

This was the most informative of the parables of the Savior. No other speaker said so much in such few words. Christ's story reached from everlasting to everlasting; it embraced eternity, and its significance never diminished. It may be impossible to decide the exact age of our planet, but the first humans were created approximately 6,000 years ago. The Bible teaches that before the end of time, the Lord will reign for 1,000 years, and therefore it may be concluded that man's existence upon the earth will continue for at least 7,000 years. Eternal ages preceded the creation of the first humans, and will continue after the cessation of time. It was truly remarkable that the parable given by Jesus included everything to be revealed between those two extremes.

The Scriptures were written by many authors over great periods of time, and in various locations. They began with the ages preceding creation and conclude with events to take place after the close of human history. Biblical authors told their story in 66 books divided into 41,173 verses. It was remarkable that Jesus only needed twelve verses to describe God's plan for all ages. The Savior said in two minutes what prophets and scribes told and wrote over a period of 4,000 years. This wonderful piece of oratory should be an example for all long-winded preachers!

God's Supreme Purpose. . . To Celebrate the Marriage of His Son

Paul, whose insight into the eternal purposes of God exceeded anything possessed by other apostles, wrote to the Ephesians declaring that God "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself; That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him.. (Eph. 1:9-10). Before the beginning of history God planned what would be accomplished before the end of time. For example, Paul said: he hath chosen us in him before the founda-

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non of the world. . ." (Eph. 1:4). John wrote: in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8). Isaiah made an astonishing prediction when he wrote: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:6-7).

During the ages preceding time, God planned a glorious celebration to commemorate the occasion when the promised Messiah would establish His everlasting kingdom and nothing can prevent that supreme event. The Lord Jesus Christ, Who was present when the plan was first formulated, expressed that truth in His immortal parable. God's original plan never changed. Wars may come and go; political leaders may rise and fall; but mankind may be assured Paul was correct when he wrote: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

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God's Strange People ... Who Ignored a Great Invitation

..... a certain king... sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Behold, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fadings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them" (Matt. 22:3-6). It should be remembered that when Jesus told this parable, Christian martyrs had not died for their faith, and therefore the Lord's message was an indictment against the Jews who had spurned God's message, and killed some of His messengers. Luke, in recording this parable, did not mention the avenging armies of

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the offended monarch. If Matthew wrote his Gospel after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. he may have believed the calamity was the fulfillment of the prediction made in the parable of the king's supper.

The two statements "they would not come" and "they made light of it," provided eloquent testimony to the indifference of the invited guests. They decided not to respond to the king's invitation, and were indifferent to future consequences. Luke was more explicit in describing the refusal to attend the supper. He wrote: "And they all with one accord began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused." The purchased land would not disappear overnight, and could be seen at any other time. Jesus said: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21). Evidently the man thought more of his new property than he did of its Creator.

"And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused." Apparently the farmer had already purchased extra animals to pull his plows. Now he wanted to know whether they would be capable of doing their job. His reasoning was without merit, for if he bought oxen without knowledge of their health and strength, he was a very foolish man. "And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." This statement was the most ludicrous of the three. Women seldom exercised authority during the time when the Lord was upon the earth. Any man who desired the company of a new wife would have remained with her during the honeymoon. The three men mentioned in the Lord's parable were only concerned about material matters, and disliked interference in their private concerns.

When Jesus described the attacks made upon the messengers, He referred to the Hebrew fathers who persecuted and killed God's prophets. The people were not only indifferent to the entreaties of the monarch; they disliked the supper even though it was provided by a king! It has often been said one never misses the water until the well runs dry! Israel never realized the folly of idolatry until they saw it in Babylon. Jeremiah said: "For my people have committed two evils; they

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have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13).

God's Surprising Plan . . . To Invite Gentiles

"Then said he (the king) to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to

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the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests" (Matt. 22:8-10).

The apostle Paul clearly understood this message. Writing to the Christians in Ephesus, he said: "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). The converts in Ephesus were Gentiles, and yet to them Paul wrote: ". . . he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.. (Eph. 1:4).

It was difficult for orthodox Jews to understand this fact, for throughout their long history, fellowship with pagan nations had been prohibited. To preserve the integrity of His people, God commanded them to be separated from the customs of heathens, and marriage with other nations was strictly forbidden. Following these principles, the Hebrews became an isolated people who considered themselves superior to other races. Jehovah was their God; Gentiles were considered to be dogs (Matt. 15:26). Many of the Christians in Rome were also Gentiles, but to them Paul wrote: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:28-29). This was the great mystery hidden in the mind of God, and revealed to Paul that he might proclaim it to all nations.

God's Stupendous Provision... To Supply Wedding Garments

Everything necessary for this wedding was supplied by the

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king. Pastor James Smith admirably expressed this fact when he wrote: "Those who came to this feast found what sinners find on coming to Christ. (1) Rest on a princely couch. (2) Shelter under a princely roof (3) Satisfaction at a princely table. (4) Fellowship with princely friends" (quoted from Handsful on Purpose, series 1, pg. 182, published by the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan). The Savior said: "A certain king made a marriage for his son." The same monarch issued all the invitations and spoke of "my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings." Furthermore, at all eastern weddings of this magnitude, each guest was supplied with a wedding garment which was a gift from the king. The details of the wedding reception were carefully planned so that the entire scene would be spectacularly beautiful. There were no conflicting colors; everything harmonized with the surroundings, and nothing was permitted to spoil the resplendent celebration.

The Savior deliberately described the preparations for the wedding, for they were to be illustrative of things planned in heaven. He indicated that clothing would be an essential part of heaven's greatest occasion. Each person at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be clothed in fine linen, which is the righteousness of the saints. John wrote: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). The Bible also speaks of (1) The garments of salvation and the robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:10); (2) The garment of holiness (Exod. 31:10); (3) The garment of humility (1 Peter 5:5) and (4) The

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garment of praise (Isa. 61:3). The same truth was expressed when the Lord clothed the demoniac of Gadara. Guests at a wedding were not admitted because they were clothed in their own expensive attire, nor were they excluded because they were clad in rags. The king freely supplied the necessary garments, and the right of admission was guaranteed to the individual when he accepted the offered gift.

God's Startling Perception ... "The king.., saw a man!"

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a

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man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless." Entrance to the banquet hall in a palace could only be made through a doorway. Jesus described how the assembled guests came from the highways and byways; they were good and bad; ordinary citizens and derelicts. They received the invitation and came just as they were. Many of them had no homes in which to prepare for the celebrated occasion; they could only wash their faces, hands and feet. If they were beggars, they had no spare clothing, and did not object to the exchange of rags for resplendence. Yet one man, for reasons not known, preferred to reject the king's garment; evidently he was satisfied with his appearance. He refused the offer made by the servant of the king, and proudly entered believing he was admirable. He spurned a royal offer, disregarded the cost of the garment, and unwisely proclaimed he was self-sufficient.

Unfortunately, that type of person still exists. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he said: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). To provide sinners with garments of salvation God gave His Son, Who offered His precious blood as a ransom for many. Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost, declared only Jesus could provide salvation (Acts 4:12). Men who rely upon their own righteousness are too blind to see, and too unwise to understand the message of Christ.

God's Solemn Pronouncement... "Take him away"

"Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen." The king's decision was final. Jesus meant this to be a warning that the judgment of God would fall upon all people who rejected the offer of eternal salvation. Suggestions that people can never be lost eternally are not based on the Word of God. The writer to the Hebrews stated: ". . . it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"

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(Heb. 9:27). People who reject God's offer on earth will never receive His blessing in eternity. It is frightening to consider the things from which the offender was led away.

He was led away from the fellowship of accepted guests. This was replaced by eternal loneliness. He lost the opportunity of hearing inspiring testimonies. This possibility gave place to weeping and gnashing of teeth. The man lost the privilege of attending the marriage and seeing the faces of the Royal Couple. He never shared in the joy of the marriage; it was exchanged for eternal sorrow and bitter memories of his earlier

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stupidity.

Thus did Jesus explain His final commission. He said: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. . . ." (Matt. 28:20).

Centuries have passed since Christ gave to His disciples that great task, and unfortunately many things have changed within the modern world. Some preachers have either forgotten or rejected what Christ said. He taught that the wedding garment was purchased and provided by God. Modern thinkers believe virtue and sincere endeavor are acceptable substitutes for the reconciling death of Jesus. It is believed that when a man does his best, even God cannot expect more. Advocates of international religions teach there are many ways by which to reach heaven. Buddhists, Moslems and other nations reject the teaching of Jesus. If their views be correct, then Christ was wrong when He said: ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6, italics mine).

If there be any other way of reaching heaven, Jesus would have said so. If non-Christians who are religious will safely reach their goal, then the Christian Church was absurd in sending missionaries to places where they were not needed! Unfortunately, heathen philosophy has diluted our faith and paralyzed our efforts. The Savior believed God would offer salvation to unworthy sinners; that destiny would be decided when people either accepted or rejected His provision. He evidently believed that men who relied entirely upon their own

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righteousness would be condemned. He also encouraged evangelism and instructed His servants to go into the highways and byways of the world to persuade listeners to accept the good news, and come as they were to the marriage. Liberal preachers would be more effective if they sat at the feet of Jesus and listened! It should never be forgotten that God said: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matt 17:5).

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