INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES

Dated April 1746, this is Edwards’ earliest extant sermon that explicitly refers to David Brainerd. Edwards had noted Brainerd’s missionary work among the Indians in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in a letter to a Scottish correspondent in November of the previous year,¹ and perhaps by the time he delivered this sermon he had heard of the publication—maybe even had in hand a copy—of Brainerd’s published account, *Mirabilia Dei inter Indicos* (Philadelphia, 1746). Evidence of their relationship hitherto is scanty, but we can conjecture that Edwards probably knew Brainerd before this, whether as a student at Yale College; or, following his expulsion, as a preaching colleague of Edwards’ student Joseph Bellamy at Bethlehem, Connecticut, during the summer of 1742; or as missionary to the Mohawks at Kaunaumeek, near the western border of Massachusetts, as an agent of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge.² There is, however, little in the sermon, except some vague references in the Exhortation, to indicate that it is about missions generally or Brainerd specifically: only the notation at the beginning gives us its inspiration: “on occasion of the news of Mr. Brainerd’s success among the Indians.”

That this was delivered as a pre-sacramental lecture, probably on the Thursday before regular services, is reflected in the choice of the text: the Lukean parable of the lord who throws a banquet. When none of his invited guests comes, he orders his servants to go out to the streets and fields to bid any and all. The text therefore cleverly brings together the need for sacramental self-examination and for lifting up Brainerd’s work among the Indians. From the figures and
circumstances of the parable, Edwards first draws representational parallels or types--more than twenty spill out in a short space. Next, he shows how these representations were “verified” in the times of Christ and the apostles. Finally, he applies the parable’s lessons as adapted for Northampton in the 1740s.

For Edwards, the parable represents the members of the visible church, those “first bidden”—the Jews—who were “given over” by God because they did not come to the figural supper when Christ appeared on earth. In the same way, people brought up in “true” religion—the people of New England in particular—have also been bidden but have refused to attend. So now, “aliens”—Indians and heathen—are being invited, and are harkening to God’s call: a further “calling of the gentiles,” as Edwards suggests was to happen in “Notes on Scripture” no. 4 (WJE 15:49). Edwards’ treatment is an indictment of those who think themselves to be godly and so presume they can come into God’s kingdom at any time, as well as a description of Edwards’ conception of emerging diversity within God’s kingdom.

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The manuscript is of ten duodecimo-sized leaves of mixed paper. The top of the first page bears Edwards’ inscriptions: “Lecture before sacr. April 1746” and “on occasion of the news of Mr. Brainards success among the Indians.”
INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES

(Lecture before sacrament, April 1746, On occasion of the news of Mr. Brainard's success among the Indians)


And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

These words are part of the parable of a certain man that made a great supper, and bade many. The occasion of the parable was this: {Christ being invited to a feast at one of the principal of the Pharisee's houses, he first rebukes the pride which he observed in the guests in choosing the highest seats, and then instructs his host not only to invite his brethren and kinsmen, and rich neighbors, who could compensate him; but to invite those who needed relief and could not compensate him}. And then, upon this occasion, Christ utters this parable.

[OBSERVATIONS.]

I. Briefly explain the parable.

II. Observe how it was verified in Christ's and the apostles' day.

III. Observe how this parable is adapted to our case, and how applicable it is for our instruction and warning, that live in these days and in this place.

IV. Conclude with an agreeable exhortation.

I. Explain [the parable].
By the man that made the supper, {is represented} God. The same with the king, Matt. 22[2-13], “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son.” ’Tis prophesied in Is. 25:6, “[And in this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined].”

By the supper is meant the glorious provision made for the souls of men by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. [‘Tis] often compared to food. [‘Tis] said to be “a feast of fat things.” [And ‘tis] often compared to excellent food, “fatness” [and] wine.

[‘Tis] compared to a marriage [feast], which a certain king made for his son. [‘Tis] often compared to a marriage feast. We read of “the marriage supper of the Lamb,” Rev. 19:9. This same feast is spoken of, Prov. 9[1-5], “Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: she hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.”

By the servant {that is sent out}, is meant ministers of the gospel. [They are] often spoken of as God’s servants, and messengers and ambassadors. Mal. 2:7, “the messenger of the Lord of hosts.” II Cor. 5:20, “we are ambassadors for Christ.” [They are] represented by the maidens that Wisdom sent forth, Prov. 9:3, {and by the} servants of the husbandman in the parable of the good seed and the tares [Matt. 13:24-30].

By suppertime, is meant the appointed time for the special and more remarkable dispensing and bestowing the blessings of the gospel on the souls of men.
By those that were first bidden, is meant those that are favored with the first offers and advantages. [They are] those who before suppertime had been invited, and at suppertime had the first offers.

By the manner of invitation,\(^1\) is represented the freedom with which the blessings of the gospel [are given]. [Wisdom] comes for all things. So Prov. 9.

By the manner of their treating the offer {to the supper}, who were first invited, is represented what is sometimes to be found in those who have the first and greatest advantages in a day of special grace. [They] refused especially from three things: self-fullness, covetousness and sensuality; or, in one word, from self-righteousness and worldliness. [Their guilt was from their] sensuality, not in open breaches of any command of God, [or] more gross violations, but in abuses of lawful enjoyment. [The invited guests replying,] “I cannot come,” represents the tyrannical power and besotting nature of sensual appetites.

By the master of the house being angry, [is represented God’s wrath].

By those that were bidden afterwards from the streets and lanes of the city, is represented those that were under far less advantages, but yet were in the visible church.

[By the] city, is meant the visible church of God.

By their being poor, maimed, halt and blind, is represented two things: the peculiarly unhappy circumstances they had hitherto been in, and also their being more sensible of their own poverty and misery.

By the servant’s returning from time to time to give an account to his lord, is represented that ministers, after they have done their work, must return {to give an account to God}.

By their having yet room, [is represented] two things:

First. The inexhaustible sufficiency.
Second. That the intended number of guests was not yet complete.

By those in the highways and hedges, [is represented] those that were out of the visible church, yet under greater disadvantages.

By their being compelled to come in, [is] represented two things:
First. Ministers’ duty.
Second. God’s power, that should be manifested in carrying on his work amongst the ignorant and miserable aliens.

By that, “that my house may be filled,” [is] represented two things:
First. The great numbers.
Second. That hereby, God fills up his intended number of guests without those that were first bidden.

By that awful threatening, “That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper,” is represented the final forsaking and giving over those who enjoyed the first and greatest advantages in a time of special grace, but slighted and lost them. [‘Tis] like swimming in His wrath.

II. How the parable was verified in Christ’s and the apostles’ days.

That was suppertime.

That in the 17th verse, was verified in the first offers and advantages being given to the Jews, for enjoying the benefit of that glorious day of grace. [They saw the] first outpourings of the Spirit.

The servants that were sent then, were the apostles and other ministers. Matt. 10:5, “into any of the cities of the Samaritans enter ye not.”

The Jews, most of ‘em, rejected the invitation in the manner that is here represented, from their self-righteousness and worldliness.

That, v. 21, “the master of the house being angry,” was verified {in God’s forsaking and giving over those who were first bidden}. 
That, “Go out into the streets of the city,” was verified in the next offers being made to the Samaritans, and Jews in foreign parts, and gentile proselytes.

That, v. 23, “Go out into the highways and hedges,” {was} verified in the gospel being preached to the ignorant heathen, and God’s Spirit being wonderfully poured out on them.

That, v. 24, “none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper,” was verified in giving over the Jews, among whom the work of God first began.

III. How this parable is adapted to our case, and may fitly be applied for our instruction and warning in this place and in these days.

It has of late years been suppertime. The people in this land, in a special manner beyond many others, [have] been bidden before this suppertime. And when suppertime came, we were favored with the first offers and advantages {in the same manner} as the Jews were. These offers and advantages have been neglected and left by many. And they have been rejected in like manner, and on the same accounts, as are expressed in the parable, and that [are] exemplified in the Jews: self-righteousness, worldliness.

God, in the next place, sent his servants out into the streets and lanes of the city. And now God hath sent to those that are in the highways and hedges.

God hath manifested himself angry with us, who had the first offers and advantages. There are such appearances amongst us, as were amongst the Jews, after God had as [it] were declared concerning ‘em, “none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

[EXHORTATION.]

I come now, in the

IV. [Fourth] and last place, to give a brief Exhortation, agreeable to what has been observed.
Let us take heed to ourselves, that the issue of things with respect to us, ben’t the same that this parable represents with respect to those who were first bidden. You see how applicable the parable is to our times and circumstances, and how parallel our circumstances are with those of the Jews in Christ’s and the apostles’ times. It has of late been suppertime. God has carried on his work continually, in one place or another, ever since, and we have been visited once and again, as the Jews were. And after our remarkable visitations, [God] sent forth his servants into “the streets of the city.” And now, {he invites in aliens}, and has in a remarkable manner left us, so as he never did since I have had opportunity [to observe]. [We] never [have been] so totally destitute, for so long a time, of any work of conversion going on amongst us, or any work of the Spirit of God tending to it. Never [has there been] a time when [we see] so little effects of means, so little effect of awakening providences. Never [has there been] any time of a contention of so hurtful and pernicious a nature to religion; never any contention that was followed with such hard consequences, as has been since the last visitation of God’s Spirit. So it was among the Jews in a remarkable manner. It was then as it was with the Israelites before their first destruction and captivity. Hos. 4:4, “Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest.”

Therefore, let us seriously and impartially consider our circumstances, and God’s present providences, and how loud God’s calls and warnings to us are. Christ told the Pharisees, “the publicans and harlots [shall] enter {the kingdom of heaven} before you” [Matt. 21:31]. And is there not reason to apprehend that the poor, ignorant, barbarous Indians {shall enter the kingdom of heaven} before many of us?

Christ pronounced woe against {Jerusalem}, wherein most of his mighty works {were done}, and told ’em that “if the mighty works, which
were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon," those heathen cities
"[would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes," Matt. 11:21]. How
much greater have our advantages been, than of those poor Indians?

Christ told the Jews, that “the men of Nineveh shall rise up in
judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented
at the preaching of Jonas” [Mat. 12:41]. Let us take heed, that the poor
Indians [do not rise up in judgment against us].

Let us therefore, everyone of us, look to himself, [and] search and
try his own way. And the rather, because of the approach of the Lord’s
Supper, the appointed, solemn representation of that very supper spoken
of. We partake of the supper in external appearance, from time to time.
Let us take heed that God don’t swear concerning us, that we never shall
taste {of his heavenly supper}; and that hereafter, that ben’t verified
concerning us, Is. 65:13-14, “my servants shall eat, and ye shall [be
hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold,
my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants
shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and
shall howl for vexation of spirit].” And that, Luke 13:26, etc., “many
shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north, and from
the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there
are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

And let what we have heard, stir up in the people of God a spirit of
prayer, earnestly to cry to God for his return, and for a general
outpouring {of his Spirit}, and a readiness to join with others. And let
us all cry for ourselves, returning to God from all our evil ways, and
come to him with weeping and supplication, looking on him whom we have
pierced, and mourning for him, as when “one mourns for his only son, and
shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his
firstborn” [Zech. 12:10].
Notes

1 JE to Correspondent in Scotland, Nov. 1745, WJE 16:485.
3 This editorial interpolation, supplied where JE drew a lengthy dash in the MS, is drawn from the Exposition of his earlier sermon on Luke 14:16 (no. 86), published as The Spiritual Blessings of the Gospel Represented by a Feast (WJE 14:280).
4 In the MS, JE interlineated “comes for” above this word, but this is treated as an intended deletion since he utilizes this phrase in the next sentence.
5 A reference, most likely, to the divisions caused by the Great Awakening among the clergy into Old Lights and New Lights, and to Separatism among laity.