

Be Careful What You Do

Matthew 22:1-14 Text vs. 13 *“The king told the attendants, ‘Tie his hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”*

It’s fascinating how a married couple can sometimes communicate with very few words after only a few years of marriage. Maybe it’s just a look! Husbands, think about this. You’ve been working all day out in the yard. Suddenly, you remember you’ve been invited to a party and dash into the house to get cleaned up. You shower. Go to your closet. Suddenly, you realize you’re not quite sure what you should wear. What’s appropriate? Is it casual? Is it a little dressier? Do you need to wear slacks? Will a sport coat do? Maybe a suit and tie! Soon, you find something you think will work. You put it on. Comb your hair. Get the car keys and rush to the living room where your wife’s waiting. You stop! She looks at you. Smiles! But her smile isn’t saying, *“Darling, you look great!”* It’s more of a smile that says, *“Is **that** what you’re wearing?”* You know what to do. You go back to the bedroom. Change your clothes and start all over again!

Well, here in Matthew 22 Jesus told a story that has a lot to do with clothing, what you wear, and when. He even talked about wearing the wrong thing. It’s a disturbing story. Because it doesn’t have a happy ending. But it’s a story with several important lessons. So, let’s look at it. It’s the parable of the wedding feast. Matthew 22:1-14 has Jesus telling of a king who had prepared a big banquet for his son’s wedding. Invitations had been sent out. And because there was a two-stage process of being invited to a wedding, the invitations had been sent out well in advance of the banquet so everyone could send back their RSVP. Those who had said *“Yes”* they would come received a courtesy reminder the day of the banquet when the king sent his servants to tell everyone to come. The party’s ready! But in our story, those who had been invited wouldn’t come. So, he tried again. He sent his messengers out to say, *“Look, it’s going to be a wonderful party -- lots of food and fun!”* But it’s as if they said, *“Sorry. We’ve got other things to do. Can’t make it. We’d love to, but we’re just too busy!”*

Well, you may know how that king must have felt, because you’ve had it happen to you. You’ve worked hard getting ready for something. Maybe a party. Maybe a get-together for a group at church. You spent hours and hours getting everything ready. You worked hard. You’re excited about what you planned. The big day finally comes. You planned for twenty. . . . Three show up! Or you planned for thirty. . . . and get eight! You want to cry. It makes you angry. You’re frustrated and get depressed. Now you know how the king in this parable must have felt when the invited guests refused to come. They were all caught up with their own lives and activities.

So, the king responded to their rejection. He extended his invitation to more. He invited *everyone* to come. Both good and bad could come to his wedding feast. He filled the banquet hall with all kinds of guests. But one showed up who wasn’t wearing the proper wedding attire. He was probably like the fella’ I told you about at the beginning who hadn’t dressed as his wife expected! This fella’ when questioned was speechless, and was thrown out of the wedding feast, making this parable have an important spiritual lesson for today.

First, it should remind you that God’s invitation is to each one of you. God has invited you to join in the celebration of His love and grace symbolized by the wedding feast. Just like the original guests in the parable, you might find yourself preoccupied with your own life. You ignore or reject His heavenly invitation. The king in this parable obviously is God. And the invited guests are His chosen people. The Jews. They had already been called by God. His servants had sent to them again and again. The prophets. John the Baptist. Jesus. The New Testament apostles. But they rejected John the Baptist. He was beheaded. Jesus was rejected. They crucified Him. The apostles and prophets were rejected. They were persecuted. Many were put to death. . . . Are you beginning to understand this parable?

Secondly, the parable emphasized the broad range of God’s invitation. In the parable the king invited everyone, regardless of their status or background. It teaches God’s love is complete. It reaches out to everyone. It embraces both the good and the bad. The righteous and the sinner. And by the end of the parable there was not one who was *not* invited to the son’s wedding feast. And that’s the point of the parable! When God throws a celebration, it’s for everyone! There isn’t a single person left out. His invitation list has everyone on it! And when Jesus died on the cross it was for all of us. No one was left out. The only thing that would leave you out would be your own indifference to His death. Your own stubborn refusal to accept God’s invitation. Then, it’s your own fault! You can’t blame anyone but yourself if you don’t get to heaven! God’s desire is to fill His banquet hall, His heaven, with *everyone*. God has invited the whole world.

Now, it’s easy to understand the parable up to this point. But then there’s this *“incident.”* The guest who came without wearing a proper wedding garment. That’s the focal point of this whole parable. The importance of responding to God’s invitation with reverence and respect. The guest without the proper attire represents those who come before God without having a genuine heart of repentance and faith. It’s not enough to merely accept the invitation. You must also come with humility. You must acknowledge your need for God’s grace and forgiveness in your life. That you *are* a sinner!

At the end of World War II, the Russian head of state, Joseph Stalin, the controversial Soviet leader who wielded absolute power that transformed the USSR into a global superpower left behind a legacy of repression. Millions of lives were lost. The Second World War was at a tipping point. The Russians had won the Battle of Stalingrad, but at a terrible cost. They were still engaged on the Eastern Front with Germany. Russians were dying by the tens of thousands. They badly needed a diversion – a new front in Western Europe to draw German forces away from them. The British needed guarantees

over their risky plans in the Mediterranean. America wanted Russian help in dealing with Japan. And if they all couldn't reach a consensus, then perhaps, they never would. It was time to talk. So, Churchill flew to Moscow wearing his famous zippered coveralls he had worn during the German bombing of London. He thought it would provide a nostalgic touch the Russians would appreciate. But they didn't! They were insulted. You see, wearing the right clothing to an important occasion honors the host AND the occasion. Neglecting to wear your best is an insult!

When Paul and Barnabas said to the Jews in Acts 13, *"It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first. But since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles."* (Acts 13:46) That's important to understand. The Jews unworthiness had nothing to do with it. The Gentiles weren't a morally better people. It was the Jews' stubborn attitude. Their refusal to obey God. That's what made them *"unworthy"*. What makes a person unworthy of salvation has always made a person worthy of salvation -- a willingness to commit your life to God and take Him at His word and obey Him. Whether God judges you as worthy of His kingdom is determined by your response to Him! And it's not just your first response in becoming a Christian. It's your continued response by being an obedient follower of Christ. The fact that you enter God's Kingdom by God's grace doesn't mean there are no standards. The king who gave the banquet discovered a man who had no "wedding garment". That man hadn't tried to prepare himself for the feast. He showed a half-hearted attitude. He obviously wasn't taking his presence at the feast seriously.

Jesus said, *"Many are called, but few are chosen."* Which is another way of saying, everybody is invited, but very few wind up there. Why? It certainly isn't God's fault. He's prepared a feast for everyone. It's called heaven! But he's not going to force anyone to come. If you miss out, you have only yourself to blame. Everyone had the opportunity to enter the kingdom of God. But only a few accept the invitation to enter the kingdom. And it will soon become serious enough to clothe themselves in God's righteousness.

Now, as you think about this parable in the days to come, examine your own heart. Have you accepted God's invitation to experience His love and grace? Have you approached Him with sincerity and reverence. Have you recognized the significance of the feast He has prepared for you? Remember, God's invitation to heaven is open to all. But it demands a response from you. Respond with gratitude, humility, and faith, so you may participate in the celebration of His eternal love.

Be like the guest who entered the wedding feast with a heart filled with gratitude, properly clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and ready to partake in the abundance of God's blessings. *"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."* (Mt. 15:34) AMEN