

Marriage Feast Parables

Rod Reynolds

Are Christians going to literally “get married” to Jesus in heaven, as some believe? Find out the real meaning of the “marriage feast” or “marriage supper” Jesus spoke of in the marriage feast parables.

In order to shed light on the message of the Kingdom of God Jesus used many parables. Among the parables used was that of a marriage supper -- or wedding feast. In the book of Revelation we're told "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:9).

What is this marriage supper of the Lamb? When is it and where is it? Is Jesus going to "rapture" the saints up to heaven to literally "get married" to him, as has been taught for a long while among some (but by no means all) Protestants and others? (E.g., see *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* on Revelation 19:1-10; cf. Vine's *Expository Dictionary* under "marriage").

Some have also long advocated the popular notion that the saints and Christ will eat the "marriage supper" in heaven, too. An Internet search for "marriage supper in heaven" or something similar is likely to point to a number of sources promoting this idea (e.g., [The Marriage Supper of the Lamb](http://godwords777.blogspot.com), godwords777.blogspot.com; [The Marriage Supper of the Lamb!](http://powerpointparadise.com), http://powerpointparadise.com; [Where and When Does the Marriage Supper Take Place?](http://www.eternalcog.org), http://www.eternalcog.org). Neither the idea of a literal marriage in heaven nor a literal marriage supper in heaven is anything new. To pretend otherwise is deceitful.

The book of Revelation was written in symbolic language. If one tries to take what is symbolic as literal he will miss the point of the real meaning behind the symbol. For example, if we understand "Lamb" as in "marriage supper of the Lamb" to be a literal lamb, a four legged creature with a wool coat, we will miss the fact that the term "Lamb" as used here is really a reference to Jesus Christ, who is called "the Lamb of God" in John 1:29, 36, and is referred to by use of this metaphor in a number of other Scriptures in the Bible. As we will see, the terms "marriage" and "marriage supper" are also used symbolically in the book of Revelation. If we ignore the Bible's own revelation about the meaning of these symbols, and take them literally instead, we will miss the real meaning behind them. It's equally absurd to think of Jesus literally marrying untold numbers of his own brothers, as it is to think of him as a literal lamb. The "marriage supper" or "marriage feast" also has a far more profound meaning when properly understood than if taken literally as a brief sit-down meal or even a feast lasting a few days.

A great source of confusion and deception is men reading their own ideas into Scripture, rather than allowing the Bible to interpret itself. The book of Revelation has especially been abused in this way, with men reading into its symbols ideas conjured up in their own imaginations. But we are told in the book of Revelation that only the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is worthy to open the seals of Revelation (Revelation 5:3-4, 9).

The book of Revelation is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His

servants things which must shortly take place" (Revelation 1:1). Jesus Christ himself is the one who reveals the symbols of the book of Revelation, and it is to him – and no one else – that we must look for the meaning of its symbols.

Christ reveals the meaning of the symbol of the "marriage supper" in the pages of his word, the Holy Bible.

Among the Scriptures where the meaning of this and related symbolism is revealed are the companion parables of Matthew 22 and Luke 14 having to do with a feast, banquet, or marriage supper. Each parable is different in certain respects, and was spoken at a different time under different circumstances, but they nevertheless complement one another.

What is it that Christ is teaching us in these parables? It's important that we understand the truth. How?

We must let the Bible interpret the Bible (Isaiah 28:9-13; 2 Peter 1:20). If anyone – out of his own imagination – makes up a fictional story to "explain" Scripture, he will be deceived. And if others are persuaded of the fiction, or fable, they, too, will be deceived (2 Timothy 4:3-4; "fables," Greek, *muthos*, myth, fiction; cf. Jeremiah 23:25-28). Unfortunately, such is all too common. Make sure it does not happen to you. Prove the truth -- very carefully, honestly, and prayerfully -- from God's word, taking into account all the Scriptures on a given subject (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Timothy 2:15-16).

Jesus often used *parables* to teach spiritual lessons. The word "parable" is from the Greek παραβολή (*parabole*), from the verb παραβάλλω (*parabollo*) which means literally to throw alongside. A parable is by definition an analogy, where one thing is compared to another by way of metaphor or figurative speech.

Parables About God's Kingdom

In the parables of Matthew 22 and Luke 14 the subject is not a marriage feast, or feast, as such, it is the kingdom of God. In each the kingdom of God is *likened* to a feast. In Luke 14:14 Jesus makes mention of the "resurrection of the just." Note the connection made between the resurrection of the just, and the subject of the parable, the kingdom of God.

"Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God! 'Then He [Jesus] said to him, 'A certain man gave a great supper and invited many' " (Luke 14:15-16; "invited," Greek, καλέω, *kaleo*, "call," note that "many," not few, are called; cf. Matthew 22:14). "Gave" (ποιέω, *poieo*) in some Greek manuscripts is in the imperfect tense, "was on the point of making" (*Word Pictures*, Robertson). In most Greek manuscripts it's in the aorist tense, which may apply to past, present or future events, depending on the context. Here the supper is clearly future (cf. Luke 14:15, where the Greek for "eat" [*phago*] is future tense), while the calling, or inviting, is ongoing and repeated (Luke 14:16-17; implies repeated calls, as *Barne's Notes* and Robertson's *Word Pictures* point out; cf. Matthew 22:3-4, 8-10). "Supper" is from δεῖπνον, (*deipnon*), in this context with the Greek *megas*, a "great supper," or a "great feast."

Now let's look at the parable in Matthew. "And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son' " (Matthew 22:1-2). "Marriage" here is the plural of *gamos*: "A marriage feast (γαμους). The plural, as here (2, 3, 4, 9), is very common in the papyri for the wedding festivities (the several acts of feasting) which lasted for days" (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*; compare Matthew 22:4). The singular can also be used of the marriage feast or wedding celebration, as in Matthew 22:8 and John 2:1-2 [on which Robertson comments: "A wedding (or marriage festival) took place"]. See below for more on the typical custom concerning marriage in Biblical culture.

The subject here also is the Kingdom of Heaven. It is *likened to* a marriage feast. Many who come up with fanciful interpretations of the "marriage supper" overlook the fact that this passage of Scripture is a simile by which the Kingdom God is likened to a marriage feast. Repeat, the subject is the Kingdom of God, not a marriage supper, as such. The Kingdom of God is a literal kingdom, with, as any literal kingdom, (1) a King, (2) territory, (3) subjects, (4) law.

Who is the King? It is the Father's kingdom (Matthew 26:29). Jesus Christ is under the Father's authority (John 5:30). But Jesus Christ is also a king (Hebrews 1:4-5, 8). His kingdom is to be a world girdling kingdom given to him by the Father (Daniel 7:13-14).

What is the territory? While God rules the entire universe (Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-3), the Bible clearly teaches that at the time of Jesus' second coming he will establish his throne on the earth. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ' The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever! ' " (Revelation 11:15; cf. Daniel 2:35, 44; 7:27; Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 5:10).

Who are the subjects? : "Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:14; cf. Isaiah 2:1-4).

What is the law of the Kingdom? God's word (Isaiah 2:3; Luke 4:4).

Servants Sent Forth to Call

Jesus' parable continues, "and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ' Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding." ' But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business" (Matthew 22:3-5).

Note that servants are sent forth to call people to the wedding festival. They are given multiple callings, multiple opportunities to be present at the wedding feast. Israel had been called, repeatedly, and would continue to be called (Isaiah 43:1; 45:3-4; 48:12; Jeremiah 35:17; Hosea 11:1-2; Matthew 10:6-7; Mark 1:14-15), along with the other nations of the earth

(Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Romans 1:5-6; 16:25-26; Revelation 14:6-7).

Who are the servants? Primarily, it is the prophets and apostles and their fellow laborers, and in a larger sense the whole Church (Jeremiah 7:25-28; Mark 16:15; Luke 10:1-3, 9; 11:47-49; Acts 1:8; Philippians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 1 Peter 2:9). The Greek word for apostle, *apostolos*, means messenger, one sent.

"But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them" (Matthew 22:5-6). Most who have heard the gospel have made light of it, and rejected the message. The servants of Christ have been persecuted and often killed down through the ages (Matthew 24:9; Luke 11:49; Revelation 6:10-11). Note that some who were called simply ignored the message, but others who were called actively persecuted the messengers.

"But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (Matthew 22:7). The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was only a forerunner of a much more complete fulfillment of this prophetic parable. The primary fulfillment will occur in the period leading up to and including the time of Christ's second coming (Deuteronomy 32:22; Ezekiel 23:47; Luke 10:2-5, 9-12; 8-9, 18-20; Revelation 18:2, 8-9, 18-20).

The Wrath of the King

"Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy' " (Matthew 22:8). In the parable, **after** the wrath of the king has been executed (signifying the judgments poured out on the nations at the time of Christ's return) the wedding feast is ready to begin. In Revelation 15 – 18 we read of the seven last plagues, filling up God's wrath (Revelation 15:1), which are poured out on the "beast" empire characterized symbolically as "Babylon." Especially he will destroy the seat of the harlot empire, Babylon the great, which has on its hands the blood of prophets, apostles and saints (Revelation 18:2, 8-12, 18-20, 24). These plagues will be poured out in conjunction with the second coming of Christ, and this will occur immediately upon his return, even before he sets foot on the earth (Isaiah 13:1-6, 9-10; cf. Matthew 24:29-30).

John had been in vision called up to heaven to see future events which were to occur primarily upon the earth (Revelation 4:1). The vision John was given in the first few verses of Revelation 19 occurs in the aftermath of the destruction of the plagues being poured out on the beast empire and the harlot city. The idea has been put forward that Revelation 15 somehow pictures a literal marriage ceremony occurring in heaven, with God the Father presiding over the saying of vows as a minister might in a modern western style wedding. But this is pure fiction, a fable spun from human imagination, such as God's word warns us against (2 Timothy 4:3-4). No such custom is found anywhere in the Bible. "There was no formal religious ceremony connected with the Hebrew marriage as with us--there is not a hint of such a thing in the Bible" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1913 edition, "marriage").

In Revelation 19 the subject of the "wedding celebration" (Revelation 19:7) and its feast

(Revelation 19:9) is introduced only **after** the harlot city has been judged and burned with fire (Revelation 19:2-3). And it is placed in the context of the reign of God (Revelation 19:6; cf. Daniel 7:25-27; Psalm 47; Luke 1:32-33; Revelation 19:15-16). "Marriage" (Revelation 19:7, translated "wedding celebration" in the New English Translation) is from γάμος (*gamos*), the same word as used for the wedding feast described metaphorically in Matthew 22. The phrase "the marriage of the Lamb has come [KJV 'is come']" does not mean it has already occurred, but that it is imminent, or near. The Greek is ἦλθεν (*elthen*, aorist active indicative of the lexical form *erchomai*), "prophetic aorist" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Robertson). This form is used often by John. See Revelation 12:10, for example (cf. Revelation 12:12), and Revelation 14:7, translated "the hour of His judgment has come," meaning that it is near at hand (cf. Revelation 15:4; 16:7; 17:1; 18:10; 19:2). Similarly, "your [or his] wrath has come" (Revelation 6:15-17; 11:18; cf. Revelation 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19:15).

The Feast Is Ready

Only after the destruction of the harlot city and empire will the stage be set for the "marriage supper" or "marriage feast" to begin. In Psalm 45 it's only after Christ destroys his enemies that the symbolic wedding celebration occurs. Keil and Delitzsch comment on this psalm: "The sequence of the thoughts and of the figures corresponds to the history of the future. When Babylon is fallen, and the hero riding upon a white horse, upon whom is inscribed the name 'King of kings and Lord of lords,' shall have smitten the hostile nations with the sword that goeth out of His mouth, there then follows the marriage of the Lamb, for which the way has been prepared by these avenging victories (Rev 19:7)" (*Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*). The "daughter of Tyre" is there (Psalm 45:12). Clearly the wedding celebration is on the earth.

The common custom reflected in the Bible is that a couple were considered "married" or bound to each other when they entered into the marriage covenant. Then there was a period of waiting before the wedding feast occurred and the marriage was consummated.

"Betrothal with the ancient Hebrews was of a more formal and far more binding nature than the 'engagement' is with us. Indeed, it was esteemed a part of the transaction of marriage, and that the most binding part. Among the Arabs today it is the only legal ceremony connected with marriage" And further "The betrothed parties were legally in the position of a married couple, and unfaithfulness was 'adultery' (De 22:23; Mt 1:19)" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1913 edition, "marriage").

Israel was "betrothed" or "married" to Christ in a symbolic sense upon entering into the covenant at Mount Sinai (Jeremiah 31:32; cf. Ezekiel 16:8; Matthew 1:18-20). Then they entered into the long trek through the wilderness before they reached their inheritance in the promised land, a type of God's Kingdom (Hebrews 3:5-19; 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:7). In a similar fashion we are "betrothed," or symbolically "married," to Christ when we enter into the covenant with him at baptism, but it's only after the resurrection that the symbolic "wedding feast" -- picturing the kingdom of God on earth -- will occur, wherein we, if privileged to be there, will receive our reward (2 Corinthians 11:2; Matthew 16:27; 25:31-34; Revelation 22:12).

Typically, in Biblical culture a wedding feast lasted for seven days (Genesis 29:27-28). "According to the usual custom a great marriage feast had been prepared...." (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, Keil & Delitzsch, on Genesis 29:21). "The wedding feast generally lasted a week" (*ibid.*, on Genesis 29:27, cf. Judges 14:10-12). The Feast of Tabernacles is another seven day feast that is typical of God's kingdom. Jesus said at his last Passover that he would not drink wine afterward until the time of God's Kingdom (Luke 22:18). His apostles will eat with him then, as they judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-30; cf. Daniel 7:21-22; 25-27; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 5:10; 20:4). The time of the millennium will be a time of great joy for the whole earth (Revelation 20:4-6; Psalm 98:4-9).

"`Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests" (Matthew 22:9-10). The "Bride" of Christ is the Church (Ephesians 5:23; 2 Corinthians 11:2). But the wedding will be furnished with "guests." Who are the guests? Both bad and good are invited (verse 10). The poor, maimed, halt and blind (Luke 14:21-24). Those found are compelled to come. No one is being compelled – forced – to be a part of God's kingdom now. When will such a thing occur? When Christ's kingdom is established on earth, the lame and the blind, all Israel, will come before God (Ezekiel 34:11-16; Micah 4:6-8; Jeremiah 31:8-9; Isaiah 27:12-13; Zephaniah 3:18-19; Jeremiah 16:14-16). The nations, even those who resist, will be compelled to come before God (Zechariah 14:16-19; Isaiah 66:18-19, 23; Psalm 45:12).

"And in this mountain [Mount Zion, Jerusalem; Isaiah 24:23] The Lord of hosts will make for all people A feast of choice pieces, A feast of wines on the lees, Of fat things full of marrow, Of well-refined wines on the lees" (Isaiah 25:6). The millennial reign of Christ will be a feast for all people. The veil of spiritual blindness will be removed (Isaiah 25:7; Romans 11:25-27; 2 Corinthians 3:14-16).

"But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, `Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, `Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth' " (Matthew 22:11-13). Those who remain on the earth when Christ establishes his kingdom must repent, they will thence be clothed with righteousness (Isaiah 61:9-11; Ezekiel 36:24-35; Isaiah 4:3-4). Those who offend, refusing to repent, shall be sought out and destroyed (Psalm 68:15-21; Ezekiel 11:17-21; 20:34-38; Zephaniah 3:10-12).

"For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). Jesus makes the point that many are called in this age through the gospel message, invited to be among those in the millennial kingdom, pictured as a marriage feast. Israel of old was called, as we've seen. Many others since have heard the gospel message, but few have given it serious consideration. Even fewer have actually believed the truth and repented, so as to be "chosen" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; cf. Mark 1:14-15; 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-40), making them eligible for the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6).

The wedding feast symbol of the Bible portrays the glorious rule of God's kingdom over the

earth for 1000 years and beyond. It portrays a time of time of joy and rejoicing for Jesus Christ, and his "bride," and for all creation, as God's blessings are poured out in superabundance. Everyone of us can take part in it, if we will believe the truth, repent, and remain faithful to God and his word.

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