

A ROYAL BANQUET DECLINED.

LUKE 14:15-24. – OCT. 14.

"Come, for all things are now ready."

JESUS continued his table-talk of our last lesson at the Pharisee's dinner. Our Lord had led the attention of his associates, not only to the proprieties of life, but to future things, by the suggestion that feasts should be given in the interest of the poor, whose inability to return the favor would insure a divine blessing more than compensating in the future – in the Kingdom. This led one of the company to a remark which we loosely paraphrase, thus, – Ah, yes! that Kingdom, for which we hope, will be a blessed time. How blessed it will be to share the bounties which God has promised in the great feast which he shall spread! The speaker probably was well acquainted with Isaiah's prophecy respecting the Kingdom (Isa. 25:6) in which God's mercies and blessings to the world are figuratively represented as a feast, in the words, "In this mountain [Kingdom] shall the Lord of hosts make unto all the people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow."

Thus gradually the minds of the company present had been led from earthly things and from commonplace matters and social chit-chat, which might have occupied their attention, to the consideration of the gracious promises of God. And undoubtedly this was our Lord's very object in accepting the Pharisee's invitation, and in leading the conversation gradually in this direction. Now he had an opportunity to teach something respecting this Kingdom and its blessings and the call to share it; and he improved it. His hearers, if they had in mind Isaiah's prophecy and God's promise to Abraham, would understand that the Kingdom or mountain of the Lord would be the house of Israel, in some glorious and exalted condition under Messiah, and that it was in and through this Kingdom that the *feast* of divine blessings, for all nations, was to be spread. Our Lord now, by a parable, drew attention to the

Gospel call of great blessings and privileges, and would have his hearers note the fact that while in a general way they would all assent to the statement that the Kingdom would be a blessed one, and the feast there something to be greatly desired, nevertheless when the offer of that Kingdom would be made them temporal things closer to their hearts would make it of no effect to the majority.

The parable represents a great feast, with a large number of friends of the host invited in advance, that they might be ready at such a time as the feast would be ready and announced. God himself is the host in this parable, and the Jewish nation were his friends to whom, as a people, he had given much advantage every way, chiefly in that to them were committed the oracles of God, – much knowledge of the divine plan for human salvation and the promises that if they, as the seed of Abraham, were faithful, they should have the invitation and privilege and opportunities of this great feast. The Lord addresses them through the Prophet, saying, "You only have I known [recognized] of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2.) Israel only was invited to this feast; but the feast was not ready until our Lord's day, and hence the invitation [R2701 : page 287] to partake of it did not go forth until then. Finally, however, the time had come; Christ, as represented in the bullock of the sin-offering, had already given himself, – the sacrifice being counted as accomplished from the time of its offering, when our Lord presented himself to John at Jordan, making a full consecration of his entire being, even unto death. In view of this sacrifice for sins, God could begin at once to call the already promised guests to the great feast of blessing and manifestation of divine favor toward those to whom he had promised it so long before, through their father Abraham.

And thus it was that when Jesus came and called his disciples and sent them forth, the message was, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand;" the great feast of fat things for this nation, that God has so long promised, is ready; and whosoever wills may come and be received and participate in it. The message of Jesus and the twelve, and later the seventy, throughout all Judea, was the invitation of that favored people

to come and enjoy the great feast for which they had impatiently waited and hoped and prayed for over sixteen centuries, – the great privileges and opportunities of the Kingdom.

But as the parable shows, when the offer of the Kingdom was really made, when the invitation to partake of the blessings of the great Feast was really put before them, it proved that they loved the Kingdom and the future things far less than they and others might have supposed. On the contrary, the unanimity with which the invitation to the Kingdom was rejected made it appear almost as tho the rejectors had acted in concert in the matter. Their excuses for so little interest in the things which God had promised, and which they claimed to be eagerly longing for, were the apparent pressure of other duties which they *must* attend to, and which left no time for responding to the divine invitation to the Kingdom. With one the pressure came in the direction of seeing to his farm, and thus being not slothful in business; another felt that it might do very well for people who had nothing else to do, to give attention to a spiritual feast, but as for him, his time was fully occupied with his property, his oxen, sheep, store-business, and what not. Another felt that his duties, social ties, wife, children, etc., demanded all of his attention, and that therefore he could not accept the Kingdom privileges.

And this, which was the sentiment of fleshly Israel, is largely that of spiritual Israel, also, now that the spiritual Kingdom is announced. Many seem to feel that what they would call the real and practical things of life need all of their attention. They want to "get along" in this world's affairs, and to be somebodies in it, and they find such interest in social and material matters a great hindrance to any response to the divine invitation to a share in the glorious Millennial Kingdom, as joint-heirs with Christ, – the great feast, the high calling which has come to us. Well, in one sense of the word this is all right, for it merely keeps out of the Kingdom a class which the Lord does not desire should be in it, and which if it did come in would need to be sifted out, later. Altho God has bidden many, he is seeking for this feast only such as

will highly appreciate it above all other privileges – those who would be willing to sacrifice any and every other thing in order to share it.

The first invitation to the feast, recounted in the parable, represents the first years of our Lord's ministry, which were specially directed toward interesting the scribes and Pharisees and Doctors of the Law, who, as the leading men of that nation, and as our Lord said, occupying Moses' seat, really represented that nation as a whole; and the rejection of the invitation by these meant the rejection of it by that nation as a whole. Thus our Lord was careful to bring before the priestly class of that time the evidences of his Messiahship, so that when, for instance, he healed the ten lepers, he charged them to tell no man, but go and show themselves to the priests. Thus the priestly class was informed respecting the miraculous work of our Lord, perhaps more particularly than others. They therefore had the invitation to the feast more particularly than others. However, the fact that the chief [R2702 : page 287] representatives of Israel were unready for the invitation was not permitted to hinder, and our Lord, through his disciples, subsequently extended the invitation to another class.

The trial of the nation as a whole, represented by its leaders, ended at Calvary, or rather five days before Calvary, when our Lord rode on the ass and wept over the city of Jerusalem, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee: how oft would I have gathered thy children, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!" As a nation, as a people, you have rejected the divine invitation to the great Feast, and as a nation you cannot taste of it. Nevertheless, according to divine intention and promise, through the prophets, God extended mercy to various individuals of that nation, after the nation as a whole had proven itself unworthy of the Kingdom privileges. The apostles were sent to gather, not the nation, but such individuals as were of humble mind, to share in the feast, and this calling of individuals, instead of the nation of Israel, was responded to exclusively by those who realized their own

unworthiness, – the lame, the halt, the blind, who confessed that they were not perfect, [R2702 : page 288] but who desired perfection, and who rejoiced in the call to partake of the Kingdom privileges, and gladly forsook all else for it. Amongst them, we are assured, there are not many wise, not many great, not many learned, but chiefly the poor, for altho the poor are not always humble by any means, yet amongst them proportionately more were found who were of acceptable character; amongst the rich and the great humility would appear to have been at all times correspondingly scarce.

This second invitation to the poor, the halt and the blind, in the streets and lanes of the city, as a picture would be very difficult to appreciate in our day of hospitals and almshouses, etc., provided by general taxation; but in the days of our Lord it would be very easy indeed to have collected a large crowd of indigent and infirm in short order.

It will be observed that both of these first calls belong to the city – that is, Israel, the nominal Kingdom of God. But the two calls failed to find the sufficient number which God had predestinated should constitute the Kingdom class. He could indeed have induced others to come in, but, on the contrary, he purposely put the invitation to the Feast in such a form as would repel those who were not of the right attitude of heart – in such a form as would attract Israelites indeed, who felt and acknowledged their own unworthiness, and who would be glad, on entering the feast, to have on the robe provided for the guests (symbolical of Christ's righteousness), to cover the filthy rags of their own imperfection. But now, because a sufficient number was not found in Israel to complete the elect number, the message must be sent outside the city, outside of Judaism, – to the Gentiles; and thus the third message was, "Go ye into the highways and whosoever you meet, compel them to come in." The word "compel," however, gives a wrong thought here: it should properly be rendered, urge, persuade.

And thus it has been that throughout the Gospel age, since the bringing in to the Gospel favor of as many Jews as were ready for it, the message has been turned to the Gentiles, "to take out of them a people for God's name," to partake of the great Feast with the remnant of Israel. As the Apostle Paul said to some of the Jews in his preaching: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles; for so the Lord hath commanded us." (Acts 13:46,47.) They showed themselves unworthy of this great blessing or gift, in that they were interested more in the things that perish than in the glorious promises of the everlasting future.

The Apostle Paul calls attention to this fact in Rom. 9:27: "The number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant [only] shall be saved." The Apostle further shows that the call of the Gentiles to be sharers in the Kingdom is merely the continuation of the original call, and that we are called in to take the places of those who neglected so great salvation and privilege. He illustrates this by the olive tree, saying that the natural branches were broken off that we, who by nature were wild, might be grafted in and become partakers of the root and fatness of the olive. – Rom. 11:17.

This third call to the great Feast of the Kingdom blessings and privileges has progressed throughout this Gospel age, and to our understanding is now nearly complete – nearly all the places at the table have been provided with guests; only a few are yet vacant; and so soon as these places are filled, the great feast will begin, and we shall indeed enter into the joys of our Lord, and not only be privileged to feast ourselves, but to carry of its bounties and blessings to all the families of the earth.

The same matters which hindered the Jews, under the first call, from accepting this invitation, have hindered to a large extent also many of the Gentiles who have heard the third call. It is impossible to

be thorough-going business men, wealthy, influential, etc., and at the same time follow in the footsteps of Jesus, giving all of our hearts, talents and energies to the Lord in acceptance of his invitation to this Feast. The acceptance of the invitation to this Feast means a deep interest in it, beyond everything else, so that all other matters, whether houses or lands, father or mother, wife or children, shall be secondary to the interests of the Kingdom, and to our responsibilities to the terms and conditions of the invitation. Consequently, what was true respecting Israel has been true as respects the Gentiles, viz., that the call to the Kingdom has been generally rejected by those who had a considerable measure of this world's blessings and advantages – those who are rich, either in honor of men or social position or talents or reputation or money, have found it difficult to leave these all to follow Jesus in the narrow way: and, consequently, the Scriptural assurance is, not only that those elected in the end of the Jewish age were chiefly the poor and lowly, but that the same has been true amongst the Gentiles, and is true to-day: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;" but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith. – 1 Cor. 1:26; James 2:5.

This does not debar those who have riches of any kind, but really gives them all the greater privilege and opportunity; for they have that much greater talent which, if they will, they may sacrifice, and thus the more fully demonstrate their appreciation of the invitation and of the Feast, and be correspondingly appreciated by the Host. Let us all, like the Apostle Paul, lay aside every weight, every hindrance, every besetment, everything precious to us of an earthly kind, that we may run with patience the race set before us, in response to this invitation to the great Feast of joint-heirship with our Lord in the Kingdom. – Heb. 12:1,2; Rom. 8:16-18; 12:1,2.
