

In the entire story (Matthew 22:1-16) the king is the only active agent. The text has the form of a parable, in the style of parables, with allegories inserted into it. The parable ends with verse 10: *so the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

Scholars believe Matthew added verses 11-14, which are absurd as an actual event. They can only be understood allegorically. We will return to this shortly.

Between 300 BCE and 100 CE, the marriage feast became a symbol of the Messianic Banquet. Isaiah (25:6-9) declared that God would prepare a banquet for *all* people and destroy the veil that covers *all* nations: death would be defeated. By the time of Jesus, expectations for the Messianic Banquet had undergone radical revision.

The Essenes, a Jewish sect that flourished from mid 2nd century BCE to the first Jewish revolt against Rome (66-70 CE), believed the banquet would be specifically connected to the coming of the Messiah. However, the participants would be limited to the wise, the intelligent, and the perfect. These would be assembled by rank.

The Essenes shrunk-wrapped Isaiah's inclusive vision to fit their exclusive ideology. Jesus sides with Isaiah. The NRSV reads *Go therefore into the main streets . . .* The Greek does not refer to "main streets" but to the point where the roads end or begin. The slaves are to go out of the city to the borders of the kingdom. They are to invite everyone they find.

Preparation was vital to a successful marriage feast for both host and guests. An invitation would go out in advance requiring an RSVP so the host knew how much food to prepare and how deeply to reach into the wine cellar.

According to the Talmud, the number of guests would determine the kind and amounts of meat served. A small celebration involving four people would require one or two chickens. Eight guests required two ducks. Up to fifteen people required a goat. For seventy-five people a fatted calf was killed.

The king in this parable made ready an ox and fatted calves. It means a large number of invitees promised to be present. When the announcement goes out that the feast is ready, no one shows up. It was considered a large insult to accept the host's invitation and then make an excuse for not attending.

The king is enraged. The guests who spurn the king's invitation, who murdered some of the evangelists sent to announce that all was ready, are in turn murdered and their city burned to the ground. Matthew is referencing the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, forty years after Jesus' crucifixion and ten to fifteen years before Matthew wrote.

Ulrich Luz, author of a three volume commentary on "Matthew," wonders if this parable offers an image of God that is cruel, deficient, and in the final analysis unchristian. He concludes, *the shortcoming of this parable could be that the "son" about whose wedding it speaks appears nowhere in the parable.*

We might wonder about the relationship between grace and judgment, between forgiveness and accountability. Should the king overlook the indifference shown him and forget the murder of his servants?

What of the improperly dressed guest bound hand and foot and thrown into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth? While Matthew appears to believe the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish religious leaders (the guests who said they would come to the feast but didn't show up) meant the Gentiles (everyone and anyone hanging out in the streets) would inherit the kingdom of God, this did not mean salvation was a *possession* of the church.

From the earliest interpretations of this story, the wedding garment refers to "works of love." The church will receive the kingdom only to the extent that it produces good fruit. Both the bad (evil) and the good live side by side in the church. The church will also face the final judgment.

Jan Karski was born in Poland, became a citizen of this country and taught at Georgetown University. Elie Wiesel found him there, living in obscurity, trying to keep out of sight. Wiesel came across Karski's name in the course of his studies of the Shoah and discovered that Karski had written a book about the Shoah in 1944.

Karski was a courier for the Polish underground and the Polish government in exile from the years 1939 to 1942. He was captured by, and escaped from, both the Gestapo and the Soviets. He was given the assignment to return to Poland, to the Warsaw Ghetto, and to the notorious concentration camp, Belzec, to see if the rumors were true.

He reported that the worst was true and so informed the leaders of the Allied nations. That brought him to the US and President Roosevelt. FDR listened without comment. He talked to Justice Frankfurter, a Jew, who said he did not believe the report.

Karski gave some lectures around the US, wrote a book, and then dropped out of sight until Wiesel found him. Wiesel told Claude Lanzmann, who made the epic TV documentary, *Shoah*, about this Pole living in America who was a witness to the holocaust. Lanzmann interviewed Karski for the film, bringing him out of obscurity.

When asked why, after all these years of being silent he decided to speak, he said there were two reasons. First, a whole generation has grown up not knowing what happened, not knowing what race prejudice and hatred toward other people can do if it is not opposed.

Secondly, he said, *I did it because I believe there will be a final judgment, and God will say to me, 'Karski, I gave you a soul. Your body is gone, but your soul is mine. I gave it to you. What did you do with your soul?' And I will have to answer him.*

The good news in the final judgment is that what we do with our lives matters to God, if not to anyone else. No matter how insignificant or unappreciated we think our lives are, God's judgment gives them eternal significance. What we do with what is entrusted to us just may be what we wear to meet the king.