

## The Priceless Wedding Garment.

Text: Mat 22:10-13

Suggested Hymns:

305, 304, 331, 282, 327

- 1) The original setting
- 2) One without a wedding garment
- 3) Jesus' intended application
- 4) What is this wedding garment?
- 5) How good is our goodness?
- 6) If this is true, why be good?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 22:10-13, <sup>10</sup> *“So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. <sup>11</sup> “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. <sup>12</sup> “So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup> “Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

This parable of the wedding garment has given the average Bible reader some difficulty. And why? A man is invited from the street to attend a wedding and is faulted because he does not have on a wedding garment. Yet we are told that the other guests, who came from the byways of the city, were clothed in wedding garments. The reason why we are puzzled is that we of the West are not familiar with Oriental customs of that day, which every child knew then.

As the man entered the palace grounds he observed that the others were not as well dressed as he. They were in rags and untidy. So he went right into the festive hall wearing his own best ‘going-out’ clothes. After a while the other guests entered. At once he saw that his clothes made him stand out like a sore thumb, and he had to leave because he did not fit in.

Let us take a look at the parable and learn its important lessons. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Original Setting**

Let us reconstruct the parable in its original setting. The king had invited the elite of his kingdom to the wedding of his son. All was in readiness, and therefore he sent out his servants to notify the guests to come.

In pioneer days a similar custom prevailed. A young man on horseback, decked with plumes and brightly colored garments, rode through the countryside to invite the guests to the wedding. He would inform them of the coming event and the day and the time they were expected.

In our parable the invited guests made light of the invitation and did not come. Most likely they did not like their king. Therefore they went on with their business and ignored the invitation. This was a definite affront to the king.

They made various excuses. One had to go out to his farm to see whether everything was in order; another was about to buy some oxen, and he had to take a good look at them before the purchase. A number of them even abused the servants, yes, went so far as even to kill some of them. This was revolt. Therefore the king delayed the wedding and made war on these subjects and disciplined them for their vicious conduct.

However, the wedding was furnished with guests. The king was not to be humiliated, nor was his son to be disappointed. The wedding will take place, and there will be plenty of guests. Where does the king find them? He gives his servants these instructions, *“Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.”*<sup>1</sup> *So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.* The king won out. This gave him great satisfaction.

### **2. One Without A Wedding Garment**

After all the guests are seated in the banquet hall the king enters, to view and to welcome his guests. The gathering presents a beautiful picture, all being clothed in well-styled, colourful garments, pleasing to the eye. The king’s vanity

and pride are satisfied until he spots one man in the royal assembly who is without a wedding garment, dressed in his own best 'going-out' clothes.

This upsets the king. He is angered. You may say: How could the king expect this man to have on a wedding garment when he had been invited from the street? Does this not seem odd? The answer: In those days, the king, when he invited guests to state affairs, provided the guests with a new garment appropriate for the occasion and gave it to them as a remembrance of the eventful day.

Why, then, did this man fail to put on the wedding robe? Because he thought his own garment was good enough. His clothes may have looked somewhat better than those of the others before they were robed in the king's garments. But now they appeared as mere filthy rags. This the man realised when the king challenged him. Aware of his breach of etiquette and guilt, he was speechless. So he could not remain. Out he goes.

### 3. Jesus' Intended Application

This is a parable, an everyday story with a spiritual lesson and application. The king is God. He has a Son, who is to be married to His bride, the church. The great Gospel feast is prepared through His coming into the world and redeeming all mankind from the darkness of sin. To this feast are invited, first of all, God's chosen people, Israel, who had the oracles of God and the promise of the Messiah, a descendant of Abraham and a son of David. But Israel rejected Jesus as David's greater Son, and a few days after this parable was told demanded that Jesus be crucified. Thus Israel spurned God's gracious invitation.

But the wedding must be furnished with guests. Who are the guests called from the streets and byways of time? First of all, the Gentiles who were not of the commonwealth of Israel. This means that all sinners from every walk of life and every race of people are called by the Gospel to salvation in Christ Crucified.

Jesus Himself says in Matthew 11:28,<sup>28</sup> ***“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** Again in John 12:32,<sup>32</sup> ***“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”*** In John 6:37 Jesus says, ***All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.*** But to enter we must be washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

#### 4. What Is This Wedding Garment?

Now the important question: What is the wedding garment which we must have on to abide in God's presence? It is the righteousness or sinless perfection of Jesus, which must cover all our sins. Only then can we stand in God's presence as welcome people and enjoy His eternal peace in heaven.

What, then, was the garment which this speechless man had on? His own uprightness or natural goodness. Let us make this difference clear to ourselves. We all have some type of reputation of respectability before our fellowmen. We have a good name, which makes us an asset to the community. People trust us, welcome us to their group, speak well of us. This community respectability we must have to keep our head high. We must have the goodwill of those whom we meet on the street, at work, and in the church.

Such men and women need not necessarily go to church. Their conduct and their thoughtfulness compel everyone to speak well of them. This natural goodness makes men and women avoid the coarse outbursts of sin and associate with "the right people." They find the doors of the neighbourhood open to them at all times. And rightly they are respected.

We Christians also have this natural, civic goodness, which gives us a fair name in the world in which we live. The community expects us to be honest and upright.

Strange as it may seem, yet it is true that the non-Christian professor of a university, the business executive of gigantic enterprises, the woman socialite, all expect their humblest workman to have finer qualities of character, if he professes to be a Christian, than some of their good friends and associates.

Our devotion to Christ, our loyalty to His church, gives us a nobility of character which is outstanding. We have an excellent example in Joseph in Egypt. Because he was God-fearing and held himself accountable to his Lord God, he resisted the temptation to be unfaithful to his master, saying, "***How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God!***"<sup>2</sup>

#### 5. How Good Is Our Goodness?

Praiseworthy as this our Christian uprightness may be, it is nevertheless far from being perfect. God has given us a yardstick whereby we are to measure

integrity: the Ten Commandments. These we have not kept in every instance; in fact, cannot keep, because we are born in sin.

However, too many people think that they are good enough because they are respected by their fellowmen and have never been involved in a scandal. We hear many say, *“I never do any wrong; I am as good as any Christians on this block.”* These people are like the man who did not put on the wedding garment. However, one of the noblest of Jesus’ disciples, John, says: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”*<sup>3</sup> No matter how good we are, we cannot claim to be sinless. We cannot stand in God’s presence and say, *“I never have broken any of Your commandments.”* Even as Christians we are still sinners.

We need another goodness, the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He came to dwell among us children of men to walk in perfect holiness. He fulfilled the Law of God in every detail. He dared the people of His day to convict Him of a sin but none could. Throughout the centuries the enemies of the Cross have sought to find some fault in Him, yet concluded that none ever lived so perfect a life as He.

Yet Jesus died, and death is the penalty for sin. How then could he die? He took upon Himself the blame of our transgressions and paid in full on the cross for the sin of the world. This He could do only because He was *“Very God of Very God,”* without sin. All was done for us so that through His stripes we might be healed.

How then do we gain any benefit from this sacrificial death of Jesus? At the cross this holiness of Jesus covers our sins and hides them from God. This is the good news which John Wesley expresses in his well-known hymn:<sup>4</sup>

*Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness  
My beauty are, my glorious dress,*

*When from the dust of death I rise  
To claim my mansion in the skies,  
E’en then this shall be all my plea:  
Jesus hath lived, hath died, for me.*

This garment of priceless worth God has provided. This makes us clean and acceptable in His sight. It is given to us by grace, a gift of God. With Paul we can say, *“By the grace of God I am what I am.”*<sup>5</sup> By faith this holiness or righteousness of Jesus is put on. That is why men and women from all conditions of life, even though they have sinned greatly, can come. Clothed in Jesus’ righteousness, they are welcomed to sit at the wedding banquet of God’s eternal heaven.

Having been robed in this priceless wedding garment we live in God’s grace daily and thus are citizens of His kingdom and of the household of God. As God looks at us through this cross of His Son we are whiter than snow. We are perfect through Jesus’ fulfilment of the Law and His suffering the death penalty for our transgressions.

We are absolutely sure of our salvation and can look forward to our full redemption when the pilgrimage of life is ended. We shall be welcomed by the Saviour on the other shore, there to enter into a fullness of joy, where pain, heartaches, trouble, and death cannot touch us again. That is the hope that the Gospel invitation holds out to us as we are invited to come because all things are ready.

## **6. If This Is True, Why Be Good?**

This poses another question: If our goodness is not good enough to save us, why be good? Can we not sin to our heart’s content and then come and be cleansed? In fact, would it not give greater glory to God if we sinned much and He forgave more? No, never!

This saving righteousness of Jesus is a transforming righteousness. Through our faith in this atoning cross we are made new creatures, born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are Christians and therefore do not live unto sin. As Christians we act like Christians, and we live like Christians.

At the cross, as Paul says, we become dead to sin and are filled with a love and loyalty to Christ which does not want to offend Him who died for us and delivered us from the prison of darkness. We live in this life to serve and to sacrifice for Him who gave His life for us. We prove that we are Christians by living the Christian way.

We find no joy in sin. Our joy is in our Lord and Saviour. We seek to keep His garment clean. This priceless wedding garment is put on by faith in the ‘waiting-room’ of time. This numbers us among that *“great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues,”* which shall stand *“before the throne”* of God to praise Him, saying, *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

And who are these? These are those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.<sup>6</sup>

May we say, then, this day with Edward Mote:<sup>7</sup>

*My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;*

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand. Amen.*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:9

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 39:9

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 1: 8

<sup>4</sup> Hymn 327

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. 15:10

<sup>6</sup> Rev. 7:9-15

<sup>7</sup> Hymn 331