not come to the marriage feast. That was His first charge against them.

Then He told them that there was another invitation.

First, the figurative description of the King’s preparation; “**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.**”

Very quaint, and very beautiful, and very solemn, are some of the Puritan writings upon that passage. They draw attention to the fact that the way in which the King spread the great feast, whereby men should come into the Kingdom realization, was a costly way.

When Jesus uttered those words, and said, “**All things are ready,**” He knew at what infinite cost God was preparing for the possibility of the realizing of that great Kingdom which He had preached, and which men had rejected.

This declaration that all things are ready so far as God is concerned, was a new call to men to come into the privileges of the Kingdom.

How did they respond?

There were two classes:

- The indifferent,
- The rebellious.

The indifferent turned everyone to his own farm; and there is a special emphasis there. “**one to his farm.**”

Christ had preached the Kingdom, God’s Kingdom, in which men should seek, not their own, but His and each other’s good; a Kingdom in which the first passion of the individual life should be the glory of God; and the necessary sequence of that passion the good of other men; but they would not come.

They went back to the self-centered life that sought for personal enrichment and comfort, without regard to the Kingdom of God, or the good of their fellow men.

Others were definitely rebellious. They treated the messengers ill, they beat and flung them out, and killed them. And all that actually happened in those days succeeding the ministry of Jesus.

In the Acts of the Apostles we find the story. We must not forget that in those early days of Christian preaching, they preached the Kingdom of God, not nebulously as we do, as though the Kingdom of God only meant that a man should submit to God; but socially, as we do not, realizing that they came, not merely for the saving of their own soul, but for His glory, and for the realization of the ideal national communal life.

But they killed the messengers and at last the King was wroth, and He sent His own armies. He Who girded Cyrus long before, led and guided the Roman armies, sweeping the city out, burning and destroying it, and irrevocably scattering to the winds His people who would not have His Kingdom because His Kingdom interfered with their own self-centered interest.

Then said Christ in this parable,

**“The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways,”** go and gather in the bad and the good; which does not mean that He was inviting into His Kingdom a promiscuous crowd both bad and good, but that no longer was the invitation to be confined to a people of a certain order.

Our Lord was not minimizing the importance of character, as we see by the final reference to the man without a wedding garment. This is one of the cases where one is bound to confess that no one can quite accurately carry the sense of the method by which Jesus said that the King addressed that man; **“He saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?”**

The word **“not”** in verse eleven is a different word from the **“not”** in verse twelve, and it is impossible to translate the different meaning by any equivalent in our language.

Dr. Vincent stated the matter in the simplest form when he said, “In the Greek language the first not was always used when referring to a matter of fact, while the second was always used in reference to a matter of thought.”

By that he means, and this is certainly the intention of the passage, there came in a man not having a wedding garment; that is the fact. But when the king looked at him and said, **“How camest thou in hither not having”** that is, deliberately not having, with determination not having, it is the not of thought you did not mean to have a wedding garment, you have dared to come without a wedding garment.

And so by that Jesus revealed to us that, even though the bad and good were to be called into the Kingdom, the question of character did matter.

Let us now go back to that statement in the previous chapter, not so much now for its application to the Hebrew people as for its principle.

**“The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”**

How does this apply to us as to responsibility? What is the fruit of the Kingdom of God?

The fruit of the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of heaven. They are intimately related. The greatest word of all is the Kingdom of God, which means the Kingship of God, which means the Kingship of God recognized and obeyed; and the Kingdom of God in some senses includes the whole universe over which He governs. Hell itself is in that Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God, if we understand the phrase in all its breadth, and length, and height, and depth of meaning, describes His ultimate and final and present authority everywhere.

The immanence of God, and the transcendence of God, are not contradictory ideas, but mutually expository ideas; and whether it be far or near, near or far, God is, and rules, and governs all.

He has created in the great mystery of His universe, beings with will, and to certain of these people, in a fallen world, and in the midst of a fallen race, He has committed the Kingdom of God; He has made them responsible to reveal it, to let other men see what it means.

If we can find a community realizing the Kingdom of God in its own life, that is the Kingdom of heaven; it is the fruit of the Kingdom of God. There was a time, a little time in the history of the Hebrew people when they realized it, when they were a theocracy purely and simply; no King interfering but the one King; all their life centered about Him.

That was the Kingdom of heaven.

There were a few fleeting months in Florence when the world saw the coming of the Kingdom of God in power and judgment, when in answer to the preaching of Savonarola people woke, and broke the chain of Lorenzo de Medici.

There was a moment in our English history when we had a glimpse of the Kingdom of God it was never a perfect glimpse when men called Ironsides held sword and Bible, and tramped to the music of the declarations of Holy Writ.

We had one gleam when Oliver Cromwell saved us all from the evil of a decadent age.

They were never lasting. They could not last because, even though there was a gleam of the glory of the Kingdom, the conditions were not established by the methods of the King.

The Kingdom of heaven is realization in actual human life of the fact of the Kingship of God. The King coming up to Jerusalem, said to the people who had been made the depository of the holy and sacred truth, **“The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof;”** that is, to a people who will exhibit all that is meant by the Kingdom of God.

And what was the nation to whom it was given? The Church.

Peter, to whom our Lord first spoke concerning the Church, said in his letter, “**Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.**”

That does not exhaust the Divine intention.

It will never be exhausted until the whole world realizes the Kingdom of God. From then until now the world is only able to know the meaning of the Kingdom of God as it sees it realized in the Church of Jesus Christ.

But the Church has failed to reveal the Kingdom of God in all its earthly meaning and glory as the Hebrew people did. That is why we are being broken up, and scattered abroad; that is why our work has become largely individualistic. There have been some attempts; some stately and magnificent, and yet terrible; some full of marvelous power, yet always failing; and some grotesque.

One of the greatest attempts to realize it has been that of the Roman Catholic Church; that great and massive structure, boastfully one o’er all the face of the earth. But Rome has failed because she has allowed the Christian ideal to be paganized, and thus has ruined the testimony to the Kingdom of God.

The movement of the Plymouth Brethren was a great one. They had the vision of a great ideal, but their testimony is a ruined and spoiled testimony, because they became Romanized with a popery more severe than that of Rome, a popery that tracked a man from village to village if perchance he did not quite agree with some view of truth, until he was ostracized and hounded almost out of existence.

More recently another attempt at the manifestation was seen in Bowieism. But Bowie’s ministry was that of taking his community, and putting it into a city by itself. Jesus Christ would have His people scattered, for His salt must live next door to the corruption; His light must shine in the darkness.

Outside the borders of the Church, there are men to-day who are seeing at least the Divine intention though they have not discovered the Divine dynamic; and perhaps, presently, we shall be surprised to see God moving toward a realization through people we thought could not be used for it, and all because His Church has not been true to Him in this matter. What is our responsibility? What shall we do? Attempt to re-unite Christendom?

In the name of God, no. There is no time to waste; life is all too brief. What shall we do? At least we ought, wherever there is a Christian fellowship, to realize the Kingdom of God within it.

Every Church ought to find out how, in that local fellowship, there may be at least a center of light, a revelation to the men outside, of the love, and the light, and the life, which come to men inside the Kingdom of God.

It is not enough that in our personal life we reveal to the world what Christ can do for us. The world is waiting to see, not merely what Christ can do for a man, but what Christ can do for the community of souls who, having come to Him individually, are now living within His Kingdom.

And if He has committed to us the Kingdom, and we do not bring forth the fruits of it, so surely as He cast His Hebrew people away from service not from salvation, but from service so surely will God move outside the churches and do His work beyond it in ways that will astonish us.

This is the message of His Kingship, and unless we realize what He means, and obey Him, we also will be cast away from service, and from helping to fulfil His great ideals in the world.

**~ end of chapter 59 ~**

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