

# The Parable of the Great Banquet

## Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:1-24

**DIG:** What's the situation here: The day? The host? The plant? The atmosphere? What does Yeshua do to heal the man and expose the Pharisees? What does their silence mean? Why do the guests' actions attract Jesus' attention? How does Yeshua's view of honor vary from that held by others at the banquet? Why is this banquet held? What do you learn about those originally invited? What is so surprising about their response? Who did the king subsequently invite? Why? What is the problem with one guest (Matthew 22:11-12)? What does it mean to be in the king's presence without the proper wedding clothes? Why is this ill-clad guest banished?

**REFLECT:** How do things like customs and status get in the way of your loving others in your family? Church? Workplace? Community? If you threw a party for the outcasts in your world, who would you invite? How might you do this? From your experience, why do so many say "No" to God's great banquet? What might you say or do to help someone overcome their hesitation? When did Christ first call you to the banquet? How did you respond initially? How many other times did He invite you? With whom in this story do you identify with the most? Why?

The one main point to the parable of the great banquet is that the kingdom of God has arrived, and to reject Christ's invitation of salvation means that other sinners, just as unworthy, will accept and take the place of those initially invited.

Still across the Jordan in Perea, once again, Jesus found Himself in the middle of controversy over healing on the Sabbath. The Pharisees' reliance on the Oral Law (see Ei - The Oral Law) led them to watch Yeshua very closely, looking for any opportunity to trip Him up so they could accuse Him before the Great Sanhedrin (see Lg - The Great Sanhedrin) and Pontius Pilate. For His part, Messiah took their scrutiny as a chance to teach them about the heart of the Torah, which consists of mercy and healing.<sup>1081</sup> On the Sabbath He preached in the synagogue and afterward went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, although He knew He was being carefully watched (Luke 14:1). Visiting speakers were often invited to a Sabbath meal after the synagogue service. But here, the Lord's opponents were seeking to find fault with Him (Lk 6:7, 11:53-54, 20:20).

There in front of Messiah was a man suffering from dropsy, which caused an abnormal swelling of his body. **The rabbis teach that dropsy was a venereal disease as a result of immorality.** Normally diseased people would NEVER be allowed to attend **the banquet** of a Pharisee under ANY circumstances because they were viewed as sinners. So we can only assume that His invitation to **the banquet** was more than a mere courtesy - it was a set up. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, asked the Pharisees and Torah-teachers: **Does the Torah allow healing on Shabbat or not?** But they said nothing, for they knew that **the Torah** did permit works of mercy to be on **the Sabbath** without violating it. So, taking hold of the man, the Great Physician healed him and sent him on his way (Luke 14:2-4 CJB). Although not explicitly stated, the atmosphere was probably very tense.

Then, knowing their thoughts, Christ asked them: **If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?** The Greek assumes a positive answer, but again they had nothing to say (Luke 14:5-6). **This method of argument followed a recognized rabbinical rule,** but the apostate religious rulers had no answer for Him. No matter how His opponents tried to catch Him in His words or actions (Luke 11:54), Jesus was their Master (Luke 13:17 and 14:6).

Having given instruction concerning the true nature of Shabbat, Christ proceeded to give a lesson in humility. When Yeshua noticed the well-known Pharisaic practice of **the guests vie for places of honor at the table** (the closer to the host a guest sat, the more honored that guest was). So in that teachable moment, He told them this parable: **When someone invites you to a wedding banquet, do not recline in the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, "Give this person your seat." Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, "Friend, move up to a better place." Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests** (Luke 14:7-10, also see Proverbs 25:6-7). Messiah said that when they arrive at **a great banquet** they should take **the lowest place** so that when **the host** arrived he might assign them a position of prominence. The person who honors oneself **will not be honored,** but the one whom **the host** (meaning God) **honors** will be **honored** indeed.

The values of **the Kingdom** that Jesus came to establish were radically different than those of His day. **The Pharisees and Torah-teachers** clamored for the spotlight and sought the praise of the crowds. Many of us still do today. **Our Savior** taught the opposite of that. **For at the last judgment all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted** (Luke 14:11).

It seemed obvious that the Pharisee who had invited his friends could expect to be rewarded by an invitation to their homes. He was using this banquet, then, as a means of ingratiating himself to others who would then heap benefits on him in return for his hospitality. Then Jesus said to His host: When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends. The Lord did not prohibit friends over for dinner. The Master Teacher's words are better understood as reflecting the Semitic idiom "not so much (friends and rich neighbors) but rather (the needy)."

So don't invite your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, the outcasts of society, and you will be blessed (Luke 14:12-14a). Yeshua's instruction to His host was to care for the poor and needy - not just those who would "pay him back" for his kindness. It's easy to do nice things for those we care about or those who will repay us. But God wants us to reach out to the poor, the lame, and the blind - to people who could never repay our kindness.

Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14:14b). The resurrection of the righteous is clearly seen in both the TaNaKh (see my commentary on Revelation Fd - The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh), and the New Covenant (see my commentary on Revelation Ff - Blessed and Holy Are Those who have Part in the First Resurrection).

Then the Master told His host and other Pharisees a second parable using a commonly understood event (a Jewish wedding) with something not so understood (the coming messianic Kingdom). Yeshua spoke to them again in parables, saying: The kingdom of Heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. God invites sinners to His salvation banquet. It was in the context of the wedding feast Messiah described the king when He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come. All seemed to be going well until an unexpected twist - the guests refused to come (Matthew 22:1-3; Luke 14:15-17). They were not ready to make the sacrifices necessary, so they declined the invitation. Their rejection of the invitation revealed their utter contempt for the host.

According to Near Eastern etiquette of the time, guests to a banquet were invited in advance. Then, when the banquet was ready, a second notification was sent telling them that all was prepared. To refuse to attend at the time of the second invitation was considered extremely impolite. It would have been an even greater insult for the guests to use the excuses they did, pleading activities that could have been done at some other time.<sup>1082</sup> This would have been totally unexpected and insulting, but the king came up with another plan.

When one of those at the table with Jesus heard this, he was reminded of the messianic **Kingdom**, and said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the banquet in the kingdom of God." The ground of his hope was doubtless in being a Pharisee. When he heard Yeshua talk about **the resurrection of the righteous**, he didn't realize **the Kingdom** had come and he was rejecting it. **The Pharisees' concept was that all of Isra'el would be included in that future Kingdom.** But Christ pointed out in a parable that **the Kingdom** would not be determined by a physical relationship to Abraham, but rather by the response of individuals to the invitation extended by **the One** who provided **the banquet**.<sup>1083</sup>

The response of **the king** is equally as shocking as the response of **those who had previously been invited**. Few **monarchs** were known for **their** humility and patience, especially in the face of an open insult. **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."** With an urgent plea, **the servants** were to appeal to **his** invited **guests** by crying out: **Come to the wedding banquet now (Matthew 22:4).** But **He** received a chorus of ridiculously transparent and insulting **excuses**. Refusing to be honest about it, **they** intentionally ignored the invitation and snickered at **the host**.

**All at once they began to make excuses and paid no attention to him. The first said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me." Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me." Still another said, "I just got married, so I can't come" (Mattityahu 22:5 and Luke 14:18-20).** John the Baptist, and then **Jesus Himself** gave the initial invitation. That was followed up by two sets of servants, the servants of John the Immerser and the twelve apostles. But **the apostate religious leaders** always had reasons why they would not accept the initiation.

As before, **the invited guests** disregarded the call from **the king**, except that **their** refusal this time was even more crass and brutal. Many of the invitees were coldly indifferent, acting as if the wedding were of no consequence. **They** responded by carrying on business as usual. **They** were so selfishly preoccupied with personal concerns for profit that the invitation and the repeated calls of **the king** to stop work and attend **his son's wedding** were altogether ignored. **They** willingly and purposely forfeited the beauty, grandeur and honor of the wedding for the sake of their everyday, mundane, self-serving endeavors. **They** were not concerned about **the king's** honor but only about what **they** perceived as **their** own best interests.<sup>1084</sup>

But unbelievably **they** continued to pay **no attention and went off - one to his field, another to his business. Their** apathy might have been understandable, but what happened next was truly alarming. **They seized the king's servants, mistreated them and killed them.** Contempt for **the king's slaves** demonstrated contempt for **the king** himself, and in **mistreating and killing his slaves they** committed a flagrant act of rebellion. **The king was enraged and** had reached the end of **his** patience about the situation, so much so that **He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city (Matthew 22:5-7).** As a result of the rejection of the offer of **the** messianic **Kingdom**, the fulfillment of this parable came true forty years later (see **Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**). **God's** patience has a limit (**Genesis 6:3**).

Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his servants, "The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come" (**Matthew 22:8; Luke 14:21a**). **Their unworthiness** was not because **they** personally lacked the required righteousness. Neither the original invitation nor the subsequent calls were based on merit but solely on **the king's** gracious favor. Ironically and tragically, **they** were declared to be **unworthy** because they simply refused an invitation that was in no way based on **worth**. In fact, many **unworthy** (i.e. **bad**) people were also invited to **the** salvation **banquet**. (**Matthew 22:10a; Luke 14:21b**). None of us are deserving: **There is no one righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10)**. That which makes a person **worthy** of receiving salvation is not any sort of human goodness, religion or spiritual accomplishment but simply saying yes to **God's** invitation to receive **His Son, Jesus Christ, as Lord**.<sup>1085</sup>

The king said: **Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite to the banquet anyone you find.** This is precisely what **Yeshua** commanded in the Great Commission: **Go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 29:19a)**. **So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find,** the outcasts of Isra'el, **the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, both the good and the bad (Matthew 22:9-10a; Luke 14:21b)**. The original **guests** had not been invited because of **their** moral or spiritual superiority, and neither were the newly invited **guests**. **God** has always extended **His** call for salvation to **both good and the bad** people because neither are righteous enough and both are equally in need of salvation. Many no doubt rejected **Jesus** and **His** claims, but many others (even rabbis like **Nicodemus** in **John 3:1-21**) gladly received the invitation. This is the heart of **Messiah's** message and all the Scriptures.

"Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room." Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes (this was the extension of the invitation to the Gentiles) and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full" (see my commentary on **Isaiah Ji - My Word That Goes Out from My Mouth Will Not Return to Me Empty**). The intent is to persuade and overcome **their** feelings of unworthiness. **The owner** sent **a servant**, not a policeman. **I tell you** (Jesus' audience), **not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet** (Luke 14:22-24). Finally, **the wedding hall was filled with guests** (Matthew 22:10b). **The marriage feast** is a symbol of **the messianic Kingdom** (see my commentary on **Revelation Fg - Blessed Are Those who are Invited to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb**). The point here is that **those** who were originally invited will not enter **the Kingdom** while others will live.

In times past **Luke 14:23** was used to justify forcing Jews to be baptized against their will. Yet nowhere in the Bible does **ADONAI** say or suggest that **He** wants people to be forced to accept **His** love and kindness. From the outset, in the garden of Eden, where Adam could freely choose whether or not to obey **God**, there has been only one message, and it is a message of friendly persuasion: **Turn from sin to God and trust in the Good News** (**Mark 1:15**). In fact, it is impossible to force people to repent or believe, for these things are matters of the heart. Thus, "forced conversion" is a contradiction in terms, since true "conversion" means inwardly turning from sin to **HaShem** through **Jesus Christ**, not outwardly transferring from one religious institution to another. In the same way, attempting to force "conversion" is not obeying **God**; quite the contrary, the coercion and cruelty involved constitute gross *disobedience*. But friendly persuasion that respects the hearer's dignity is commanded and can produce good results.<sup>1086</sup>

**But** there was one more surprise. **When the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing the proper wedding clothes.** The Bible teaches us that **the Lord** never forgets those who **have not soiled their clothes**. Just like at Sodom, **He** was willing to save those who belonged to **Him**. The word **soiled** comes from the Greek word *moluno*, which means *to stain, to smear or to pollute*. **The church** at **Sardis** would understand what that meant because of **the city's** wool dyeing industry. Their **white clothes** were a symbol of salvation (**Isaiah 64:6; Jude 23**). **Christ** specifically said: **They will walk with Me, dressed in white, for they are worthy** (**Revelation 3:4**). **Their** names were still in **the book of life** (**Revelation 3:5**), **their** robes had been washed and made **white in the blood of the Lamb** (**Revelation 7:14**). **Their worthiness** was not in **their** own good **deeds**, which had been pronounced incomplete before **God** (**Revelation 3:2**), but in **Yeshua**, who alone is truly **worthy** (**Revelation 4:11, 5:9 and 12**). **They** would be included in **the wedding feast of the Lamb** (**Revelation 19:9**), where the true **Bride of Christ** (**Revelation 19:7, 21:9, 22:17**) will be dressed in fine linen (**Revelation 19:8**).

The fact that all **the other guests** were **wearing wedding clothes** indicates that **the king** had made provision for such **clothes**. It would have been unethical for **the king** to invite the most wicked people in the land to come to **the banquet** and then exclude one poor fellow because **he** didn't have the proper **clothes** to wear. No, **he** was fully accountable for being improperly dressed. But nevertheless, **the** gracious **king** gave **him** one last opportunity to justify **himself**, asking with undeserved respect: **How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?"** **The man was speechless**, unable to offer **the king** even the most feeble excuse.<sup>1087</sup> When **the man** could not provide an adequate answer **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"** (Matthew 22:11-13).

It is a terrible thing to reject the invitation of our heavenly Father. Yet, so many today are doing just that! But if we accept His invitation, we will be able to say: **I am so joyful in ADONAI! My soul rejoices in my God, for He has clothed me in salvation, dressed me with a robe of triumph, like a bridegroom wearing a festive turban, like a bride adorned with her Jewels** (Isaiah 61:10a CJB).

Barukh HaShem who has clothed in salvation those who sincerely desire to attend **the wedding banquet**. **For many are invited, but few are chosen** (Matthew 22:14). This must have stung badly. The belief of the religious leaders is that *they* were the **chosen** ones. **The rabbis taught that all Isra'el shared in the world to come, and the pious among the Gentiles will also have part in it. But only the perfectly just will enter at once into paradise. All others will pass through a period of purification and perfection, variously lasting up to one year. But notorious Torah-breakers, especially apostates from the Jewish faith and heretics, have no hope whatever, either in this world or the next.**<sup>1088</sup>

Then the chief priests, the Torah-teachers and the elders must have been infuriated when they finally realized **Jesus** was talking about **them!** They had already decided that **Yeshua** was powered by Satan himself (see Ek - **It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, that this Fellow Drives Out Demons**), so from that time on looked for a way to arrest Him because they knew He had spoken the parables against them. Now the tables were turned. But they were afraid of the crowd because they considered Him a prophet; so they left Him and went away (Matthew 21:45-46; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). So in those final days of **Christ's** life, the lines were drawn even more deeply.

Messiah's love and mercy are so great that His invitation is without limitations. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). He also said: **Here I AM! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me** (Revelation 3:20). He yearns to have us attend His **banquet** that He told His **servants to go out to the roads and country lanes and persuade them to come in, so that His house will be full** (Luke 14:23).

*Lord Yeshua, I want to be present at Your salvation **banquet** despite my sin and unworthiness. I am Yours. I believe that You are **the Son of God, the Meshiach, the Expected One**, and that You died on the cross for all my sins, past, present and future. I believe that You were buried, rose from the dead on the third day before ascending back to Your home in heaven. And I accept Your generous invitation to the heavenly **banquet**.*