

Put On Thy Strength, O Zion

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Each of us should evaluate our temporal and spiritual priorities sincerely and prayerfully.

Parables are a defining feature of the Lord Jesus Christ's masterful approach to teaching. Simply defined, the Savior's parables are stories used to compare spiritual truths with material things and mortal experiences. For example, the New Testament Gospels are replete with teachings likening the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed,¹ to a pearl of great price,² to a householder and laborers in his vineyard,³ to ten virgins,⁴ and to many other things. During part of the Lord's Galilean ministry, the scriptures indicate that "without a parable spake he not unto them."⁵

The intended meaning or message of a parable typically is not expressed explicitly. Rather, the story only conveys divine truth to a receiver in proportion to his or her faith in God, personal spiritual preparation, and willingness to learn. Thus, an individual must exercise moral agency and actively "ask, seek, and knock"⁶ to discover the truths embedded in a parable.

I earnestly pray that the Holy Ghost will enlighten each of us as we now consider the importance of the parable of the royal marriage feast.

The Royal Marriage Feast

"And Jesus ... spake unto them again by parables, and said,

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

"And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

"Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

“But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.”⁷

In ancient times, one of the most joyous occasions in Jewish life was a wedding celebration—an event that would span a week or even two. Such an event required extensive planning, and guests were informed far in advance, with a reminder sent on the opening day of the festivities. An invitation from a king to his subjects to a wedding such as this was essentially considered a command. Yet, many of the bidden guests in this parable did not come.⁸

“The refusal to attend the king’s feast was a deliberate [act of] rebellion against ... royal authority and a personal indignity against both the reigning sovereign and his son. ... The turning away by one man to his farm and by another to his [business interests]”⁹ reflects their misguided priorities and total disregard of the king’s will.¹⁰

The parable continues:

“Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

“Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

“So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.”¹¹

The custom in those days was for the host of a wedding feast—in this parable, the king—to provide garments for the wedding guests. Such wedding garments were simple, nondescript robes that all attendees wore. In this way, rank and station were eliminated, and everyone at the feast could mingle as equals.¹²

People invited from the highways to attend the wedding would not have had the time or means to procure appropriate attire in preparation for the event. Consequently, the king likely gave guests the garments from his own wardrobe. Everyone was given the opportunity to clothe themselves in garments of royalty.¹³

As the king entered the wedding hall, he surveyed the audience and immediately noticed that one conspicuous guest was not wearing a wedding garment. The man was brought forward, and the king asked, “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.”¹⁴ In essence, the king asked, “Why are you not wearing a wedding garment, even though one was provided for you?”¹⁵

The man obviously was not dressed properly for this special occasion, and the phrase “And he was speechless” indicates that the man was

without excuse.¹⁶

Elder James E. Talmage provides this instructive commentary about the significance of the man's actions: "That the unrobed guest was guilty of neglect, intentional disrespect, or some more grievous offense, is plain from the context. The king at first was graciously considerate, inquiring only as to how the man had entered without a wedding garment. Had the guest been able to explain his exceptional appearance, or had he any reasonable excuse to offer, he surely would have spoken; but we are told that he remained speechless. The king's summons had been freely extended to all whom his servants had found; but each of them had to enter the royal palace by the door; and before reaching the banquet room, in which the king would appear in person, each would be properly attired; but the deficient one, by some means had entered by another way; and not having passed the attendant sentinels at the portal, he was an intruder."¹⁷

A Christian author, John O. Reid, noted that the man's refusal to wear the wedding garment exemplified blatant "disrespect for both the king and his son." He did not simply lack a wedding garment; rather, he chose not to wear one. He rebelliously refused to dress appropriately for the occasion. The king's reaction was swift and decisive: "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."¹⁸

The king's judgment of the man is not based primarily upon the lack of a wedding garment—but that "he was, in fact, determined not to wear one. The man ... desired the honor of attending the wedding feast, but ... did not want to follow the custom of the king. He wanted to do things his own way. His lack of proper dress revealed his inner rebellion against the king and his instructions."¹⁹

Many Are Called, but Few Are Chosen

The parable then concludes with this penetrating scripture: "For many are called, but few are chosen."²⁰

Interestingly, Joseph Smith made the following adjustment to this verse from Matthew in his inspired translation of the Bible: "For many are called, but few are chosen; *wherefore all do not have on the wedding garment.*"²¹

The *invitation* to the wedding feast and the *choice to partake* in the feast are related but different. The invitation is to all men and women. An individual may even accept the invitation and sit down at the feast—yet not be chosen to partake because he or she does not have the appropriate wedding garment of converting faith in the Lord Jesus and

His divine grace. Thus, we have both God's call and our individual response to that call, and many may be called but few chosen.²²

To be or to become chosen is not an exclusive status conferred upon us. Rather, you and I ultimately can choose to be chosen through the righteous exercise of our moral agency.

Please note the use of the word *chosen* in the following familiar verses from the Doctrine and Covenants:

“Behold, there are many called, but few are *chosen*. And why are they not *chosen*?”

“Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men.”²³

I believe the implication of these verses is quite straightforward. God does not have a list of favorites to which we must hope our names will someday be added. He does not limit “the chosen” to a restricted few. Instead, *our* hearts, *our* desires, *our* honoring of sacred gospel covenants and ordinances, *our* obedience to the commandments, and, most importantly, the Savior's redeeming grace and mercy determine whether we are counted as one of God's chosen.²⁴

“For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”²⁵

In the busyness of our daily lives and in the commotion of the contemporary world in which we live, we may be distracted from the eternal things that matter the most by making pleasure, prosperity, popularity, and prominence our primary priorities. Our short-term preoccupation with “the things of this world” and “the honors of men” may lead us to forfeit our spiritual birthright for far less than a mess of pottage.²⁶

Promise and Testimony

I repeat the admonition of the Lord to His people delivered through the Old Testament prophet Haggai: “Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.”²⁷

Each of us should evaluate our temporal and spiritual priorities sincerely and prayerfully to identify the things in our lives that may impede the bounteous blessings that Heavenly Father and the Savior are willing to bestow upon us. And surely the Holy Ghost will help us to see ourselves as we really are.²⁸

As we appropriately seek for the spiritual gift of eyes to see and ears to hear,²⁹ I promise that we will be blessed with the capacity and judgment to strengthen our covenant connection with the living Lord. We also will receive the power of godliness in our lives³⁰—and ultimately be both called to and chosen for the Lord’s feast.

“Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion.”³¹

“For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments.”³²

I joyfully declare my witness of the divinity and living reality of God, our Eternal Father, and of His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. I testify that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer and that He lives. And I also witness that the Father and the Son appeared to the boy Joseph Smith, thus initiating the Restoration of the Savior’s gospel in the latter days. May each of us seek for and be blessed with eyes to see and ears to hear, I pray in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Matthew 13:31–32.
2. See Matthew 13:45–46.
3. See Matthew 20:1–16.
4. See Matthew 25:1–13.
5. Mark 4:34.
6. See Matthew 7:7–8; Luke 11:9–10.
7. Matthew 22:1–5.
8. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (1916), 536–40.
9. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 537.
10. See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 537.
11. Matthew 22:8–10.
12. See John O. Reid, “Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen,” *Forerunner*, Mar.–Apr. 2016, 8, cgg.org.
13. See Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* (1985), 132.
14. Matthew 22:12.
15. See Reid, “Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen,” 8.
16. See Reid, “Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen,” 8.
17. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 539–40.

18. Matthew 22:13; see Reid, “Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen,” 8.
19. Reid, “Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen,” 8.
20. Matthew 22:14.
21. Joseph Smith Translation, Matthew 22:14 (in Matthew 22:14, footnote *b*); emphasis added.
22. See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1993), 769–71.
23. Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–35; emphasis added.
24. See David A. Bednar, “The Tender Mercies of the Lord,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2005, 99–102.
25. 2 Nephi 25:23.
26. See Genesis 25:29–34.
27. Haggai 1:5.
28. See Jacob 4:13; Doctrine and Covenants 93:24.
29. See Matthew 13:16.
30. See Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–21.
31. Isaiah 52:1.
32. Doctrine and Covenants 82:14.