

The Marriage Supper of the King's Son

by John Nelson Darby

God is dealing with man on the ground of grace, not claim, and invites people to the marriage supper of His Son.

Scripture: Matthew 22:1

Topics: "Invitation to Salvation", "Grace"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of God's grace in the parable of the Marriage Supper of the King's Son, illustrating how God invites all, regardless of their past, to partake in the joy of His Son's glory. He contrasts the self-righteousness of the religious leaders with the genuine repentance of sinners, highlighting that true acceptance comes from recognizing one's unworthiness and relying solely on God's provision. The sermon underscores that the invitation to the feast is based on God's grace, not on human merit, and that the wedding garment symbolizes the righteousness provided by God for those who accept His invitation. Ultimately, Darby calls believers to rejoice in the grace of God and to focus on the glory of Christ rather than their own inadequacies.

Transcript

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE KING'S SON

MATTHEW 21:23 to 22:14

If all things were not entirely out of course, every principle of human nature astray from God, there would be no need for all the painstaking on the part of God of which we read in these chapters (and that after all with such strange results), no need of these, in one sense, sorrowful and assiduous efforts to call people back unto Himself. We might have supposed, as we sometimes see in the case of a self-willed child, that the moment the father's voice of love and entreaty was heard, instant obedience would be produced, because a sense of relationship was there. But no ; these constant efforts, this " changing of the voice " (as Paul has it), serve but to shew that all sense of relationship between man and God is gone. That voice touches no spring, there is not a chord upon which He can act-the echo of the heart is gone. Where there is the appearance of an answer, it is but hypocrisy. I am not saying that God cannot change the heart, but that there is entire alienation of the heart from God. The Lord in these chapters goes through these various efforts and their result in a very full and distinct manner indeed, both as regards the responsibility of man and the actings of His own grace; and He does it in the simplest way by appealing to man's conscience just as he is.

We read, " And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things ? and who gave thee this authority ? " (V. 23). God comes into the world to do good, and man asks by what authority God does good in the world! Jesus had been shewing His power previously (v. 12-4), but now He was quietly teaching in the temple. They were vexed to see the veil of hypocrisy drawn aside, and the finger of God put forth in the cleansing of the temple from these things by means of which they had made it a house of merchandise, and therefore they ask Him this question. The Lord appeals to no miracle-He has done plenty, but He appeals not to miracles. " Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it; from heaven or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven ; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him ? [for John bore testimony to Jesus]. But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people: for all hold John as a prophet " (V. 24-26). That is, He at once, by means of the question which in divine wisdom He puts to them in reply, brings out the real state of their conscience. " And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things " (V. 27).

Thus, at the very outset, He puts this great truth before all, that the conscience of man is bad in not submitting to the righteousness of God. And that is the case always. Man cannot deny that things come from heaven, but he will not believe. If pressed to the utmost (look at the extreme case of infidelity), men love darkness rather than light, just as it is said, " Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind," etc. (Rom. 1).

Having laid down this in direct application to their own conscience, He could now tell them that which follows, " But what think ye ? A certain man had two sons ; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father ? They say unto him, The first. Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him " (v. 28-32).

In this first parable the Lord puts a case according to the difference there is between formal righteousness and the repentant sinner; between the person who goes through the world decently, desiring to make a fair appearance, and the one who, acting against all the dictates of natural conscience, sins wilfully, and then repents.

In the second son we have that which is descriptive of the general character of ' decent' people. They go on quietly and in outward order, professing to own the will of God, and to serve God ; they say, " I go, sir," but after all, from morning to night, and from night to morning, they are occupied in doing their own will and nothing else.

In the other son there was the positive delight in doing his own will (just, alas! the description of the wilfulness of the human heart: he said, " I will not"), delight in breaking through all righteousness as it regarded the relationship between himself and his father, but withal the consciousness of this, and the owning afterwards that it had been broken through (not merely that he had done a wrong thing, but that he had disobeyed the father), and repentance on account of it.

There was no regard in the self-righteous Jew, with all his profession, for the righteousness of God; but the publicans and the harlots believed John. Now there was no regard in the former for the ordinances of God; in the latter there was no regard for the common decencies of life, but when they heard the ministry of John, who came in the way of righteousness, they repented ; and this repentance, touching the root of all sin, referred itself, not merely to acts of sin, but towards the Person sinned against. The one decently owned God, and left it there. The others indecently and outrageously sinned against God, but " repented, and went." They recognised not merely certain particular faults, sins in conduct, but sin against God, that they had failed in rendering that which was due to God. We see then that the only repentance which God owns is that in which there is the recognition of sin, and the recognition of Himself as the One against whom we have sinned. The state that the publicans and harlots were in brought them to this certainty, that if God spoke, they had nothing to say for themselves, there was nothing which they could do, except indeed to put their hand, as Job says, upon their mouth, and say, " I am vile." And this they did, whilst the scribes and Pharisees remained as insensible as possible, not only to God's word, but also to the full operation of God's grace; they were as insensible to it as if there had been no such thing. This is the first part, the first case of God's dealings with man, brought before us by our Lord here.

We next get certain dealings on the ground of responsibility, then dealings on the ground of grace : the one in the latter part of chapter 21, the other in the early part of chapter 22. First, as to responsibility the Lord says, " Hear another parable : There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country : and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it " (v. 33, 34). It is quite clear that this applies to the Jewish people in the first place ; yet as to the general principle of the parable it is true of all who have heard the name of Christ and have refused to believe in Him. It is not merely a case of relationship, as between a son and a father (that we have seen before), but it contains an appeal to the conscience of persons on the ground of certain things God has done. It was God that had planted the vineyard, hedged it round about, digged the winepress in it, built the tower, let it out to husbandmen. He had put this vineyard into the hands of certain persons, and having done much for it (everything that He had done for the Jews, as we see in Isaiah 5 : 2, almost in the same words), He naturally looked that it should bring forth grapes to Him. So it is, as to the general principle, in Christianity. It is not a question of natural conscience merely; God had let something out to husbandmen. This was a new thing. He did not leave men to the light of their natural conscience. He had taken the greatest possible pains with them, done everything, so that He says, " What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it ? and then, putting them on the ground of responsibility, He comes looking for fruit. We shall see just now that God has abandoned this ground. He produces fruit, but He has abandoned the ground of seeking for fruit.

God had done everything possible for the Jewish people as His vineyard, and then the thing that He naturally looked for from them was that they should bring forth grapes. He sent the prophets first (the way the prophets are looked at here is, that they were seeking fruit), " and the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first : and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son," v. 35, 37. We find Christ Himself taking them up upon this ground. He came (though not as to ultimate result or purpose) to seek for fruit in His vineyard (it is not a question of grace), and having come to seek fruit, they say, We will get rid of this Son. " When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him," v. 38, 39. The end of responsibility, and of all this patient

dealing of God with the Jewish people on that ground was, that they were glad of the occasion to kill the Heir, in order that they might seize upon the inheritance. " When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen ? They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked men," etc. (v. 40, 41).

Here then again we mark this great principle, that in whatever way God looks for a response from man He finds none. There is such a thing as God's looking for fruit from that which He has planted and nurtured in the world, but there is no fruit to be had from man towards God. The husbandmen's will was entirely against it. They did not recognise the authority of God in His vineyard : they liked to have it for themselves. The will was entirely and absolutely wrong. The truth was, the husbandmen were opposed to the planter of the vineyard, and therefore the relationship was not owned, etc. The effect of the ordinances God had given was only that of bringing out the enmity and hatred of those to whom He had entrusted His vineyard. The Lord ends this part of man's history with the question of seeking fruit and finding none. He places man in a certain religious position, giving him many external advantages, and looks consequently for fruit.

Now, beloved friends, there are many hearts looking at that as their position: the ground they are dealing upon with God is that of seeking to return fruit. They feel that God has given them certain spiritual advantages, opportunities of hearing, and the like, and that therefore they ought to return fruit to Him. And so they ought. But then, although such are not in a condition of soul answerable to that of the husbandmen who killed the heir, they have mistaken, and that altogether, the ground on which God is dealing. And it does not stop here, for the soul may even deal with Christ Himself as with one who is seeking fruit, just as much as with the law and the prophets. It sees in the perfectness of Christ a claim, in the love of God a claim. It thinks that if God has so loved as to give His Son, if Christ has so loved as to shed His blood, there must be this claim of fruit from it to God. Most truly there is, in one sense, but claim does not produce fruit. Surely there must be fruit found in every believer ; but if we stand before God on the ground of having to meet His claim, it is all over with us. It is a very different thing whether there is the claim of fruit, or whether fruit is produced through the work of the Spirit on the soul.

And further I would say, that where there is honesty and sincerity of heart, and the conscience is touched with the testimony to the love of God, seeing the infinite greatness of that love as manifested in the Son of God having come down from heaven to die upon the cross, in the way of claim the only effect is to make it say, Well, it is all over with me if there is no return! And so it is all over with it on that ground. I repeat, the soul sees the love, but it sees also the infinite claim that that love has upon it, and therefore that all is over with it, and it feels no hope. All this is upon the ground that God is claiming fruit. There is the sense of God's amazing love in giving His Son to death for sinners ; the soul sees His graciousness in this, and feels that it ought, in return for this love, to produce the fruit that God is looking for, but that it does not ; consequently all this exercise of soul ends in nothing but the sense of deserved condemnation and judgment. Claim on a person always results in judgment to that person, if he is unable to meet it. If God is dealing with us in the way of claim against us, the result of that is to bring us in guilty in not having answered at all to the claim which God has against us. We have made of the love of God in Christ a severer and more terrible law than that given by Moses, when the soul puts itself under claim to that love ; and therefore we feel condemned and get into despondency. The Lord has tried man by the law, and it has ended in nothing but judgment. The more you elevate the claim of God, the more you elevate your own condemnation. If you put the love of God in the place of law, the greater the love that has been manifested, the more guilty are you in rejecting the claims of that love.

In the beginning of the next chapter the whole thing is changed. It is not claim at all : God is presented as dealing on different ground altogether. " And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come," v. 1-3. True, they would not come ; but it is not at all the presenting of certain claims on the conscience of men. It is something the king is doing and inviting to. He tells them that he is going to glorify his son, and therefore that he must have around the marriage-table of his son all that which would make the marriage glorious and blessed-what is suited to the glory of that son. It is all grace. How clear that everything in a case like this comes from the person who makes the feast. There could be evidently no such thought as that of the guests invited having to provide the entertainment. Why, it would be an insult to the king. There can be consequently no thought of claim here, or of the allowance even of the guests bringing anything towards the feast, neither the thought of a suitable return on the part of those invited. Everything is done on the part of him that invites ; and, I repeat, all such other thoughts would be a positive insult.

This parable then brings before us, not the question of God's dealing with the natural conscience of man, neither that of the owner of the vineyard looking for and not receiving fruit (the Lord has closed that altogether with the last chapter), but that of the king acting according to the riches of his own house in order to glorify his son.

This was the very thought of the king in preparing the supper. Was it merely that he was going to make certain people comfortable? No; it was about his son. And in order to glorify that son he must have full blessing at the table-what shall I say ? happy faces around it, hearts without one care, without any shade of anxiety upon them, free from every suspicion of his love. The "marriage" of his son must be honoured in having all these things accompanying it.

The application of the parable is as simple as possible and that is the ground on which God is dealing in the gospel, and not as claiming fruit. I do not say He does not produce fruit, but it is not a ground of claim in any shape. Man has failed altogether, not only in not producing fruit, but also in not owning the claim which God has upon him ; and if he does own the claim, he gets into despair on account of it. I have put that case. But now all this is over, entirely over, and God is set forth as glorifying Himself in having others made happy around His Son.

If I speak one word, or have a thought about claim, in connection with the ground of my standing in the presence of God (though I admit the principle most fully), it destroys the whole ground upon which God is acting in the fulness of His grace. It is quite clear that one who had allowed for a moment the thought of having to provide his share of the feast could have no real sense of the honour of the person who invited him to the feast (the man who had brought it would have been kept at the door) ; there would have been the entire undervaluing both of him who had made the supper, and of the supper.

And it is also true, moreover, that if a guest who had been invited by the king were a rich man, and sought to come in in costly raiment of his own providing, or, on the other hand, a poor man, who attempted to wear his ragged garments, it would in either case have been an insult to the king, a despising both of the "robe" provided and of the thing invited to. He who invites to the wedding is the only one who can provide the guests with a garment suited to the occasion. All is entirely set aside, both as to the thought of our capacity (because of anything we are in ourselves), to come in, and as to the fear of our state shutting us out. Our blessing depends on one single thing, the sufficiency and the grace of him who invites.

" 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. 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. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city," v. 4-7. Here again we get a notice of the manner of God's patience, and also an evidence of what the heart of man is. Just as the Lord had taken them up (the Jews) before on the ground of God's claim to fruit through the ministry of the prophets, and by His Son, so now He takes them up on this other ground of the invitation to the " marriage supper," " and they made light of it."

" All things are ready " (that is, there is nothing more to be done) ; this was specially the message when the apostles went out after the crucifixion. The feast was ready. The principle of man's heart is seen, not only in despising the claim, but in slighting the grace of God, and in killing His witnesses. The carelessness that would make a sinner despise the king's grace is exactly the same thing in principle that would make him kill the Son. " They went their own way," both in one case and in the other.

But then we have this blessed truth: God did not give up one particle of the fulness of His love, or of the blessedness of His purpose as regards His Son. He is dealing upon this ground, I must have people around me, and blessed there; I must have the " marriage " of my Son honourable. Yes; God, so to speak, must have His house filled. " Then saith he 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 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," v. 8-10. Now there is the present going forth of the gospel into the world-the great character of the gospel.

The first principle is the full outflowing of grace, the activity of God's love going out into the world and bringing in to partake of the blessings which Himself has provided. His love goes out in simple grace to find " good and bad," as it is said, to partake of the goodness of His house. That is the principle God is acting on in the gospel. It is quite clear that He provides everything. He is not claiming fruit but providing blessing.

" And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a 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. 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," v. 11-13. Here we find a sad fact: not the principle of God's dealing, but a fact. One case is sufficient to shew the principle. The " wedding garment " was there, the provision for the guests' blessing made by the King. He takes notice of all present, and Christ was not possessed by this individual. The only effect of his being there was to make it more distinct than ever, to prove the more, that he had nothing to do with the " wedding," for he had not on the " wedding garment." He might have had the most splendid garment; but whether his raiment was splendid and costly, or the vilest rags in the country, those of the poorest beggar, it mattered not-it was not the " wedding garment."

If our souls are not in the spirit of the " wedding for his Son," there is a clear proof that our hearts have not entered into that which God is doing. There is the principle of the whole matter in the question, " How camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment ? " He has given up the ground of claim in dealing with us ; He is asking for nothing ; and more than that, He will receive nothing from us. We cannot pretend

to go and carry Him anything ; if we do, we insult Him.

Have our souls entered, beloved friends, into God's great thought ? He is thinking about His Son; His heart is set on glorifying His Son, and that by the joy of those who are brought in to the " wedding." A soul not in the spirit of the " wedding," the nearer it might be to the Son, the more in company of those seated at the table, the more manifestly would it be seen that it had nothing to do with being there. Were the guests at this table merely for the purpose of feasting ? Surely not. They were there for the wedding of the Son, and to do Him honour. Unless our thoughts and spirits are clothed with Christ, the nearer we be, the more evident would it appear that we have nothing to do with that feast. To be there, and present ; the table, we must be able to enter into the one thought that is governing (so to speak) God Himself in all His counsels ; and this is the glory of His own blessed Son.

In going to a wedding, the man who only thought of the feast would not have entered into the spirit of the thing ; and the man who took something towards the entertainment would but insult the maker of the feast: nobody wanted anything of him. The effect of understanding rightly that God is glorifying His Son Jesus is to make us put aside every thought but that. Let us be the most vile and wretched sinners in ourselves (as Paul says, " of whom I am chief "), all anxiety will be taken from our hearts, everything of uneasiness, and uncertainty, because the invitation is there. And it is God that provides for all in the house " the wedding garment," a robe suited to His own presence. Supposing the king's invitation had come to some poor man clothed in rags, should he have said, Oh! that cannot be for me ; I am a poor man! That was the king's affair; or, I cannot enter the king's palace as I am; my garments are not fit for his presence! no matter. That, I say, was the king's affair, and it was the king who had invited him. He would go on the king's invitation the moment he believed it; for the only thing that was necessary to fit him for a seat at the marriage table was that which the king himself had provided, and he would count on the king for it.

Beloved friends, that is all we have to do. " They which were bidden were not worthy " ; but the house must be filled. Surely we shall daily learn more of the blessings connected with the King's house, and we shall count it blessed to be there; but the whole affair is, God is glorifying His Son Jesus, and we have nothing to do but to rejoice in His grace. It is He who has thought of the " wedding " for His Son, who has thought also of the dress of the guests (providing everything needful to fit the guests for their presence at it) ; and we have nothing to do but to have done with ourselves, and to think of the worthiness of Him who has invited us.

Our title to be at the feast is the invitation of Him that is glorifying His grace in the " marriage " for His Son. What an unworthy feeling for one instant to call this in question! He gave His Son; He sent His Son into the place of our sin and misery to bear that wrath upon the cross which was due to us ; He has raised Him again from the dead. What do you fear ? Are you hesitating about your own worthiness, saying, Oh, but my state of soul is not such as befits one who is called to the marriage supper of the King's Son! No matter, in that sense, what the state of your own soul is ; " they gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good." No matter, if invited by the King, whether the invitation meets you in the " highways " as a beggar, or as a prince, so to speak. What is it you are doubting about ? Has God made a mistake in inviting you ? Surely you are not worthy to be before the King ; but He has called you without expecting to find any worthiness in you; He knew what your unworthiness of heart was before He called you.

He is calling sinners by a love that has been proved stronger than death. The Son of God went down into the dust of death for sinners, the Son of God went down under the power of Satan (though He could not

be holden of it) for sinners, the Son of God went down under the power of the wrath of God for sinners. What more could have been done ? Christ is risen again, and is alive at the right hand of God. " All things are ready; come unto the marriage!"

God invites on the ground of what has been done, and not on that of anything yet to be done. The only question we have to ask ourselves is, whether or not our hearts have submitted to His righteousness. Surely what He gives is that which produces fruit. When at the " marriage supper," the King desires that cares and sins and anxieties should be all forgotten ; He will have around His Son happy faces, hearts free from distrust and free from doubt. Everything can be forgotten, save that we are there. If you see this, beloved friends, I do ask you, Are your souls happy ? Do your faces shine with gladness now, as those who know that their place is to sit around that table ?

God's heart is set upon the glory of Christ in connection with the joy and blessing of those whose hearts have submitted to His righteousness, and He has provided for it. If your hearts are occupied with the glory of Christ, you will not be thinking in one sense of what you are, or of what you were ; your thoughts will dwell upon the blessings into which you are brought through grace, of which Christ is the source and the centre in the presence of God.

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