

# The wedding feast

(*Matthew 22:1-14*)

“And Jesus answered and 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: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. 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. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The king who makes the marriage for his son and invites guests to the feast represents Principle. The feast is the flow of ideas given by Principle through its impersonal Christ, which means that a feast or flow of ideas is always ready for each of us.

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This feast is not insipid, but meaty. "Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready." Principle through its impersonal, ever-present Christ is the impelling power behind the feast of ideas, and so those ideas are not pappy surface stuff without substance, but truly meaty. We need that meatiness to destroy the "physical plagues imposed by material sense" (S&H 575:5-6), to which Mrs Eddy refers when speaking of the marriage feast in the Apocalypse. We have to be able to analyze, uncover, and annihilate the claims of material sense, so that they are stripped of their coverings and their nothingness is laid bare. The feast of Soul is not trivial, "dainty afternoon tea" stuff. No one can meet major problems with mental blancmange, but the meat of Science is ready to nourish him and fit him for the challenges of the day. Referring to this, Jesus said to his disciples, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of . . . My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work."

Those who were bidden to the feast — who should have been attracted to it because of their spiritual inclinations and background — made excuses and "went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise." If we are spiritually inclined and have great spiritual potential, more things may try to divert us from following our true inclinations than if they had not been aroused.

In reading this parable it is well not to project the excuses onto other people or sects, but to examine our own attitude. In doing this someone with a healthy mentality will not lie down before the suggestions that he is actually like any of the phases of thought covered by these illustrations, but will immediately be awakened to feel that because he is not like that in truth, he will not allow himself to be like that for one more moment of time. To look at error honestly and see it as error is good, but it then becomes necessary to realize emphatically and clearly that it has no expression in our individuality. Jesus once said, "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." If a man recognizes a claim which has tried to assert a princely domination over his character, he should be glad to recognize it, but made much more glad by knowing that it is only a claim

and is not true and therefore he will not let it manifest itself in his thinking and will not be identified with it.

The guest who chooses to go to his farm represents that type of thought which considers that it has a round-the-clock human activity requiring undivided attention and leaving no time, thought, nor energy to give to the spiritual.

The one who goes to his merchandise instead of to the feast represents the state of thought which wants to have spiritual ideas for better human conditions and is more concerned with the human conditions than with the spiritual ideas; it wants physical demonstrations to be the only proof of spiritual factuality. Like Simon the Pharisee, that type of thought may be said to "*love little*" (S&H 364: 23-24).

Those two attitudes of mind debar any of us from the feast, because to enjoy the feast we need the wedding garment of a full devotion to the spiritual, irrespective of the human results and with a determination not to allow a sense of responsibility to human activities to occupy our thought to the exclusion of any honest desire for the spiritual.

In Luke's version of this parable (14:16-24) the excuses are more detailed. One man begs to be excused because he has bought a piece of ground and must needs go and see it. The man with the farm, as we have seen, represents anyone who allows a sense of duty towards the human and physical to possess him to such an extent that he believes it demands his round-the-clock attention and overrides any claims of the spiritual. The man who has bought a piece of ground stands for those who cannot make this excuse, but nevertheless consider that development for material gain is of more importance than developing the spiritual, a realm which they feel holds no hope of human reward. Another man says he has bought five yoke of oxen and must go to prove them; if anyone acquiesces in the testimony of the five physical senses, feels the strength of that evidence, stubbornly contends for the finality of deductions based on this evidence, chooses to go along that path and takes on the inevitable burden attached to all this, it is his own reasoning which shuts

him out from the feast prepared by Principle. He just does not want to listen to Truth.

A third man says he has married a wife and therefore cannot come — he has married himself to sensualism in its many forms, invested his future in the material, and so cannot partake of that which is wholly opposed to this, namely, the ideas of Soul at the feast of Soul. Mrs Eddy gives the true sense of wedding when she writes, “Hourly, in Christian Science, man ... weds himself with God, or rather he ratifies a union predestined from all eternity” (Un.17:7-9).

In Matthew’s version the rest of those invited took the servants of the king, “entreated them spitefully, and slew them.” There are many attitudes of mind which do not want the feast of spiritual ideas, but those who indulge these attitudes are subconsciously envious of those who do want the feast and they consequently endeavour to ridicule and pull to pieces anything to do with the spiritual. But since man is spiritual, their spiritual instinct troubles them because of their attempt to throttle it. This disturbance may well cause them to turn on those they know to be right and set up a barrage of disapproval and dislike in an attempt to silence the spiritual instinct which is causing them turmoil.

“When the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.” Truth knows nothing of error and so does not send out armies to defeat it, but when error tries to oppose Truth, it destroys itself in doing so. Mrs Eddy says of God, “He need not know the evil He destroys, any more than the legislator need know the criminal who is punished by the law enacted. God’s law is in three words, ‘I am All’ ” (No.30:9-11). When we get into a mood of decrying the spiritual, refusing to acknowledge its effects on every hand, and endeavouring to undermine it with scorn, we are really burning up (for as long as we indulge this malpractice) our own ability to partake of the spiritual; we are engaged in a self-destructive process of using our “city” of reasoning ability to argue *against* the spiritual and *for* the material and we end by believing the arguments we put forward. As long as we entrench ourselves in this negative thinking, we are cut off

from Principle's feast. But it is because we *are* of Principle that we are not at ease (and may even suffer some form of dis-ease) in this attitude, and the wise man therefore quickly forsakes it and lets his true and natural self take possession of his thinking.

The king says 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." The servants go out into the highways and gather as many as they find, "both bad and good," so that the wedding is "furnished with guests."

This move on the part of the king to send out into the highways to bring in both bad and good to furnish guests for the wedding serves to show that there is in each one of us the instinct and desire to respond to the spiritual, no matter whether the arguments of mortal mind tell us that we are good or that we are bad.

In Luke's version of this parable the man giving the great supper tells his servant, after all the excuses have come from the invited guests, "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." There is still room after they have come, so the lord says to his servant, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." We may belittle ourselves in any of the ways symbolized here. We may have a poor opinion of ourselves; we may feel disadvantaged in some particular direction; we may be hesitant about reaching out for what is at hand — the wedding feast of thought based on spirituality and consistent with Principle; we may feel that we have been blind to Truth and unable to see it clearly. But we have to silence all such suggestions, which are false even though they may be subtly cloaked in the guise of humility, and see to it that no matter what they say to us we are going to attend that wedding feast.

So the parable deals with the two aspects of error's attempt to stop the individual from enjoying the wedding feast of Soul's "infinite resources with which to bless mankind" (S&H 60:29). On the one hand Jesus points out that specific counter-attractions based on materiality — symbolized by the excuses about the farm, and so forth

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— can so occupy thought that there is no time to respond to those spiritual inclinations inherent in us all. On the other hand a poor opinion of ourselves can cause us to hesitate in responding to the feast of Soul; this must be dealt with as the king did here by demanding that we no longer allow the suggestions of sense as to our shortcomings to keep us from the feast, but put them aside and come determinedly into the feast which is ready and waiting for us all. Thus the Master is pointing out that an individual should be alert not only to the claim that the counter-attractions of sense have either substance or beneficial purpose in his life, but also to the fact that even if he is not subject to these counter-attractions, an untrue opinion of his own ability to respond to the spiritual may be excluding him from the feast and so has to be rebuked; without further ado he must see to it that he enters the feast-chamber of Soul by entertaining ideas which being spiritual are real and satisfying.

The two sides of the coin of this currency foreign to man's true nature are highlighted by Mrs Eddy when she writes, "Mankind thinks either too much or too little of sin. The sensitive, sorrowing saint thinks too much of it: the sordid sinner, or the so-called Christian asleep, thinks too little of sin" (Mis.107:32-3). Few people realize that the outlook of the "sensitive, sorrowing saint" is as detrimental to true character-expression as is that of the "sordid sinner". In this parable the sordid sinner is represented by those aggressively satisfied with matter's reality (those who said that they had a farm, merchandise, and so on), for all sin is based on belief in matter's reality and attractiveness. And "the sensitive, sorrowing saint" is covered by Jesus when he refers to those in the highways who have to be awakened from a wrong opinion of themselves and compelled to come to the feast of Soul.

Having dealt with these two claims which falsely educated reasoning would make on each one of us unless we are watchful, Jesus shows that once we have entered the areas of Soul with its true repast, we should realize that this is a wedding feast, that we have responded to our true selves and therefore are attending the marriage of Principle to its idea; this being so, it is essential to put on the

wedding garment of happiness and gratitude.

Matthew ends his version by saying that when the king came in to see the wedding guests, "he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen." At first sight this may sound ruthless, but then we realize that Principle can address us in no other way than as "friend," and it is only if we make no appropriate response, no effort to change our outlook, that we cast ourselves out of its atmosphere of light and joy. On reflection we see how exactly right was the requirement that a wedding garment be worn, for to partake of the feast there must be a state of thought full of the expectancy of good and willingness to join in with its revelation. A wedding garment is not ordinary, but the most refined of garments, a thing of beautiful expression. When we put it on, it immediately gives us a sense of anticipation and joy and also draws out our best behaviour towards others — an attitude of intelligent understanding and alertness towards all that is going on and all the ideas expressed. We are fully prepared to contribute to the atmosphere. And so when we come to Principle's feast of Science, we must be clothed with our best expectancy and happiness and with an intelligent and truly intellectual approach towards that which is scientific.

Christian Science is the acme of true intellectualism, as Mrs Eddy knew, and it awakens genuine intellectual ability in the quick and perceptive appreciation of all that it reveals. True intellectualism can be overlaid by a surfeit of what calls itself intellectualism, but it is nevertheless present to be awakened in every individual who longs for that awakening.

The woman at the well said to the men of the city, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29) It was the intelligence of Jesus' words and their being filled with joy and promise which appealed to her, because he had

awakened an intelligent and truly intellectual response, and that is the wedding garment. The attraction of Jesus to her and to the disciples was the new world he was walking in, the world of Spirit.

If we are expectant that the ideas prepared for us by Principle will take us into new areas of thinking which meet our deepest desires and if we are full of adoration for what Mrs Eddy calls "the most adorable, but most unadored" (Mis.106:23-24), we have a consequent alertness to listen and partake, an eagerness and joy. How different that is from coming along merely because someone or a sense of duty pushed us and we are without genuine enthusiasm. The latter approach of itself casts us out — it is not Principle that casts anyone into "outer darkness." So we should never try to attend the wedding feast of Soul clothed with a sense of personal duty toward the spiritual and clad in the heavy garment of a false morality; throwing all that aside, we should don the wedding garment of a happy acceptance of the atmosphere of Soul, whose infinite resources supply a veritable feast of inspiration and conviction.

There is a wedding feast always waiting in every form of scientific thinking, but above all in the Science of being; and in order to partake of this it is essential to admit fully that we are wedded to Science and ready to partake of the ideas at the feast through our study and through the contribution of individual interpretation of what we have been studying. It is a wise student who says to himself when he picks up the Bible or "Science and Health" or any other of the writings of Mrs Eddy, "This is a wonderful opportunity and I'm glad I'm here. I will let no other thoughts come in to spoil my consecrated attention. I will wear the wedding garment of happy expectancy." Even "Science and Health" can become deadened if we approach it without a wedding garment and with a heavy sense of duty. If we have the wedding garment, it sparks off inspiration in every line, sentence, paragraph, and chapter.

Emotionalism is unbalanced excitement which can die down. It may cause a man to say of Science, "Isn't it wonderful?" and he may feel it at the time and yet not really know that it is wonderful. The demand for a wedding garment is a scientific demand because in no

science will anyone ever partake of its wedding feast unless he goes to it with full and joyful anticipation and gives it all his attention and consecration. And so to join in with Science there must be receptivity and responsiveness. We are not the makers of Science but partakers of it, therefore our mood should be one of coming into living rapport with it. Science itself is "altogether lovely" and harmonious and our attitude must be one of entering the rhythm and joy and realization of it, coming into the spirit as well as into line with its letter. "The letter of Science plentifully reaches humanity to-day, but its spirit comes only in small degrees. The vital part, the heart and soul of Christian Science, is Love. Without this, the letter is but the dead body of Science, — pulseless, cold, inanimate" (S&H 113:3-8).

If Science does not cause a joyous anticipation which stirs the depths of mind and soul, it is not worth having. But when someone is not interested in Science and never gets going along its paths, he becomes envious, morose, discouraged and then "how great is that darkness" he is in. To touch Science and not touch it rightly is more dangerous than not touching it at all. Science is alive, so we must touch it with a sense of life. We cannot play with it, toy with it, or be half-hearted about it. If it were a human theory or if it were a religion, we *could* play with it; we could come to it as and when we wished. But it is an alive, dynamic, all-embracing whole and All, and so we must respond to it with expectancy and full awareness.

The man discovered without a wedding garment was "speechless." If we wish to wear the wedding garment of Science, we must continually speak to ourselves, and if necessary to others, the truths which Science reveals. We glimpse something of the wedding garment which Jesus wore when we read in "Science and Health" that his prayers were "deep and conscientious protests of Truth, — of man's likeness to God and of man's unity with Truth and Love" (12:13-15). It was said of him, "Never man spake like this man." Let us see that we use our understanding of Science to give us that same quality of speech, filled with divine encouragement and certainty, and then we shall realize that we are properly garmented for the further feasts of Science which this will bring us. Mrs Eddy hints at the

effect of wearing the wedding garment when she says, "I agree with Rev. Dr. Talmage, that 'there are wit, humor, and enduring vivacity among God's people'" (Mis.117:10-12). If we don the wedding garment of accepting the spiritual as all, we find ourselves enjoying the experience symbolized by a guest at a wedding, where wit, humour, and vivacity usually do predominate.

The garment to cast off before we go to the feast is any sub-conscious looking at our own faults and wondering where we have gone wrong or are falling short, for this will make us "speechless." Love's wedding feast is always prepared and ready for us all, and Love has prepared us for it. Perfection is the theme of the feast, and the way to attend it is made clear by Mrs Eddy: "To-day you have come to Love's feast, and you kneel at its altar. May you have on a wedding garment new and old" (Message 1900, 15:18-20) — may the well-established and necessary teachings of Science so clothe your thought that you constantly find these basic truths renewed in fresh realizations.

The feast of Soul is continual, not a periodic happening for which we don a wedding garment and then take it off. So let us adopt more and more Principle's viewpoint, which knows nothing of certain days which mean more than others, but has continuous flow. We should expect this in our own experience, whilst being aware that nothing in the mortal will help us to experience it, because the mortal is set against it. Nevertheless it is divinely and scientifically natural, and expectation speeds our progress towards it. "God, the divine Principle of harmony, is ever with men, and they are His people" (S&H 573:15-17), without a break. If we accept this, we shall not have periods when we are inspired and full of joy and other periods when we are the opposite. If we realize that we have been educated by mortal mind to expect so much of the positive and then so much of the negative, in various admixtures, we can wake up to this and immediately start the process of true education by saying, "Let my expectation always be what Principle itself is expecting." God could not foreordain anything unlike His own nature, so why should we expect anything that God does not expect? Why should we not expect

and enjoy a perpetual wedding feast?

"Many are called, but few are chosen." Everyone is continually being called to the wedding feast, and so instead of being among those who pass the invitation by through not considering it intelligently, we should see to it that we respond at once and with joy.

We are wise if we acknowledge the joy that was inherent in Jesus from the beginning and right through his earthly career, until at the very end when he ascended he left with his disciples this precious gift, for Luke tells us that they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

This sense of joy was so natural to Jesus that before he was born and when his mother met the mother of John the Baptist we are told that her greeting caused the unborn child in Elisabeth to leap with joy. (See Luke 1:39-44.) From this beginning the theme of joy runs through all the teaching of the Master. In the Sermon on the Mount he tells the student that when he is disturbed by opposition to Truth he should "rejoice, and be exceeding glad" (see Matthew 5:10-12). He also refers to it, for example, in the parable of the treasure hidden in the field where the man for joy sold all that he had and also in the parable of the talents where the faithful servants were rewarded by entering into the joy of their lord. In the Gospel of John there is repeated reference to joy in those chapters in which Jesus was bringing home to his disciples qualities of thought which were uppermost in his own consciousness and which he wanted them to have. He said, for instance, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." He said also, "I will see you again, . . . and your joy no man taketh from you," "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." And in speaking to Principle about his disciples he said, "And now come I to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

Joy is not a mere Christian duty: it is an attribute of God. The Psalmist declared, "In Thy presence is fulness of joy." Joy emanates and radiates from God, and is part and parcel of the meaning of life

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and of our natural being as Soul's reflection of itself. It is unavoidable in its expression in man, just as much as living is unavoidable as the expression of Life.

The fact that in this parable the guest without a wedding garment was stringently rebuked reveals the importance of the sense of happiness and joyful expectancy with which the student should approach the feast of ideas to be had in his studies. How often do we put on this wedding garment which Jesus was asking that we should do? Mrs Eddy quotes Paul's admonition, "Rejoice in the Lord always," adding, "And why not, since man's possibilities are infinite, bliss is eternal, and the consciousness thereof is here and now?" (Mis.330: 11-13).