

REFLECTION ON WEDDING CLOTHES FOR THE KINGDOM

Matthew 22:1–2 Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: **2** "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son." [NRSV]

The invitees, however, were unwilling to come and were thus found not to be worthy by the king, who instructed his servants to invite everyone they could find — good and bad alike:

Matthew 22:10–13 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. **11** "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. **12** He asked, 'How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?' The man was speechless. **13** "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.'" [NIV]

One may be astonished by the fate of the poor fellow without "wedding clothes": wasn't it unfair or even cruel of the king to punish so severely the man he began calling "friend"?

How could the king — representing here a loving God, the heavenly king — do such a thing? After all, the man was not one of the formal original invitees: all he did was to accept a last minute perfectly unexpected invitation and he did not do anything wrong, except for not being dressed up for the occasion. Did not Jesus Himself — on another occasion — instruct not to worry about "clothes" [Matthew 6:25]?

What may we learn from this striking and perhaps even disturbing parable?

First — no matter what our own judgment may be — that is how God governs His kingdom. In His love and mercy, Jesus alerted us and we are wise to deport ourselves in accordance.

Second — after accepting humbly God's provisions, as obedient children — we may ask: what are the wedding clothes and where do we get them?

Zechariah, one of the great prophets of Israel, who most keenly saw the coming of the Messiah gives an insight when he described Joshua, high priest at the time:

Zechariah 3:3–4 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. **4** He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes." [NASB]

The wedding clothes are not material clothes (about which Jesus told us not to worry); rather, they are the spiritual clothes that one is to wear in the kingdom. The man lacked wedding clothes simply because of his iniquity, that is: his own sin.

God is perfect and His kingdom is perfect: there is zero tolerance for sin and iniquity. Jesus had exhorted already — from the Mount — not just to aim to be perfect, but that we must be perfect:

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. [NRSV]

If we want to be in the kingdom and not in outer darkness, where there is "weeping and gnashing of teeth," we must be rid of our filthy clothes and acquire the wedding robes of righteousness.

How may we do this? We cannot cleanse ourselves of iniquity. That only Jesus can do: Jesus, the One Who lived as one of us, but without sin:

2 Corinthians 5:21 He made the one who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf, in order that we could become the righteousness of God in him. [LEB]

Jesus — being without sin — suffered death on the cross so that we may be forgiven of sin and receive His righteousness, which is our "wedding clothes."

It is important to remember that these wedding clothes — our righteousness — are based:

Philippians 3:9 not [on] having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. [NASB]

Our standing with God is not based on what we have done (perhaps a mix of good and bad), but on faith: there is no escaping that.

This is His promise:

1 John 1:8–9 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** But if we confess our sins, God Who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [NRSV]

The parable of the wedding feast ends with these sobering words of the Lord:

Matthew 22:14 "For many are called, but few are chosen." [NLT]

In His grace, God calls many; in fact we are told that His will is that no one should perish. Nevertheless, only a few will be chosen to be in the kingdom of heaven: only those who have the wedding clothes of the righteousness of Christ.