Parable of the Wedding Garment  
by Brett Hickey

Good morning! Welcome to *Let the Bible Speak*. We are devoted to helping you meet your spiritual needs. We want to help you to know the word of God better. We want you to be able to separate the truth from error. If you have a Bible question, please call us at 1 800 380-LTBS, that’s 1 800 380-5827, write us at PO Box 10731, Springfield, MO 65808 or contact us through LetTheBibleSpeak.com. This morning we notice another of Jesus’ parables.

Matthew 22:1-2 “And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.”

What’s the message of the Parable of Wedding Feast? The message to the Jews is obvious: to hear you talk, especially the religious elite, you would think that the coming Messianic kingdom is the most anticipated event and that honoring God is your greatest aim, but this just doesn’t square with your actions. You are insulting the king by rejecting His invitation! A closer look at this parable, right after our song…

Verse 2 reads, "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding.”

The wedding feast was a special part of Jewish social life—it was big time! It was a great honor to be invited—especially if the host was someone notable. The glory days of the kingdom of Israel were long gone, but Jesus’ audience could still imagine what it would be like to be invited to a feast prepared by a king for his own son—a time of warm fellowship and joyous celebration. If you wanna be a grump and grouch, if you wanna gripe, groan and gossip, carp, criticize and complain—be advised: this is out of place at the king’s wedding feast. Paul writes in Romans 14:17, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Not only can you experience joy in the kingdom of God—the Holy Spirit commands it repeatedly in Philippians 4:4-8 and calls joy out as the choice fruit of the spirit.

Verses 3-5 “[A]nd sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, ‘See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.’” But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.” In that time and place, there was a two-stage process of being invited to a wedding. The host sent out invitations well ahead of time and everyone sent back their RSVP. Then, those who said "yes" received a courtesy reminder on the day of the banquet. In this case, those most expected to receive the word with excitement, balked. You would have thought that an invite from the king would have sufficed, but no. So other servants were sent out with details of how great this gathering was going to be—all things are ready, come to feast! This was the opportunity of lifetime… But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his farm, another

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to his business.” This was an awful affront to the majesty and graciousness of the king. Shocking really! You did not turn down any invitation from the king—much less the granddaddy of all invitations! But they did—and not just one or two of them. They were too busy. They had work to do. Places to go and people to see.

You know how the king felt. You’ve planned dinner or outings—worked yourselves to death with all the preparations, only to be met with no shows and cancellations. Now you have all this food and nobody’s coming. This may frustrate some of you. This may make some of you cry. Whether you’ve actually been there or not, you know how God must feel whenever we reject his invitation to enter the kingdom, whenever we reject his invitation to gather around the table of the Lord, to feast on his word and to help issue invitations to others. He goes to all this trouble to prepare the kingdom, invites us to join him and then what? We make light of God’s invitation because we’re too busy. Let that sink in! But it got even worse.

Verse 6 “And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.” Some of this sorry mess of ingratitude actually get hostile with the messengers. They get violent—beating and brutalizing the very folks who brought them the good news. This is a painfully obvious reference to how the Jews abused and often even murdered the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus and his disciples. The same spirit prevails when we show contempt and scorn for God’s messengers, when we abuse, mistreat and malign those preaching and teaching the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Like those on the king’s guest list, we provoke the fury of the Lord. The response: the king, in verse 7 “sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.” Matthew picks up on this idea in Matthew 24, predicting the destruction of Jerusalem. And in 70 AD, the Romans fulfill it, completely destroying Jerusalem and burning it.

Verse 8 “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.’” What made them unworthy? Their response to the gospel call—their reaction to the word of God. Verses 9-10, “Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ 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 original guest list was limited, but it’s now expanded to include everyone—“both bad and good.” C.S. Lewis once said, “there are two kinds of people in the world: Those who say to God ‘Thy will be done’ and those to whom God says ‘thy will be done.’” [italics mine] Nobody is sent to hell. We either accept or reject the gracious invitation of King. It’s as simple as that! God wants us at the feast, but we must choose.

Remember, Jesus had been preaching the gospel of the kingdom to the chosen people for three years, but God had been telling them through the prophets to be looking for their invitation ever since days of Abraham. Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies scattered throughout the very book they read, recited, studied and sang from, but they still wouldn’t have him.

When the Jews rejected the kings’ invitation, the Samaritans and Gentiles made the guest list. Now everyone was invited. Just as Romans 1:16 puts it, “to the Jews first and also to Greek.” In Acts 13:46, Paul and Barnabas told the Jews at Antioch, “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.” And that’s exactly what they did.
Think about your guest list. Who have you invited and who you are planning to invite. Does your list fit Jesus’ parable? Notice, everyone is invited—the good and bad! The lowest sinner you can find can be made as white as snow by the blood of Jesus, but we tend to invite the good, the likable, the successful, the educated and the intelligent—our peers. Notice also that it’s not the king himself, but his servants that deliver the invitations. Hey! That’s you and that’s me! We’re the servants sent out and we need to check our guest list. Has it been too restrictive? This is counter intuitive, but when it comes to who’s invited, God wants us to put the emphasis on quantity, not quality. Everyone is invited—the good and the bad.

Our parable is pretty easy to follow up to now, but something peculiar develops. Verse 11, "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment." This is a problem.

At the end of World War II, the Russian head of state gave an elaborate banquet to honor British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The Russians arrived in their best formal wear—military dress uniforms—but their honored guest did not. Churchill arrived wearing his famous zipper coveralls that he had worn during the German bomb attack on London. He thought the Russians would appreciate it. They didn’t. His wardrobe selection was well-motivated, but the Russians were humiliated and insulted. This is exactly how the king in this parable viewed the man coming in without a wedding garment—only this was not merely a fashion faux pas; what Jesus was talking about was moral failure.

When I read this part of the parable I’m reminded of Hans Christian Anderson’s story, “The Emperor’s new clothes.”

Many years ago there lived an emperor who cared much about his clothes. One day two swindlers said they could make the finest suit of clothes from the most beautiful cloth. This cloth, they said, also had the special capability that it was invisible to anyone who was either stupid or not fit for his position.

Being a bit nervous about whether he himself would be able to see the cloth the emperor first sent two of his trusted men to see it. Of course, neither would admit that they could not see the cloth and so praised it. All the townspeople also heard of the cloth and were interested to learn how stupid their neighbors were.

The emperor then allowed himself to be dressed in the clothes for a procession through town, never admitting he was too unfit and stupid to see what he was wearing. He was afraid that the other people would think he was stupid. A child, however, walked right up to the carriage and shouted, “Hey! The emperor has no clothes!”

His father reprimanded him and took him away. But the boy's remark had been heard by the crowd, who were soon chanting, "The boy is right! The Emperor has no clothes! It's true!" The Emperor realized that the people were right, but could not admit it. He thought it better to hold his ground under the illusion that anyone who couldn't see his clothes was either stupid or
incompetent. And he stood stiffly on his carriage, while behind him a page held his imaginary mantle.

That story is not inspired, but what happened in it depicts reality in religion. People are sold a bill of goods. The preacher tells them they’ve got their wedding garment on, when spiritually they’re “poor, miserable, blind and naked.” (Rev. 3:17) Then, when they hear the truth, they stubbornly hold their ground, clinging to the fact that others insist they have their garment on. There will be many persons who, like the emperor and man in Jesus’ parable, will be exposed on the Day of Judgment. Jesus says in Revelation 3:18, “I counsel you to buy from Me…white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed…” “Blessed is he who …keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” (Rev. 16:15)

You may be thinking, how were they supposed to know what to wear? Well, in that day the king supplied the wedding garment himself. All the guests had to do was just put it on. But this fella was so careless or cavalier that he didn’t put on the right clothes even when they were handed to him.

Let’s try to get in the mind of the guy without the wedding garment. Maybe he was thinking, “Hey, most of the people rejected the invitation; the King will just be tickled that I wanted to come.” Perhaps he thought that the king was “too kind and loving” to send him away. Maybe he thought that this was “just a small thing” that wouldn’t really matter. He possibly thought that with all the people who were there, the king wouldn’t notice.

How does all this justification hold up? First of all, understand, nobody is going to slip through the cracks. Neither is anyone going to ride the coattails of their mother or father through the pearly gates. Paul settles that in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Next, when we start dividing the commands of God into big things and small, we’re looking for trouble. Jesus said in Luke 16:10 that “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.”

True, God is kind and loving, but there is a flipside to that. The Holy Spirit insists in Romans 11:22, “Behold the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.” God loves His Son, but he subjected Jesus to indignities unworthy of a lowly bug. And, if you dare despise that great offering of love, if you spit on that sacrifice or just walk on by, don’t think there will not be a penalty. Jesus makes this crystal clear as He winds up the parable.

And, finally, for the remaining excuse: of course, God is glad when we accept His invitation, but He’s the host, and we must accept God’s invitation on His terms. If you saunter into a restaurant in sweats and T-shirt when there’s a sign out front that says, “Coat and tie required,” you’ll be sitting on the pavement, not at a table. Accepting an invitation means accepting the terms of the invitation.
This guy without a wedding garment thought he could come to the king’s feast on his own terms. He “interpreted” “wear a wedding garment” as “wear the garment of your choice” and it did not fly! Too many want to enjoy the feast, but without submitting to God’s terms. Jesus drives this truth home in Luke 6:46, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not what I say?”

Verse 12 reads, “So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. 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.’” Listen, it’s not going to be about bank balances and portfolios, degrees or plagues—Jesus won’t be checking passports or driver’s licenses, He’ll be looking for a wedding garment. And what does the wedding garment represent? We’ve been talking about this and some of you have already seen it.

Paul helps us in Galatians 3:27, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” We put on our wedding garment when we put on Christ, and Paul says that we put on Christ when we are baptized. Water baptism is not optional or incidental, it’s mandatory. The Holy Spirit says, we are baptized into Christ and in baptism we put on Christ. If we’re not in Christ, if we do not put on Christ, if we do not have on our wedding garment, we will be “cast away into outer darkness.”

But it’s not just about doing what needs to be done as one outside of Christ. Faith (Heb.11:6) must be accompanied by repentance (Acts 2:38). Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of life. Let me tell you, you can be dunked all day every day, but if your heart stays same, no amount of water can save you.

The urgency related to our wedding garments is further heightened in Revelation 3:4-5, “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from Book of Life…” And again, Jude 23, “Others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”

Wearing white garments is about more than avoiding wrong. It’s also about doing what’s right. Ephesians 4:24, “(P)ut on the new man…in true righteousness and holiness.” Ephesians 6:11, 14 “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil…(P)ut on the breastplate of righteousness…” Paul hits it again in Colossians 3:10-14, “(P)ut on the new man who is renewed in knowledge…” “(P)ut on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering…” “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”

Then the king said to the servants (vv. 12-14), ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen."
The more you study this story, the more you sense this story says something about the difference between accepting Jesus and obeying Jesus. Don’t insult the king. “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.'” (Rev. 22:17) Stay with us to learn how to get a copy of this message, after our song…

Thank you for watching Let the Bible Speak. We hope you have heard God speak to you through His word. If you’d like to hear how you can obey the gospel and avoid hell’s fury, or if you’d like to get a free copy of today’s message, “Parable of the Wedding Garment” or begin our free Bible study course, please write us at the address to follow or call 1-800-380-5827. You may also visit LetTheBibleSpeak.com to watch videos of the program. Finally, we echo the sentiment of the apostle Paul when he wrote in Romans 16:16, “the churches of Christ salute you.” Until next week, goodbye and God bless.

Sermon delivered by evangelist Brett Hickey over “Let the Bible Speak”
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