

## “IMPROPERLY DRESSED”

**READING:** *Matthew 22 verses 1-14*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*It was the first time which the young girl had attended a wedding, and as she sat alongside her mum she was enthralled by all that was happening around her – the flowers decorating the church, everyone dressed up in their best, the music. Then the bride came in with her bridal party to join the groom and his best man at the front of the church. Sometime during the ceremony, the little girl leaned over to her mother and whispered: “Mummy, why is the bride dressed in white?” The mother thought about that for moment and struggled to come up with a simple explanation her daughter would understand. Finally, she smiled and said to her daughter: “The bride wear white, because white is the colour of happiness, and today is the happiest day of her life” The little girl thought about this for a moment, and then she said, “So why’s the groom wearing black?”*

Weddings are usually “dress up affairs”, although, sometimes you might wonder. If you have ever watched “Don’t tell the bride” where the groom is given £12,000 to arrange the whole wedding without input from the bride, including her dress and dresses for the bridesmaids, you can see the differences in expectation between the groom and the bride. Sometimes his idea of a suitable wedding dress is far from what the bride has already set her heart on. Sometimes, on receiving an invitation to a wedding, particularly for the ladies, it’s a case of “what shall I wear?” or the dreaded words for a husband to hear, “I need to go and buy something to wear” or maybe even worse for him “you need a new suit.” Now, I’ve been to a few weddings, and I’ve conducted a fair number of them as well but I don’t recall ever being to a wedding where someone has been kicked out because of how they have dressed, or not dressed. There are some where they should have been.

Here in **Matthew 22**, that is exactly what took place. The King gives a wedding banquet, and becomes angry that one of the invited guests wasn’t wearing the appropriate clothes. Not only was that man kicked out, bound hand and foot and thrown outside, into the darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. On the face of it, this reaction by the father of the groom seems a little unfair, and a bit drastic. After all, in the parable Jesus tells these guests don’t seem to be wealthy people. Jesus tells us that they were from the streets, and it’s reasonable to believe that at least some of them didn’t have the resources to dress in the best of garments when invited. But the King kicks this man out of the banquet anyway, and he’s not particularly nice about it.

So, the first question that comes to mind is “what has happened here?” According to Barnes New Testament Commentary notes: “Ancient kings and princes were accustomed to make presents of changes of raiment to their friends and favourites. To refuse to receive this gift was an expression of highest contempt.” Now it begins to make a little more sense. The king had supplied all of his guests with wedding robes, and this man just didn’t wear what he was given. From the very outset Jesus explains what this parable was referring to: **“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son” (verse 2)**. So, this is a description of how people qualify for heaven, and from the way Jesus tells the story, it appears it isn’t all that hard to get into heaven. The servants of the King **“went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.” (verse 10)**. It didn’t matter whether they were rich or poor, influential or destitute, good or bad. Everybody was invited. Now it’s hard to imagine that some would have rejected the King’s offer, yet they did. It’s hard to believe that anyone would abuse the King’s offer, yet they did. But it’s really hard to imagine why this man would be invited to the banquet, accept the offer, and then literally slap his host in the face by refusing to wear the garments the King had graciously supplied!

It would appear that the clothing he wore to the banquet “looked” much like the wedding garments everyone else was wearing. This man seems to be fitting into the banquet scene up until the time the King makes his entrance and notices that the robe the man is wearing isn’t the one he had supplied. Why wouldn’t this guest wear the King’s raiment? Perhaps it was because he felt his own clothes were good enough. They looked very similar to what everyone else was wearing. There are people who believe God will accept them with the garments they wear even though their idea of what is acceptable isn’t the same as God’s.

*In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Ivan the IV became the first Czar of Russia. He ruled a large diverse nation but he wasn’t a good ruler. He was very cruel, so much so, that he became known as “Ivan The Terrible.” During his reign he married 7 women and abused each and every one of them. His idea of a good time was going up on the walls of the Kremlin and throwing animals over the walls to the pavement beneath so that he could watch them die. When Ivan died in 1584, historians tell us that those who prepared his body for burial were instructed to shave Ivan’s head and to dress him for burial in the robes of a monk. He wanted that done, because he apparently hoped that God would only see his garments and think that he was a good and simple monk, and thus Ivan the Terrible would slip in under the radar. He thought if his garments made him look enough like a Christian, he’d be saved.*

There are people today who believe that they look enough like a Christian to be saved. They wear the garments of being “nice people”. They know that God hates sin, and they believe they are not nearly as sinful as other people they know. They don’t think of themselves as being bad people and if they’ve done any bad in their lives, they believe their good works will outweigh any bad they’ve ever done. But God says that’s not the way it works: **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2 verses 8-9)** or, as **Titus 3 verse 5** tells us - God will save us **“not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit”** Others believe they’ll get into heaven because of their religious affiliation. If you belong to, or attend a church, that should get you in – shouldn’t it? Jesus tells us that isn’t how it works: **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7 verse 21)**

*Once upon a time a man died and went to heaven. As he came near the pearly gates he saw Saint Peter standing at the door and confidently approached him believing he would be able to enter the eternal city with no problem. To his amazement, he was told by Peter that there was a point system he would be required to meet in order to qualify for heaven. “How many points do I need to get into heaven?” he asked.*

*“Thirty thousand,” replied Peter.*

*“Thirty thousand?!... Well, I was a member of my local church. How much was that worth?”*

*“About five points,” came the answer.*

*“Five points!” the man stammered, “Okay, then what about all the good things I’ve done for my neighbours and family. Surely that is worth quite a bit.”*

*“According to our records,” Peter, at this point, consulted his clipboard, “that comes to about eight more points.”*

*Worried now, the man cried, “But that makes only thirteen of the thirty thousand required. Why, if it weren’t for the grace of God, no one could make it into heaven!”*

*“That’s the rest of the thirty thousand,” replied Peter.*

My point is this: you and I will never qualify for heaven by what church we belong to or by the good deeds we’ve done. Those aren’t the “garments” God will accept at His banquet. The prophet Isaiah writes **“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...” (Isaiah 64 verse 6)**. OK, we should be part of a good church. We should be doing good deeds. Even the world knows that is what Christians should be known for. But if that’s the clothing we’re relying on to make us acceptable to God, we’ve missed the point. To believe we

have earned our salvation because of what church we belong to and the good deeds that we've done is essentially the same as walking into the banquet in our own clothing

The only wedding garment that's going to make any difference is that which God supplies. **Galatians 3 verses 26-27** tells us about this new garment: ***"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."*** What garment will God accept? Only the blood of Jesus. Only His righteousness can clothe us and cover our sinful past. It is not the rites and rituals of the church which will save us, it's the "putting on of Christ" that saves us. It is only Jesus that saves us. We accept Him as our Saviour. We put Him on when we respond by our faith, repentance, confession of Jesus as Lord, and by sharing in His death, burial and resurrection in water baptism. The point is this, we should never try to substitute anything for the wedding garment God has given. Everything that looks like Christianity is actually a reflection of the Jesus we put on when we believe/repent and are baptised.

In the story of the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15 verses 11-32**), once the wayward son has realised his wrong choices and decides to return home and throw himself on the mercy of his father, we read that the father on seeing him return home, ran, threw his arms around him, kissed him and commanded that the father's best robe be put on his son. That robe covered up the boy's pitiful state. It covered up the effects of his destitution, but it also signified his acceptance back home. It is the blood of Jesus that makes us acceptable at the wedding banquet in Heaven. There is a chorus which says:

"I am covered over with the robe of righteousness that  
Jesus gives to me, gives to me;  
I am covered over with the precious blood of Jesus  
And he lives in me, he lives in me,  
Oh what joy it is to know my Heavenly Father loves me so,  
And gave to me, my Jesus,  
When He looks at me He sees not what I used to be, but  
He sees Jesus, Jesus."

**Isaiah 61 verse 10** assures us: ***"I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*** Later in the Old Testament, the prophet Zechariah records: ***"The angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Take off his filthy clothes.' Then he said to Joshua, 'See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.'***

If we depend upon anything else, we're just relying on window dressing, improperly dressed.

## **PSALM 106 verses 1 – 5**

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures for ever.

<sup>2</sup> Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD or fully declare his praise?

<sup>3</sup> Blessed are those who act justly, who always do what is right.

<sup>4</sup> Remember me, LORD, when you show favour to your people, come to my aid when you save them,

<sup>5</sup> that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may share in the joy of your nation

and join your inheritance in giving praise.

## **MATTHEW 22 verses 1 – 14**

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: <sup>2</sup> ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. <sup>3</sup> He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Then he sent some more servants and said, “Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”

<sup>5</sup> ‘But they paid no attention and went off – one to his field, another to his business. <sup>6</sup> The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup> The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Then he said to his servants, “The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. <sup>9</sup> So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.” <sup>10</sup> So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

<sup>11</sup> ‘But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. <sup>12</sup> He asked, “How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?” The man was speechless.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

<sup>14</sup> ‘For many are invited, but few are chosen.’