

THE SLIGHTED INVITATION

– LUKE 14:15-24. – AUGUST 5. –

Golden Text: – "They all with one consent began to make excuse."

THIS LESSON is a continuation of our Lord's table-talk at the home of the Pharisee. He had given suggestions along the line of humility on the part of guests, then to entertainers as to how their hospitality might wisely be dispensed: following this came a remark from one of the guests, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." This was doubtless uttered in a reverent spirit, possibly by one of the apostles, with a view to turning the attention of the company to the message which the Master and his disciples were proclaiming – the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.

The Jews for over sixteen centuries had been waiting for the Kingdom of Messiah, which God's promise to Abraham indicated should come in connection with his seed – Israel. Moses, their Mediator and lawgiver, had declared that Messiah would be like unto himself as a leader for the nation, but greater. Through the prophets, all the way down through Israel's history, God had told his chosen nation of the great blessings in store for them. The grandeur of the Millennial Kingdom had been portrayed, and the wonderful opportunity for divine favor and refreshment had been pictured, with the assurance that it should extend from Israel to all the families of the world. In a vague manner the Jews had looked forward to this Kingdom with a mixture of hope and pride, combined with a fear that the changed conditions might in some particulars put any restraint upon their liberties as respects sins, etc. The reference to eating bread in the Kingdom, viewed from the oriental standpoint, would signify to be on good terms with the King, and a new regime, and to be a participator in the blessings of that glorious epoch.

PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

Our Lord was quick to turn the remark so as to point out a valuable lesson to all present who had the hearing ear. He gave, especially for the benefit of his disciples, but incidentally for the benefit of others of the company who were entertaining him, a lesson showing how those who might have been expected to appreciate God's favors would [R3833 : page 250] fail to do so, because of lack of faith and because too closely wedded to the affairs and interests of this present evil world. He likened God's Kingdom blessings to a great feast. This is a common illustration throughout the Scriptures – a feast of fat things with wines well refined, is the Prophet Isaiah's description of the Millennial blessings and glories which the Lord has in reservation for the world of mankind. The Prophet declares that the Lord will in this mountain spread a feast. (Isa. 25:6.) The mountain is the Kingdom, the dominion of Christ when it shall be set up, his Church being glorified with him in power, and blessings of very rich and choice kind will be set forth for the whole world of mankind.

The Jews usually ate two meals in a day: the first might be termed breakfast, and was usually very simple, very plain – bread, olives, milk, etc.; the second and principal meal of the day was called sometimes dinner and sometimes supper, and consisted of more elaborate dishes, according to the ability of each family. The great feasts were usually made about sundown. Our Lord's parable pictures such a great feast, for it speaks of oxen and fatlings being killed, which implies hundreds of guests. In these great feasts it was customary to send out the notifications long in advance, without specifying exactly the time, which would depend upon contingent circumstances. On the day of the feast, when it was assured that there would be no miscarriage of the arrangements, servants were sent to those already notified or bidden that they might come promptly to the feast.

Our Lord represents the host of his parable as getting ready the supper on a grand scale, and then sending word to the previously bidden ones to come. Contrary to all precedent these guests declined, literally "begged off," asked to be excused, did not appreciate the honor done them, and sought for one or another excuse to avoid going to the feast. Such great feasts were made by princes or very wealthy men, and it was considered a high honor to have an invitation and to attend. Our Lord purposely made the parable the very contrary to the custom. One excuse was that the invited guest had recently purchased property and must examine it; another had purchased five yoke of oxen and needed to inspect them, test them; another had married a wife, etc. When the servant returned and reported that the bidden guests had declined to come the host was indignant, as he had every right to be. It was indeed a shameful procedure from any standpoint to accept an invitation, to allow the host to expect the invited one and to make elaborate preparations, and then at the final moment for the latter to make some trivial excuse.

"THEY THAT WERE BIDDEN"

As the parable refers to Jehovah's invitation to the blessings of the Kingdom, so those in the parable who originally were bidden, but who began to make excuse, were the Jews. To them God had given notice respecting the coming feast. They as a nation had declared that they would be very glad indeed to accept the high honor which he had conferred upon them in bidding them first to the special favors and privileges of the Kingdom. The feast had been in preparation for more than eighteen centuries from its first announcement. Our Lord with the apostles was the servant of Jehovah to inform his chosen people that all things were now ready, to come in prepared condition of heart to enter into the Kingdom, to enjoy its bounteous feast of rich blessings in their own hearts and lives, to be changed, begotten of the Spirit, that they might become New Creatures and heirs of God and joint-

heirs with Messiah in that Kingdom. What a wonderful offer! How we should have expected that the whole people of Israel would have joyously hailed the message, and cried Hosanna to God in the highest! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah – the Messiah.

But no! the guests on the contrary looked at the servant and said, "We do not believe that this will be so grand a feast as we had supposed. The servant looks so meek, so gentle, so lowly of heart, that we feel it indicates that the feast will be a very tame affair; and now, separated as we are, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, we do not believe that we would very much enjoy the feast. We will not say this in so many words, we will preserve an outward form of godliness, and instead of confessing the truth on the subject we will merely make excuses to ourselves or to the servant of being too busy, etc. We will send our regrets instead of attending, although really we have no regrets. Indeed we feel that we will be happier pursuing our usual course of selfish ambition rather than get too close to the Lord, to his supervision, and the rules of righteousness which must certainly obtain in connection with those whom he would honor."

The parable represents that the entire company of those who were bidden refused – failed to hearken to the servant or to come to the feast. Those who did receive our Lord and his message were so few, as compared with the entire Jewish nation, as to leave them almost unworthy of being mentioned, but, additionally, those who received Jesus were in large proportion the publicans and sinners, who in their day were considered rather as moral and social outcasts, and not at all recognized as the ones eligible to the Kingdom which God had promised to the holy. The Scribes and Pharisees counted themselves the holy people, and claimed for themselves the blessings, the invitation to the feast. Practically none of these received the Lord or came to the feast.

The host, who had made so great provision for the Jewish nation, "was angry" – not mad, not in a rage, but indignant, and with perfect propriety he decided that "None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." The supper of this parable, therefore, is not the only parable mentioned in the Scriptures, is not the supper mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah, which would be a feast of fat things for all nations. Because other Scriptures clearly show us that when that secondary feast for all nations shall be spread, Israel will have the first opportunity of participating in it. (Rom. 11:25-32.) The feast here spoken of is evidently the marriage feast of another parable. Its blessings are not the general favors and mercies that are coming to the world by and by, but the special blessings and favors of God which, in the beginning of the Millennial age, will be bestowed upon the glorified Christ, our Lord, the Head, and the Church his body, the Bride.

Natural Israel had the first opportunity for attaining the spiritual blessings to which spiritual Israel now aspires. **[R3834 : page 251]** The Apostle explains this in Rom. 11:7-26, where he pictures the favored ones of God as an olive-tree, and informs us that the branches of that olive-tree at the Lord's first advent represented the Israelites, and that nearly all of these branches were broken off because of unbelief, because of failure to accept the invitation to the feast, because of a lack of appreciation of the spiritual blessings to be bestowed because of lack of faith. The Apostle tells us that God has accepted the believers in Christ of every nation, and that these are by faith engrafted into the olive-tree to take the place of the natural branches, the Jews broken off from relationship to this blessing through unbelief.

THE MAIMED AND HALT GATHERED

As the Scribes and Pharisees, the more devout of the Jewish nation, constituted the class to whom the Kingdom was primarily offered, so the class whom they rejected, the publicans and

sinners, constituted the class described in this part of the parable as the poor, the halt, the maimed and the blind. When the better educated, the less morally lame, the less spiritually blind, rejected our Lord and his message respecting the Kingdom, he at once began to seek out the publicans and sinners, and to these his teachings were chiefly directed – they were invited to come to the feast which their more educated, more outwardly religious and pious brethren of the Scribes and Pharisees did not appreciate. But the servant could not find enough of this class to furnish the feast with guests according to the original arrangement of the host. The explanation of this part of the parable is that God, knowing the end from the beginning, had determined a definite number to constitute the Church, the Bride class, to be joint-heirs with his son in the bounties and blessings of the Kingdom, represented by this great feast.

We understand the Scriptures to teach that this elect number is 144,000. Jesus and his disciples, as the servants of Jehovah, gathered as many of these poor, halt, lame Jews as were willing to come to the feast. About 500 accepted the invitation in our Lord's time and several thousand more at Pentecost, under the ministration of the Spirit, while several thousand more responded to the same glorious message further on, and ultimately the message reached those of every country. But in all we are assured that only a remnant of Israel was found worthy of the Kingdom honors. How many in all we could only guess, but we see no reason for placing the estimate higher than ten thousand. Even if some one would estimate that double this number more or less accepted of Christ, we should think it strange, as compared with present conditions, if more than ten thousand became footstep followers of our Lord Jesus in the narrow way of self-sacrifice even unto death, through which narrow way only can any attain to this great feast.

"GO YE INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES"

Suppose that a remnant of ten thousand Jews did accept the divine favor in the very spirit of it, this would leave 134,000 short of the furnishing of the feast with the predetermined number of guests. Would the householder abandon his original arrangement? Nay: he determined that the full complement of guests should be there, as this parable shows, and hence the servants were found outside that city, the Jewish nation, to which belonged the promises by divine favor. Those servants were sent into the byways and hedges, into various parts of the world, to find guests for this great feast. They were bidden to urge all that they met, up to a certain number, to come to the feast. As the Lord of the feast had prescribed the number of his guests, they were not to cease inviting until the full complement had been found, nor were they to invite any more than the fixed number. This part of the message had been going out to the Gentiles ever since Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, heard of the blessed opening of this door of opportunity to the Gentiles.

Throughout the Gospel age the Lord has directed his servants and guided in the work, so that at no time would more than the elect number be even invited. This accounts to us for much of the opposition and persecution which the Lord has permitted to come from time to time upon his servants and upon those who are willing to accept his invitation. He not only wishes to have guests at his feast, joint-heirs with Christ in the Kingdom, but elsewhere he has shown that he has predetermined that these only are the ones he will accept as copies of his Son. This signifies, then, that those who hear this invitation and are inclined to respond favorably will be tested by opposition and persecution, which in various ways will test and prove them and discourage and hinder any who are not of the stamp, the character, which our Lord has predetermined will be satisfactory to himself. He assures us that faith and zeal are amongst the characteristics necessary, and he

has provided for the covering of every blemish and defect where these acceptable characteristics are found.

"VIRGINS HER COMPANIONS"

To our understanding other Scriptures show that many more than the 144,000 have accepted Christ and have made a consecration, agreeing to follow the great servant of God to the feast. Many of these, a "great company," although following in a measure, and in that measure satisfactory to the Lord, are not up to the divine standard of love and zeal. Nevertheless, since they exercised a sufficiency of faith to leave the world behind with a view to accepting God's favors, he will not permit them to suffer loss, but will give them also a share in the feast, though not in the chief seats of honor and distinction with the heavenly Bridegroom and the 144,000 constituting the Bride. The "more than conquerors," we are assured, shall in this feast sit with our Lord in his throne and share his glory, honor and immortality; but to the great company, after a certain purifying and washing, tribulation, there will be granted the honor of association, not in the throne but before the throne, not wearing crowns but bearing palms, not constituting pillars and living stones in the Temple but doing service in the Temple in humbler positions. All of these are represented in Revelation 7, and again in Revelation 19 we have the intimation that although this feast is specifically the nuptial feast of Christ and the Church, nevertheless the "great company," (Rev. 7) the virgins, the Bride's companions, will be invited to share in this nuptial feast – "Blessed are they that are invited to the marriage-supper of the Lamb." – Rev. 19:9; Psa. 45:14,15.

It will be later on that the feast of fat things for the **[R3834 : page 252]** world will be spread out, and the intervening time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation shall so plow up the fallow ground of the human heart that the masses of mankind will indeed be ready to hail the blessings of that day. And hence

we read of it that there the Desire of all Nations shall come. The bread of life will be provided to whosoever will accept it, the water of life to all who are thirsty, the Spirit and the Bride shall say, Come, and whosoever will may come and partake freely.

How wonderfully grand and broad are the divine provisions, the feast which God has prepared! What a grand privilege we enjoy in that our ears already have heard of this special feast, to which the invitations have been going forth throughout this Gospel age – this nuptial feast by which we all will celebrate our union forever with the heavenly Bridegroom in the glorious estate of the Kingdom which is to bless the world. Let us not be like those of the parable who disesteemed the offer. Let us, on the contrary, following the example of the Apostle and his exhortation, lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us – one weakness or difficulty in one person, another weakness or difficulty in another – and let us run with patience the race set before us.

Let us be so enthused with the glorious possibilities of this great feast that we will not be content to walk or to meander slowly, toying with the affairs of this world or the flowers or attractions beside the way, which would lure us from the way, but let us press along. The way is rugged, and has been purposely so arranged by the Lord that only the zealous, the earnest, the faithful, the loyal, will be able to attain to the prize. Let us not be discouraged either, as though it were an impossibility to attain the blessing to which we have been called. The fact that the Lord has called us implies that he has made it possible for us to attain, and this possibility we see centers in our dear Redeemer: not merely in the work which he accomplished for us in the past when he redeemed us, but also in his gracious assistances which he renders us all along the journey. Let us remember his assurance that he is able and willing to make all things work together for good to them that love him, to the called ones according to his purpose.

THE BLESSING OF THORNS

When we thank our heavenly Father
For the blessings of each day;
For the flowers that are strewn
O'er the roughness of the way;
When we thank him for the roses
That we gather day by day,
Do we ever see the blessing
Of the thorns along life's way?

Oft we thank him for the sunshine
That he sends us from above;
Do we ever in the shadow
Recognize his tender love?
When our feet grow worn and weary,
And our crosses hard to bear;
Oft the way seems long and dreary,
Knowing not his tender care.

When the clouds that round us darken
Change to night our radiant day,
Oft we murmur that the sunshine
Has been hidden from our way.
But our Father in his wisdom
Sends the dark as well as light;
Can we doubt his loving kindness,
In whose keeping all is right?

If no shadow veiled our pathway,
And we knew no ill to fear,
Would we cling so closely to him?
Would our Father seem so near?
As when darkness gathers round us,

And our faith in self is lost,
We but trust him, and the Savior
Gives us strength to bear our cross.

In our path if all were sunshine,
Would we look to him for light?
And if all below were brightness,
Then would heaven seem so bright?
When we meet beyond the shadows,
In that land of endless day,
We will thank our heavenly Father
For the darkness of the way.

Oft we cannot see his kindness
Through the darkness, pain and loss;
But we know the crown is dearer
For the sharpness of the cross.
And when in his throne we gather,
And our dear Redeemer meet,
We will thank our heavenly Father
For the thorns that pierced our feet.

– *Eugenia M. Doyle.*
