



October 11th

THE NEW SHOFAR

We need to learn to let go and let God

The world needs the “fruit” God sends them through us

A tale of two judgments

This is a parable that speaks of two judgments: the judgment of those Jews and Gentiles who refuse to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah. *Note:* they are the ones who **reject** Jesus as Messiah. It is not against those who do not know Him or have not heard the Good News preached to them. They resist and reject anyone as their Messiah from God.

But as well it is a fierce judgment against those Christians who do not live the kind of life to which they are called in baptism – a call they have accepted. Both Jews and Gentiles have been called by God (the king) and given the vocation of producing fruit worthy of life eternal. That “fruit” is a way of life, professions of faith and an ongoing loving service of all God’s people so that everyone can come to know God. From the time of Abraham faithful men and women have been called and sent into the world to make God known, to reveal the hand of God in human history. This is the “fruit” that feeds the world, giving them hope for a future greater than the world itself can supply. Failure here condemns others to a futile hope in the “ways of the world”, the “ways of their times” ways that cannot bring eternal life.

God pursues the people of the world to offer them salvation

In the parable we see an incredibly active king. He is the one who calls the feast, sends the servants, makes His judgments, and joins the feast Himself. In Matthew’s Gospel it is a guarantee that in the life, preaching, teaching and ministry of Jesus, the Father is never absent. Find Jesus and we find God. To hear Jesus is to hear God and by living in Jesus we live in God. The works of Jesus are the works of the Trinity in creation.

Palestinian wedding invitations did not include specific times as we do today. There were generally two of time elements associated with the festivities. *The first* one was to forewarn the people. They had to get things ready to come when the time was right. *The second* invitation would be sent out when it was time to get ready and head off for the feast was about to begin...: *My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come immediately to the wedding banquet.* No replies were necessary as it was presumed everyone invited would come. The idea of refusing was too horrendous to even contemplate. It would have been impossible for those hearing to sermon to accept how the people would resist the words of the servants. Who could even contemplate refusing such a wonderful and undeserved invitation to such magnificent festivities?

But the king is not to be put off by rejection. He wants people at his feast and so sends the servants out once more. This is again the story of Israel. She rejected the prophets of old just as she had rejected John the Baptist. Having rejected the prophets what do they do? As Jesus

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points out here, they simply go back to their old ways of life. It is as if they are denying the invitation altogether, as if the king had made no request, that the son was not getting married.

Some of the people were so blind to the importance of the mission and the threat the generosity of this loving king made to their own reputations and status, they put the servants. This is hubris gone mad. They were not even prepared to hear the king's invitation. How sad is that? Rightly enraged, the king sent an army and killed those who had rejected Him.

Unperturbed, the king maintained His passionate desire to include people at His feast and so sent the servants into the city to invite *everyone* they met. The emphasis here is on *everyone*, no matter their state in life: saints and sinners alike were all given an invitation to the wedding feast that was already laid out on the table. This is the divine will. God wants all of us.

The only requirement now was an acceptance on God's terms. When the seats were all filled, the king/God arrived to mingle with the crowd (like Adam, Eve and God in the Garden of Eden). He found one man who had clearly not bothered to put on the wedding garment (the garment was a metaphor for righteousness). No reason was given, He just came to the feast on his own terms. This man was judged harshly and thrown out into the darkness. The end of the parable would have come as a massive shock to all hearing it: while God invites everyone to the table of eternal life, not everyone is going to take up the call to accept the invitation and to transform their lives (repent) as is required. They spend eternity in darkness.

Thank God! Alleluia! God never gives up on us!

Once again, we are presented with reality of the Father of Jesus being a persistent God, one who is going to fill His banquet hall – come what may! He has a passionate desire to have all seats taken. His desire is to feast eternally with every one of His children. There is room for all, seats for all and plenty of food for all. The Jews hearing this parable would have been surprised as they had presumed they had pre-booked their seats through their circumcision and the keeping of the Torah. All they had to do was come when they were ready. On their terms. It was their right as Jews to so inherit this welcome into life. They had a right to seats.

It was equally true that Christians in the early Church communities (and today) were stunned when they realized this parable applied to them as well. Simply being baptized is never going to be enough to guarantee life eternal in the messianic feast of heaven. This is borne out by the man at the end who does not have on the wedding garment. Dressing in the wedding robe was standard procedure for any feast. People travelled to the place of the party, changed out of their dusty, dirty clothes and put on the garments provided for the festivities.

It was used as a symbol of leaving behind former lives of sin upon hearing the proclamation of the Good News of the Reign of God in Jesus. Like baptism it means to clothe ourselves in Christ. This man saw no need to change. He was prepared to accept the invitation and presumed that there was nothing more for him to do. Jesus makes it clear that He is not issuing massive demands. It is just about putting on a simple white robe! He could have demanded much more but the point is how the Way to life is not about “doing” many great things, or about “avoiding” many terrible things. The Way to Life is about *being*, about a Way of living in the world. The more intimate our life in Christ becomes, the more our lives in the world will change. The closer to Christ, the greater the fruits of the Spirit available for others, for the world through us...*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,*²³ *gentleness, and self-control.* Living Christ-like lives means God does the rest.

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