

## **WHAT WILL YOU BE WEARING?**

Matthew 22:1-14

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Matthew presents us with a parable today that is similar to one in Luke. The differences however are so striking that one almost wonders if this is a totally different parable. This also could be an example of Jesus simply being a good preacher and using the same story for a different audience. That said, this is probably Matthew's reworking of Luke's version to make it fit his world and theological needs. One thing to remember about the various gospel writers is that each has an agenda and the placement and additions to the version in Luke, definitely reflect Matthew's agenda. In today's world we might refer to this as "spin." I will do the same thing this morning because at the 10:30 service my primary audience will be children. Our younger members would not understand some of the content I will offer to you. The underlying idea is the same, but the delivery is different. How that applies will be explained in just a moment.

Two things that bother people about Matthew's version of the parable are the image of the king destroying the cities of those who will not come and then this problem of the guest who is not properly dressed. These are not found in Luke's version. Luke leaves out this entire piece because Luke is writing to a Gentile audience who would not have the same memories or cultural image of God as Matthew.

Matthew has set this as the third of three parables all dealing with rejection of God's word by those in authority. In Matthew this parable like the previous two is placed between the cleansing of the temple and Jesus' arrest. This represents the culmination of these three parables with each one being a more scathing attack on the Pharisees than the previous one.

This is clearly a judgment parable. It is an indictment of the Jewish authorities and all who have turned away from Jesus' message. Matthew is very clear that those who think they are most deserving of salvation find themselves too busy to even attend the banquet. They have rejected the offer of salvation and so find themselves suffering the same fate as the unfaithful vineyard workers. Matthew is talking to a specific audience in images of an angry God that they would understand and react to. Imagine if you will that he is preaching to someone today who believes that God causes natural disasters to punish sin. So the King destroying the towns is making a point that the Pharisees would have clearly understood.

Over the centuries the question coming from this parable is who will get into the wedding feast? In other words, am I saved? This seems to be the burning question if you will pardon the pun. That however is not the real issue here. The question the puzzlement, the thing that makes us wonder what is going on is the exchange between the king (God) and the man who does not have on the proper wedding garment. Matthew is clear that all are

invited, but just showing up is not enough. We must be dressed properly so the key question is what is the wedding garment that we need to have on and how do we get it?

What the garment is has changed throughout the centuries. Each interpretation is influenced by the needs of the church at that time. The early church theologian Irenaeus said it was the Holy Spirit. John Chrysostom said that it was the patience of God and must be a clean garment that represents our life. St. Augustine said it was caritas (charity) this is the adoption of Christ's precepts and work. Martin Luther countered later that it could not be works, but had to be faith. Each has adapted the wedding garment to meet their need, their time, and their theology.

So what does the wedding garment stand for in our time?

At first blush, the idea of sticking with Martin Luther and faith as the garment has appeal. Martin Luther was writing in response to the problem of works righteousness that was prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church of his time. Augustine had speculated that caritas or charity as one of the types of love was the nature of the garment, but that had been turned into the doctrine that taught that we earned our way to the place at the banquet by what we did. Martin Luther always held that we do not earn our way into heaven by works, but by faith.

At first glance then faith seemed a good answer. Upon reflection though there is a problem with faith as the garment. Paul states in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 that faith is not what endures. The passage is the famous passage that talks about all the things that love is; love is patient, love is kind etc. Faith is what gets us through this world. It is the hope of things to come but at the banquet we no longer need faith. Once we are seated at the banquet and see God face to face as opposed to through a mirror dimly we no longer need faith.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:12-13

So how can faith be the garment that is needed when we take our seat at the banquet? This brings me back to a moment of partial agreement with St. Augustine. There may be more to his thought about caritas than I had first imagined. Love is what Paul tells us endures and caritas is one of the types of love that Augustine lists.

However it is more than just charity. Augustine is talking about more than just acts of charity but in the love that motivates them. Love is what God ultimately is all about. This is what the Corinthians passage is all about. It is nothing less than the definition of God.

This fits well with Jesus' teaching of loving God and loving neighbor that I referenced last week as the principals behind the Ten Commandments.

However, we are left with a problem. If the garment is the love of God, why didn't the man have the wedding garment on? The surprising answer is that he refused it at the door. It would have been custom to have extra robes at the door for a guest that might not have one. So the real problem is that the robe was offered and not accepted.

This is ultimately about Grace, but we must be open and willing to accept the wedding garment and then put it on. The sin of the man was not that he did not have one when he arrived, but that he refused to put on the one that was offered.

Robert Capon in his book *Parables of Judgment* uses an example that may help. He compares this to our walking into the heavenly car store. We have a measly \$125, but want the perfect car. Our salesman walks us around the lot and we realize that with what we have in our pocket we can only afford a piece of junk. Yet that heavenly salesman says come around the corner here, have I got a deal for you. Around the corner sits a brand new Porsche with everything on it we can imagine. He says to us, "Go ahead, it's yours. The boss loves you and thinks you are special, take it, no charge." And what do we do, we walk around it, kick the tires, jump on the bumper and wonder what's the catch, what's wrong with it. We cannot believe that the boss loves us so much that we get this car for free. Yet that is how the heavenly car dealership works. This is how the heavenly banquet works. This is how God works. But we do have to be willing to take the keys, get in and drive away.

Have I got a deal for you. Here are the keys to the kingdom, the heavenly wedding cloak. Do you want them or not?