

Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen (Part Nine)

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Over the last 40 years, especially, in the church of God, Christian loyalty has been tested repeatedly. It is interesting that the period of disloyalty by those who left the fellowship coincides with the attitude of most of the members of the church in Laodicea described in Revelation 3.

Revelation 3:15-17 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.'

What image forms in your mind of the person who is neither cold nor hot in making moral and spiritual decisions? This is the person who is faithful to his own humanly reasoned desires.

What picture comes into view of the person who has need of nothing? This is the person who is smug, who does not need others, and is loyal only to himself.

The *New World Dictionary of American English* defines a loyal person as one who is, "faithful to those persons, ideals, etc. that one is under obligation to defend, support, or be true to."

It defines loyalty as the, "quality, state, or instance of being loyal; faithfulness or faithful adherence to a person, government, cause, duty, etc."

Let us look for a moment at the tribe of Judah to see a faithful adherence to a cause, and loyalty to family. The walls of Jerusalem, having been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, remained in ruins for almost one-and-a-half centuries despite futile attempts to rebuild them (Ezra 4:6-23). By about 440 to 430 BC, such a helpless situation made Jerusalem vulnerable to her numerous enemies. Yet from a mixture of apathy and fear, the Jews failed to rectify this glaring deficiency of a lack of a defense and protection. The leaders and the people had evidently become reconciled to this sad state of affairs for their families and tribe.

Then, God sent them the dynamic catalyst in the loyal leader: Nehemiah.

Nehemiah 4:1 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews.

Nehemiah 4:6-14 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall." And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and

cause the work to cease." So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us." Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, will fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

Nehemiah was calling upon Judah to remember the greatness of God and to base their loyalty to their families and brethren on God's faithfulness. God would be faithful to His covenant promises, and therefore, loyal to His people.

The Jews were willing to faithfully guard their compatriots and families and even die for them because they were loyal to one another. Their loyalty for one another was founded on God's loyalty to them and on having the same goal to fight for and on having the desire to work together to pursue that goal. They were family, and they were brethren. Nehemiah said, "Fight for your brethren!"

This is the attitude we should have in our relationship with others in God's church. We are spiritual family. Faithfulness to God leads to loyalty to one another.

The Hebrew word translated into English as "fight" in verse 14, is a fiercer word than it appears. According to *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*, the word means to eat, to consume, to war against, to eat up, to devour. It seems to have been a very early mode of expressing the violence of enemies in war, and their determination to conquer. As Joshua says of the Canaanites, "They are bread for us" (Numbers 14:9).

The significance of Nehemiah's admonishment was that they were to fight for their families and brethren with their all—with everything they had to offer. Their loyalty to God and one another was to be total—even to death.

Friendship

Every Christian remembers that Jesus Christ said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Loyalty is associated especially with friendship. The friendship of David and Jonathan recorded in I Samuel 20 is the classic example in the Bible.

The book of Proverbs has sayings about a friend who sticks closer than a brother; who keeps secrets; and who criticizes in the best interest of a person.

On a more lighthearted note, it has been said, "You can always tell a friend, for when you have made a fool of yourself, he doesn't feel you have done a permanent job."

Regarding our relationships with one another, an expression of the ideal is the proverb that we desire loyalty in a person.

Proverbs 19:22 (RSV) What is desired in a man is loyalty.

The word for "loyalty" in the RSV, is translated "kindness" in the NKJV and KJV, and as "unfailing love" in the NIV. These are core characteristics of loyalty.

An Issue of Faithfulness

Loyalty is a relational term. While one can be faithful to an ideal, duty, or vow, one is loyal only to a person. In a general sense, loyalty, faithfulness, and trustworthiness are used interchangeably. Loyalty indicates enduring commitment to a person over a long period of time, often with the implication of the commitment persisting in the face of obstacles that threaten such endurance.

Loyalty is the trust and faithfulness that people pledge to and expect from each other in a relationship between relatives, friends, brethren, master and subject, employer and employee, or nation and citizens.

These relationships vary in their degrees of friendship. A loyal friend sticks by and proves reliable even in adverse circumstances. He is also faithful and loyal in his dealings.

Biblically, loyalty points beyond human relationships to the relationship of God with His people, a relationship based on covenant and expressive of eternal love from which no saint can ever be separate.

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of God's loyalty to us and our loyalty to Him, nothing can separate us from our intimate loving relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. True loyalty on our part requires humility and outgoing concern for others. The result is that as the household of God nothing should be able to separate us from being loyal.

Now, we are not talking about blind loyalty. We are talking about loyalty based on truth, not on speculation or assumptions.

Our integrity is manifested in our loyal treatment of others in word and action. Our families and our brethren yearn for our loyalty. We all want friendships with each other based on faithfulness. We all want to believe our friend will stand by us through thick and thin. And, that our friend is trustworthy and has our best interest at heart.

On a more lighthearted note, it has been said, "A true friend will see you through, when others see that you *are* through."

The New Testament also refers to faithfulness and loyalty as human virtues relative to roles. Role expectations create a firm loyal bond. Social expectations are attached to these roles, creating a kind of covenant, and thereby creating role obligations that must be met out of loyalty to individuals and faithfulness to a covenant.

In I Timothy 3:11, women are exhorted to be "faithful in all things," that is, to fulfill the role obligations of women. Out of this comes loyalty to her husband and family. The same is true between

brethren in that our responsibility to each other is a role that God expects us to fulfill faithfully. It is used in a similar way in Matthew's and Luke's parable references to faithful servants and faithful stewards. "Faithful" here is very much role-relative; but the point of the parables is not that the Christian should allow role expectations to totally determine his or her behavior, but that one be faithful to God and give that loyalty precedence over all others.

Faithfulness is applied to the roles of witness and minister, child, brother, and even perhaps the role of martyr (as in the case of Antipas in Revelation 2:13, where the role expectation is not to deny the faith).

I have not been talking about blind loyalty to any individual or blind faith to any cause. Loyalty must be based on faithful dedication to God's commandments, statutes, and laws. Loyalty must be in accordance with and never contradicting the principles of God.

Loyal and Faithful Jesus Christ

It is important that the New Testament describes Jesus as faithful. He is called a merciful and faithful High Priest. He fulfills that role finally and ultimately "in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people," as Hebrews 2:17 tells us.

Also, Jesus Christ is faithful in Moses' role; He surpasses and fulfills the faithfulness and loyalty of Moses in building and ruling the house of God—the household of God—the church of God.

Hebrews 3:1-6 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

The writer of Hebrews goes on to say that the children of Israel continually tested God's faithfulness and loyalty, and *always* God was faithful to His covenant, and He was loyal to those who were loyal to Him. But they suffered from the human trait that comes out of rebellion—unbelief.

Hebrews 3:12-13 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Unbelief is faithlessness, and part of faith is loyalty, therefore, disloyalty equates to unbelief.

The servant owns nothing, is heir to nothing, has no authority, and no right to control anything, and is himself wholly at the will of another.

A son, however, is the heir of all, has a prospective right to all, and is looked up to by all with respect. But the idea here is not merely that Christ is a Son; it is that as a Son He is placed over the whole arrangement of the household, and is one to whom all is entrusted as if it were His own already.

We are part of God the Father and Jesus Christ's Family. It is where we belong. That is, we belong to the Family over which Christ the Son is placed.

Jesus Christ is the consummation of God's determined loyalty to His gracious covenant relationship with His people. Christ is faithful and loyal to the Father and the Father to Him. We have the wonderful opportunity to be part of this faithful and loyal spiritual Family. The training ground for it is here and now—in our own households and in the household of God.

Loyalty means enduring commitment to a person over a long period of time, often with the implication of the commitment persisting in the face of obstacles that threaten the lasting commitment.

Jesus has something exciting to say about friendship and loyalty:

John 15:13-17 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another."

It greatly enhances the love of Christ, that while the instances of those who have been willing to die for friends have been so rare, Jesus was willing to die for sinners, who rejected Him, persecuted Him, reviled Him, scorned Him, and wanted to kill Him.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast

While teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus presents a parable to the chief priests and elders. To make His point, Jesus uses the illustration of a wedding feast given by a king in celebration of his son's marriage.

It reveals the blending of mercy and justice in God's character, as well as the Jewish leaders' neglect of God's offers of mercy and the judgment that falls on those who abuse their privileges. They scoffed at His offer of friendship.

In the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus answers the Pharisees, who were enraged at Him for His blunt rebuke of them in Matthew 21:33-44. Jesus continues His frank teaching to expose their rejection of the gospel, portraying them as ungrateful citizens who would reject their king's invitation. In this parable, Jesus uncovers what was going on in their minds and in their conduct, as opposed to what they said.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast illustrates God's gracious invitation in the gospel and of the indifferent and even arrogant way men and women respond to it. It also refers to outer darkness as the end of those who presume to enter God's presence without the wedding garment of Christ's righteousness.

Matthew 22:1-14 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, 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. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 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. 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.' "For many are called, but few are chosen."

There are significant features in this parable. Clearly, "a certain king" refers to the Father, and "the king's son," the bridegroom, is Jesus Christ. "The bride" is God's church, but it is not a primary issue in this parable, nor is the marriage itself.

It is the wedding feast that is prominent, illustrating the full benefits of God's truth: fellowship with God, excellence, abundance, and happiness. God offers a magnificent spiritual banquet to "the called." The glorious feast He has prepared includes pardon of sin, favor with God, peace of conscience, exceedingly great and precious promises, access to the throne of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

This parable is also found in Luke, though with some differences. The fullest form is Matthew's. Luke does not mention the guest who is cast out. But Luke 14:15-24 contains an elaboration of the excuses made by those who refused the king's invitation.

Luke 14:18-20 "But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'

Those Who Would Not Come

Let us look closer at those who would not come.

The story begins with a king who has prepared a wedding feast for his son and sends servants to those who have been invited to tell them that the feast is now ready and that they should come. They refuse to come!

Matthew 22:1-3 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, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come."

The first invitation differed from the second and third invitations significantly. God offered ancient Israel a part in His plan of salvation, but they could not keep focused on Him. Through every call addressed to them by the prophets, they slipped and fell in willful ignorance and rebelliousness.

Those invited by the first invitation would not come. They returned their invitation unopened. They treated it indifferently as if to despise it. So, preoccupied with worldly interests, they would not even take the time to open it. Their refusal is an insult, of course. It is dishonoring to the son, the king, and even to the servants who carried the king's message. But the king is patient at first. He sends other servants to repeat the invitation.

Matthew 22:4 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 again, they refuse. This time, however, they do not merely reject the invitation, they also mistreat the messengers and kill some of them. The king sends an army to destroy the murderers and burn their city.

Matthew 22:5-7 "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. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city."

The second invitation differed from the first and third invitations significantly. This invitation is more precise and urgent than the first. Everything was ready for the marriage celebration, yet the servants sent in this round of invitations were no more successful than the first. The king's kindness was met with contemptuous ridicule; indifference became scorn. The invitees' business interests meant more than their obligations to the king. Some were even murderously hostile, showing their wickedness in their treatment of his servants.

Since the beginning, God's servants, the prophets, were ridiculed, attacked, and abused; and since Christ's death, His servants have often been just as cruelly treated. The disrespectful refusal of the invitation, leading to the more grievous sin of murder, results in unexpected judgment.

The initial prophetic fulfillment of this can be seen in Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70, when the Roman armies of Titus ("his armies") destroyed the city. God carried out this judgment on a people who utterly rejected both His Son and His servants.

Wherever God gives His gracious invitation, Satan is there with an alluring offer of his own. Nevertheless, the ultimate fault lies with the foolish refuser of wisdom. To reject and ignore wisdom and not learn from its rebuke has serious consequences.

Proverbs 1:24-32 Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have none of my counsel, and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For, the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them."

Why did they refuse God's gracious offer? Because of the ease at which the simple (or foolish) are enticed and turn away. They turned away their ears from hearing the truth and were complacently comfortable with believing lies. The prosperity of the fools gives them a false assurance; they deceive themselves that they will never see judgment.

Proverbs 1:33 "But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure without fear of evil."

By contrast, heeding the way of wisdom gives safety and peace. The one who hears the voice of wisdom in preference to the enticements of the wicked will not fear evil, having a full consciousness of God's protection.

The Refusal of the Jews

Now, let us get back to the reason. The Parable of the Wedding Feast is so easy to understand. It is that nearly every part is discussed in plain terms elsewhere.

- The king is God, sitting on the throne of the universe.
- The son is His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.
- The banquet is the marriage supper of the Lamb.
- The servants are the early preachers of the gospel, and later ministers of God.
- Those to whom the invitation was first given are the upright Jews.
- Those who eventually come to the banquet are the outcast and poor, even Gentiles.

Verses 11 and 12 of John 1 suggest that on one level, at least a few of Jesus' parables deal with the refusal of the Jews to receive Jesus when he first came to them.

John 1:11-12 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

This was a major puzzle during Jesus' physical lifetime, as well as afterward, so it is not strange to find parables that either deal with it directly or allude to it indirectly.

For example, the older son in the Parable of the Prodigal Son represents Israel and her religious leaders particularly. So do the workers in the vineyard who were hired early but were paid the same as those who came late. So does the Pharisee in the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector.

These parables all explore the thinking of those who supposed they had worked long and faithfully for God, unlike the common people or Gentiles, and were resentful when the grace of God was shown to people they considered unworthy of it.

The unique element in the Parable of the Wedding Feast is the willful refusal of those who were invited. It was not that they *could not* come. Rather, they *would not*. The reason for their refusal is not spelled out, but the way the servants were treated suggests what it was.

Matthew 22:6 And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.

If the invited guests felt that way toward the servants, they obviously felt that way toward the king who had sent them and would have seized, mistreated, and killed him if they could have. In other words, they would not come because they despised the king and were hostile to him. The leaders of Christ's day bitterly resented this portrait of them, but resent it or not, that is precisely the way these religious leaders thought and acted. In the story Jesus told immediately before the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus told of tenant farmers who beat, killed, and stoned the owner's servants. At last they murdered his son.

In the chapter following Matthew 22, Jesus pronounces woe (i.e., anguish) on these same people.

Matthew 23:29-37 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell [i.e., Gehenna]? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!"

We know that at the last these rebellious subjects of the King of heaven killed Christ. As Stephen later put it,

Acts 7:52-53 “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”

Today, we are not so inclined to kill prophets. If we are honest, however, we will admit that the same spirit is present among many of our contemporaries as they dispose of God’s messengers by ridicule or neglect, if not by more violent hostility. They willfully reject God’s invitation—His calling.

Today, this same attitude is often found among the children of godly parents; dedicated from their birth, prayed for by loving devotion, listening to the Word of God from their childhood, and yet unconverted. We are hopeful and expectant that they will accept the truth and live God’s way of life. But often, that does not always happen! There are many excuses made by people for not regularly attending church services. A minister may seem too abstract: but plain-speaking is desired. He may be too deep: but nice stories are preferred. Nevertheless, the self-excusers would not listen any better to a new messenger than to the old one.

A self-excuser is someone who tries to give an unacceptable reason for being excused; he offers a plea in justification of a fault or for release from an obligation or promise. Fundamentally, he is a liar—a promise breaker. With regard to the church, he is the worst thing of all—a covenant breaker.

Leviticus 26:14-16 'But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart.

Some who are invited to the wedding banquet do not openly express their hatred of the one who gives it, but they make excuses.

Matthew 22:5 But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.

Remember, Jesus elaborates that point in Luke’s version.

Luke 14:18-20 “But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.'"

Each of those excuses is comparatively trivial. As Jesus tells it, it is not a case of a man being on his deathbed, unable to move, nor a woman being kept at home by a violent husband.

So what if a man has just bought a field? There is no reason why he would have to see it on that day and miss the banquet. The field could wait. There was no reason why the second person had to try out his oxen. He could have waited a few days. Even the excuse about marriage had no substance. Are we to think that a new bride would be unwelcome at a feast to which her husband was invited?

Besides that, the invitation was not the first they had received. In both versions of the parable Jesus says the invitation was sent to those who had already been invited once. The guests had no excuse for failing to arrange their schedules accordingly. When the final summons came, they should have been eagerly anticipating the banquet.

Many who reject the gospel invitation today have equally flimsy excuses and will rightly incur the King's wrath. They say they are too busy for spiritual things. They say they have fields, or patients, or property, or bonds, or whatever it is that imprisons their minds and keeps them from loyalty to God and our Savior.

You do not have to murder a prophet to miss out. You have only to waste away your time on things that will eventually pass away and thus let your opportunities for repentance and faith pass by.

Those Who Came

Half the parable (verses 1-7) is about those who despised the king and would not come to the banquet, but the second half (verses 8-14) tells of those who did come.

Matthew 22:9 'Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.'

Luke makes it plain that these persons were drawn from the lower ranks of life.

Luke 14:21 "So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.'

Luke 14:23 Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.'

This seems an extraordinary thing for the master to have done, or in Matthew's case, for a king to have done. But when we remember that the master represents God, it seems inevitable. God must be honored and Jesus must be effective in His work.

But surely God is dishonored by the kinds of people who come, someone might say. These are not the important people, not the wise, not the strong, not the mighty. True, and God admits it.

I Corinthians 1:27-29 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Salvation must be completely by God's grace; otherwise, God does not get the glory.

The third invitation differed from the first and second invitations significantly.

Matthew 22:8-10 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 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.

This invitation reveals divine mercy offered to the Gentiles in addition to the Israelites. The good and bad represent the whole spectrum of moral character. The king's invitation shows no partiality; God can call both the good and the bad out of this world.

But will the person repent, change his ways? Human goodness cannot earn an invitation to be called. So, the good and bad are only welcome by invitation from God through the blood of Christ.

II Thessalonians 1:3-12 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Man without a Garment

At this point in Matthew 22:10, the parable seems to be over, which is the case in Luke. But Matthew is not quite finished, because Jesus wanted to emphasize a much-needed warning concerning the man who came to the feast without a wedding garment.

Matthew 22:10-12 . . . And the wedding hall was filled with guests. 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.

The disadvantaged sometimes possess an inverse pride. Because they are not rich or famous or powerful, but poor and unknown and weak, they feel they deserve the king's bounty and can come before Him in their own character and on the basis of their own "good" works.

Jesus exposed that error by showing how the man who came to the feast without a garment was immediately confronted by the king.

Why is it important for the guests to wear proper wedding garments? The guests do not enter the wedding hall immediately. Those gathered from the highways would be inappropriately clothed, so time is given them to clothe themselves in proper attire provided by the king. The parable suggests that, not only did the man not have on a wedding garment, but he did so intentionally. He decides against clothing himself properly, even though the appropriate clothing is available.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

What is the wedding garment? It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, of course. It is that perfect righteousness that God provides freely to all who repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. If we are clothed in Christ's righteousness, we will be able to stand before God and rejoice in our salvation, but only if we are spiritually clothed. If we are not clothed in Christ's righteousness, we will be speechless before God and will be cast out.

Matthew 22:12 "So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless."

The words "the man was speechless" inescapably gets our attention, because that is the same thought Paul expresses in Romans 3:19, when he wraps up his powerful indictment of humanity. Paul concludes that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God, because all have sinned.

Romans 3:19-20 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

His presence at the wedding is a sign of his rebellion against the king's authority and majesty, symbolized by the feast. When the man realizes his sin against the king's order, he is speechless as his judgment is pronounced, because he has no valid excuse.

The wedding garment, conspicuous and distinctive, is Christ's righteousness attributed to the guest, sanctifying him as righteousness also.

Revelation 19:7-9 "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

The wedding garment symbolizes the habit of love, sincerity, repentance, humility, and obedience. It replaces the street clothes that stand for the habits of pride, enmity, rebellion, and sinfulness.

Biblically, beautiful clothing indicates spiritual character developed by submission to God. Paul exhorts Christians to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" like a garment. Clothing, then, represents a Christ-covered life, and as a result, character consistent with God's way of life.

Matthew 22:13 "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.'"

This describes the sentence of the guest without proper attire; he is bound and cast into outer darkness—death. This cannot be describing those at the actual marriage of Jesus Christ. Once the firstfruits are proceeding on to the marriage supper, God has already changed them "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," made them incorruptible, and He will never cast them out.

Refinement

It is essential to God's plan to preserve, train, and perfect His church. We find that all that the seven churches of chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation persevere through is for the purpose of spiritual refinement.

Psalms 66:8-12 Oh, bless our God, you peoples! And make the voice of His praise to be heard, who keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved. For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water, but You brought us out to rich fulfillment.

Though the experience of metalworking is unfamiliar to most people, we still talk about God's melting our hearts, and purifying or refining us. We tend to see this individualistically rather than corporately. But God does both, and by refining us individually, He refines His church corporately. Our actions individually affect the church corporately as a whole—as a body. Individual decisions do not mean independent actions.

The Bible often stresses refinement's positive benefits rather than the element of judgment although both maybe involved. This is why the refining process requires the judgment that sin be removed from the body beginning on an individual level.

In this church history series we have seen that throughout the last almost 2,000 years, God's people have experience the same types of trials, tests, and persecutions. Some time periods have had more severe trials than others. But regardless of the time period, God has tried and tested every individual that He has called, for the purpose of separating out and completing His elect in preparation as firstfruits for the Kingdom of God. "Many are called but few are chosen."

The true church of God is spiritual, not physical. And, although it is visible in the sense that the saints carry out God's will within visible organizations, it is not some politically organized denomination that one joins. We are not baptized into any humanly devised organization, but into the body of Christ. Jesus did not die for one visible organization called a church. We cannot *join* the true church. Only God can call us and place us into it. The church is called the body of Christ because it is a spiritual organism whose head is Jesus Christ, just as a husband is head of his wife in the physical realm as we read in Ephesians 5:22-24.

From the beginning the church was subject to the rule of God. It was not a government set up by human beings. Jesus is head of the church. The true church of God is one spiritual church, composed of scattered members and united in spirit. The church that Jesus is building is composed of those scattered individuals who have God's Holy Spirit.

If we have submitted to God in faith and obedience, are genuinely repentant of our sins, have accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, were baptized with full submersion in water, and have received the Holy Spirit, and if we have done all the required things and produced good fruit, it is still by the grace of God through faith that we receive salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of God, not our own works.

It is not the blind grace of the tolerance of sin that Protestantism falsely calls "love," but it is a deep commitment by God the Father and Jesus Christ to see Their plan for the salvation of mankind through to the successful development and completion unto perfection of the firstfruits of the Kingdom of God, followed (at another time) by the salvation of the rest of humanity.

There are great rewards promised to the called who overcome: spiritual food (Rev 2:7), a new name (Revelation 2:17), authority (Revelation 2:26), white robes of righteousness (Revelation 3:5), a permanent position or responsibility (Revelation 3:12), enthronement (Revelation 3:21), and an eternal inheritance (Revelation 21:7).

In God's dedication to work individually with each of us, He mercifully forgives our sins as we repent and overcome them. It is by the grace of God that we are given the opportunity to be among the firstfruits of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus Christ reveals to the apostle John, as he writes to the church in Sardis, an essential principle that describes the proper garments of those who are worthy as overcomers.

Revelation 3:4-5 "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."