

## The Wedding Garment

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Psalter 89: all  
Acts 8:5-25  
Psalter 172: all  
Psalter145:1-4  
Psalter 103: all

In the first part of the parable about the wedding feast of the king we learned how he, at his own expense, prepared all things for those invited.

We also saw how, even after the first invitation was made light of, the king sent out a second, even richer one—"All things are ready." In other words, the guests need bring nothing but themselves; the king has provided all.

We have considered together how this parable represents the good news of salvation, sent out by means of God's servants throughout the ages. Sadly, the parable also points to the reality that the good news has been rejected by so many to whom it came, first among the Jews and now the Gentiles.

Yet despite these rejections, the just king remained gracious and merciful, sending forth still more servants, bringing in to the feast both the bad and good so that the wedding feast would be furnished with guests

In this message we want to consider the final part of this parable of Jesus. In this closing section we find the king coming to see his many guests and spotting among them one that did not have on the wedding garment that had been given to each guest that entered the feast.

Our text is Matthew 22:11-14, but for the sake of

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time I will only now repeat verse 14, the conclusion, “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

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1. The king’s inspection
2. The man without a wedding garment
3. Jesus’ concluding summary

The feast would be held, the king’s son would be married. There will be a celebration complete with guests. The servants had gone out the third time. They went into the highways and bid to the feast whomever they found there, whatsoever they be.

In obedience the servants went out. Verse 10 tells us they gathered all as many as they found, bad and good alike, so that the wedding was furnished with guests.

Would *you* plan your wedding reception this way, friends? Hire people to go out into the streets of the nearest city, pick out whomever they came across and invite them to the reception, so that when you came to the reception, the room would be filled with all kinds of people, probably most of whom you never saw nor met in your entire life?

You might think, going to such a reception, what insanity! What a lavish waste of money! But then again, can you imagine wedding invitations stirring up so much passion in those who *receive* them that they actually mistreat or even kill those who delivered them?

This is the gospel, friends. It runs contrary to everything we are used to doing and thinking. God *does* bid all kinds to the wedding of His beloved Son. He not only invites us to attend a *meal* with Him, but in fact to spend all eternity with Him! Believers shall spend that eternity with Him, not only as His redeemed people, but also as a people betrothed unto Him by righteousness and grace.

**I. The king's inspection**

So there they all were, gathered for the wedding feast. See who comes in, children? There, it is the king himself! In verse eleven we are told the king came in to see the guests. This was certainly expected, that the king should appear at his beloved son's wedding feast.

But see the surprise! The king is not at all displeased with the diverse group his servants had brought in. There perhaps was a beggar, there a leper, there a thief. But one could hardly tell what they had been before. What? Could not tell? How so? They all looked nicely dressed. Even the poor? Yes, the poor looked just as nice as the rich. How?

In those days, and especially at a rich man's feast, the host would give to all his guests special clothing to wear. It would be very costly, fit very nicely, and look wonderful. In this way, no one would be shamed by not having as nice clothing as the next man. All would wear what was given.

How thoughtful, how generous of the king this was. He didn't want any poor person embarrassed nor any rich person proud. Each could mingle with the other and all in costly, lovely clothing.

There he goes, the king, mingling among them all. He is evidently pleased with the turnout. The disappointment and wrath that lined his face earlier as he dealt with those who had so shamed his servants was gone. It was replaced by a warm smile of contentment that so many were in attendance, all looking just as nice as the other.

What is Jesus' point in all this, congregation? Remember in the sermon about the wedding feast we learned that it wasn't a person's *worthiness* that determined if he would be invited to the feast or not? It was the king's love and kindness that enabled guests to come. Remember, too, how we saw that only their unbelief and scorn could hinder their attendance? In

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other words, it wasn't the *king* that made them unworthy; it was their own sinful rejection of his invitation that prompted him to call the uncooperative ones unworthy. He called them this only *after* their punishment was given.

But see in the wedding garment further proof of the freeness of the gospel. When they arrived, the rabble from the highways, bad and good, would have their shame covered. They were all given a clean, wondrous garment that set them, in a sense, as equals among the others. No one had to be ashamed before the King, wearing the garment he himself had provided.

So it is still, beloved. God bids us come. He knows what we have been and what we still are. He knows the ugliness of our sins even more than we ever could. He knows our *hearts* and their sinful depths, better than we do. But He also provides, not only the invitation, but also the remedy for our guilt and shame and ugliness. He covers us with a garment He Himself has made. He places upon us, through the merits of the Lord Jesus, a righteousness just as wonderful as His own—*perfect!* Isaiah wrote about this beautiful garment of righteousness in 61:10:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

God Himself gives these garments through faith in Christ Jesus, and joyful will we be when we are covered by them! How so? Because they beautify sinners so that their sin is seen no more.

Do you realize what this means, beloved? When the King of kings comes into the heavenly feast, when He looks at you, at me, *with* the garment of Jesus' right-

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eousness wrapped about us, covering all sin and guilt, then we shall be able to stand before Him without shame. In fact, He will rejoice over our beauty. Imagine! Zephaniah 3:17 says, “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” This kind of love, this joy, these thoughts are staggering, aren’t they?

But just as it seemed things would go joyfully on, the king pauses. There, over in the corner, sits a man who stands out from the rest. The king makes his way there. There must be some mistake. “And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” Let us consider this question and the man’s lack of an answer in our second thought.

### II. The man without a wedding garment

What a blessed King, what a dear Being God, is congregation! Jesus, who in this parable is unveiling layer after layer of His Father’s beauty, kindness, and generosity, includes also *this* word, “Friend.” The King said, “Friend.” It is as if He was saying, “I had no quarrel with you, sir. Did not My invitation come to all? I did not inquire whether you were rich or poor, did not ask your family circumstances, never sought to know if you were an upright man or a criminal. And when you arrived, surely you saw how each of the guests was offered the costly, beautiful garment I had prepared for him. Did you not see them joyfully putting them on, covering their rags or their poverty or shame or sins or past or lusts, putting all that away forever beneath this my joyful gift? Friend, how camest *thou* in hither not having a wedding garment?”

We ought not conclude that somehow the ungodly will be able to sneak into heaven and remain awhile till they’re discovered. Revelation 21:27 makes it plain, “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth,

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neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." No, that's not the point of this part of the parable—that someone who didn't belong somehow entered heaven. The key is the garment, the *wedding* garment.

The king did not mind who the man was. He did not inquire his ancestry or origin or lifestyle or past. He was not interested in his age, ethnicity, or anything like that. The whole difference, the whole point, was the wedding garment. The question is really, "Why don't you have on the wedding garment? Why would you not accept one? Why not wear my precious gift? What is it about your own clothing that you prefer it so to mine?"

Spiritually speaking, the question is far more piercing. How is it you do not so value the offered righteousness My Son purchased for sinners at such an enormous price—His own blood—that you are content with your own moth-eaten righteousness? How *dare* you appear before Me without it? Are you somehow *better* than all these others who *leaped* at the opportunity to wear it? To sit here like this is an insult. It is insulting to Me who provided all free of charge to you, an insult to My Son whose death *paid* for all. Friend, how?

I want you to answer this question, friends. Are *you* clothed in Christ's righteousness? Are you *sure* you won't appear before God in your own? How did you come to have that precious garment of Christ's? Are you sure you're not, at least in part, depending on something other than the Lord Jesus for your righteousness? Have *you* wholeheartedly embraced the King's invitation? Are you holding back a part of your heart, your life, from Him? Have you truly been made willing to serve Him unconditionally? If not, how are you going to stand before Him without the wedding garment? How are you going to look the Father in the face, seeing how He did not spare His beloved Son but delivered Him up to the death of the cross, and you, *you* cannot be bothered to come and

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to embrace this so great salvation? Too busy with the farm, merchandise, your work, play, friends, studies?

How are you, without Christ's righteousness, going to appear before *Christ*? What will you say to Him who died so that sinners like you could live? What will you say to Him when you see the wounds and His glory and majesty? What will you do? What will you say?

Jesus tells what you will say—*nothing*! "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless." What could the man say? He saw the other guests, their garments. He knew these came from the King. What will we say, rejecting the proffered righteousness of Christ? Speechless. Not a single answer to a thousand questions. That will be the most awful silence you ever experienced. To have absolutely nothing to say, all your sins stuffing your mouth shut. Your conscience will explode with overloading guilt in that moment. All swaggering talk, all excuses—all will be gone *then*!

Once the king in the parable saw there was no misunderstanding, once he saw that the man had no excuse for his appearing this way, the king at once dealt with the man as a criminal. Justly incensed against him for his pride, his arrogance, verse 13 reads, "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."

The man had wandered the highways of sin. God could have justly, sovereignly let him continue wandering till death. But the servants came and called. The man responded. He was happy to get what he could *from* the King, but he was not about to give up anything *for* the King and certainly not his self-righteousness and pride. He came to the feast but ended up bound over to outer darkness.

How many of us appear fair for heaven? God didn't have to allow His Word to come to you. He didn't have

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to order matters so that you would be brought up in a Christian home or otherwise direct you to His church. But He did. He met you somewhere on the highway of sin. He sent His servants to call you, “Come to the feast. Come to wedding of the King’s Son.” He prepared all that you lacked—His righteousness for your unrighteousness, His garments to cover your spiritual nakedness, His love to cover your sin.

To be *among* the godly, however, is not to *be* godly. No wedding garment, no righteousness of Christ—you shall be cast out. This man had once been free; now he was bound. He was once sitting with the guests. Now he was gnashing his teeth and wailing aloud. To go from the church to the very gates of hell – how awful!

As horrible as the ending to this parable is, how much more will the reality be? The reality of appearing before Christ *unprepared*, the reality of appearing before God as an *enemy*, the reality of realizing for the first time in our life that those who we thought were fools were truly wise and that all our self-inflated thoughts of ourself were all a lot of nothing in God’s sight.

This parable doesn’t have a happy ending. Jesus doesn’t tell us about those that had the wedding garment on, the guests who did, without shame, enjoy the king’s fellowship. No, His focus was on this one man and those who did not heed the first two invitations earlier. So that must be our focus, too, beloved. We don’t want to miss the force of what Jesus is saying, trying to soften the blow of this parable by diverting our attention to that which Jesus wasn’t emphasizing.

But before considering Jesus’ concluding summary, let us first sing from Psalter 145:1-4.

**III. Jesus’ concluding summary**

Jesus’ summary was ever so brief yet so very powerful. “For many are called, but few are chosen.” This summary may, at first, appear surprising to us. Wasn’t there



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a roomful of guests at the wedding? Wasn't there only *one* man who was cast out? Why then does Jesus say *many* are called, *few* chosen? It would seem many were chosen, but few lost.

But we're forgetting something. The earlier servants—who came to the feast then? The second set of servants—who responded to *their* appeal? Just look around in your mind, dear friend. It's not our place (nor are we able) to judge the eternal destination of others. But one doesn't need much insight to see that the vast majority of those around us, regardless of what they might *profess*, do not appear to be very zealous after holiness and godliness.

What about ourselves? Are we living testimonies of God's grace? Can the robe of Christ's righteousness be clearly seen on *us*? Can it be seen by the way we live, the things we talk about, the tendencies of our heart?

Notice, too, that Jesus *didn't* say, "Many are called but few obey or come." No, He says, "Few are *chosen*." He points us to the sovereignty of God in salvation. Maybe this spoils the whole parable for some hearing it. You can go along with invitations, responding or not, disdaining or thankfully receiving the wedding garment—but "few are chosen"? Doesn't the mention of God's sovereignty dash the rest of the parable? Doesn't it render the rest of it meaningless? After all, if God chose some few, no wonder many did not come. What could they do about it?

That's the way man's mind goes. If God is sovereign, I'm guiltless. If God chooses, I'm off the hook, so to speak. If He's that sovereign, then nobody really has a chance. If you're picked, your in. If you're not, there's nothing you can do to change it. That was the thinking Paul battled against in Romans 9:19: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" In other words, can *I* change God's

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sovereign choice? And our answer is, “No, you absolutely cannot change God’s election.”

But we are not ashamed to state exactly what Jesus says here at the end of this parable. If you respond to the invitation to the wedding feast, the gospel, if you receive a wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness, it is entirely God’s doing—one hundred percent His doing. And therefore it is entirely, completely to His glory that you do. And *what*, may I ask, is wrong with *that*?

God creates man with an entirely free will in the Garden of Eden. Man takes his free will and turns his back upon God, thinking that he himself will be as God instead. God justly takes away this free will and allows man to receive the temporal, spiritual, and eternal death that was threatened. What’s there to argue against here?

What then, considering the ruin man has made of himself, if God, who is rich in mercy, should still extend to perishing man the precious gospel of Jesus Christ so that whosoever believeth in His only begotten Son will undoubtedly be saved? What’s to argue against such astounding, undeserved mercy?

What if man, utterly incapable because of his Fall and sin to do good, is then rescued by God’s sovereign grace from such a pit, born again by His mercy and power, and brought to a saving knowledge of and relationship with Himself? If God, entirely on His own, effects salvation *for* helpless mankind, what argument should we make against such a magnanimous way of salvation?

What if, in His infinite justice, God allows some, even many, to walk on in the sin they so love and cherish? What if God allows obstinate, God-despising sinners to go on in their rebellion against Him, their Creator? If, after a lifetime of abusing His mercies, spurning His invitations, wasting His blessings, He should justly judge them? What’s to argue against such justice, such righteous judgments?

I say, thank God many are called. What a mercy to

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hear the good news! I say thank God any at all are chosen, for each one is more than deserve to be since, in the final analysis, *none* are deserving! I say, thank God we don't know if we are one of the *not* chosen. If we, too, believe in Jesus Christ, if we, too, embrace this blessed gospel offer by faith, if we, too, eagerly wrap this proffered righteousness about us by faith, then we, too, will personally enjoy this blessed salvation. Who can argue against this? Is it not rather a cause for rejoicing?

Yes, friends. Thank God we serve a sovereign and a holy God. I'm very, very thankful salvation wasn't left up to *me* or to *you*. Knowing just a little about my own heart, there would be no hope at all! What a comfort it is to know that all for whom Christ died *will* most assuredly be saved. None shall perish. What a comfort if *I* may be privileged by His grace to be one of them.

No, friends, the end of the parable fits perfectly with the rest of it. There's no disconnection here, no derauling of the gospel message. God will have us know to whom belongs all the honor and glory. It's not me and it's not you. It belongs entirely to God. It belongs to Jesus Christ the Son of God. It belongs to the blessed enlightening and indwelling Spirit of God.

We can fight against this truth, but doing so will avail us nothing. It will land us in outer darkness at last where is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Instead let us fall before the God whose love is so very, very great that He gave His only begotten Son so that sinners like us could live.

If you think all this unfair, I dare say you don't know yourself well enough. You have altogether too high thoughts of your own goodness. But if you rejoice at this word *chosen* then I think you begin to understand how that we cannot be saved in any other way. We would *never, ever* have been saved if we had to do our part. And contrary to widespread opinion, this very gospel truth is that which makes men *holy*, not remiss or careless. Men

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who ascribe all grace, glory, salvation, and holiness to God are those who abide at God's feet. Those who are careless or remiss are those who are satisfied with sin, with self, with their own goodness, with rubbish. Such think little of wedding garments. They would rather wear something of their own making! And so you shall—and that forever!

Yes, friend, this is a solemn parable. It was meant to be. But let us not lose sight of the tremendous love, mercy, and grace of God that runs all through it, not to mention His longsuffering!

Let us bless the Lord who thus cares for us, poor sinners. Give Him all glory, ye people. He alone is worthy of it! "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever." Amen.

