

Matthew 22:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy (τότε λέγει τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ· ὁ μὲν γάμος ἑτοιμός ἐστιν, οἱ δὲ κεκλημένοι οὐκ ἦσαν ἄξιοι)—The gamos hetoimos estin ('the wedding is ready') stands unchanged despite human rejection. God's purposes are not thwarted by human refusal. The indictment ouk ēsan axioi ('they were not worthy') reverses Israel's privileged status: those who should have been most ready proved most resistant.

Axioi (worthy) here means morally unfit through willful rejection, not inherent merit. No one 'deserves' the invitation (cf. Luke 15:19, 'not worthy to be called your son'), but those who refuse it demonstrate unworthiness by their contempt. This echoes Acts 13:46: 'You judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.' The shift from particular election (Israel) to universal invitation (Gentiles) begins here.

Historical Context

This pronouncement of unworthiness marks a turning point in redemptive history. The 'original guests' (covenant Israel) forfeit their place through rejection, opening the feast to outsiders. Paul's ministry paradigm—'to the Jew first, and also to the Greek'—reflects this pattern: offer to the covenant people first, then turn to the nations.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What makes someone 'unworthy' of the kingdom—is it lack of qualification or refusal to accept grace?
2. How does this verse challenge both presumption ('I'm in because of my heritage') and despair ('I'm too sinful to come')?
3. In what ways might religious privilege become a barrier to genuine response to the gospel?

Interlinear Text

τότε	λέγει	τοῖς	δούλοις	αὐτοῦ	Ὁ	μὲν	γάμος
Then	saith he		servants				The wedding
G5119	G3004	G3588	G1401	G846	G3588	G3303	G1062
ἑτοιμός	ἐστιν	οἱ	δὲ	κεκλημένοι	οὐκ	ἦσαν	ἄξιοι·
ready	is		but	they which were bidden	not	were	worthy
G2092	G2076	G3588	G1161	G2564	G3756	G2258	G514

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 3:4 (Parallel theme): Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Acts 13:46 (Parallel theme): Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

2 Thessalonians 1:5 (Parallel theme): Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

Revelation 22:14 (Parallel theme): Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

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