

19th Sunday after Pentecost

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Are You Wearing the Wedding Garment?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The text is Matthew 22:12

¹¹ *"But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.*

¹² *And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. (Mat 22:11-12 ESV)*

The question for this sermon on the basis of this parable that Jesus spoke is, "How do you know that you are wearing the wedding garment?" While there are a number of reasons to attend worship services, such as worshipping the God of the Bible, another important reason is to move from understanding the Bible to applying the various passages. What do I mean by that?

To understand a Biblical passage means to know what the text is saying. For example, it is easy to understand what happened at the cross. A carpenter from Nazareth is arrested and then put to death by crucifixion. But how does one apply that event to your personal life. Some conclude that if we want to be saved we also need to follow the example of Jesus and help people in need. Others teach that it really was not Jesus who go crucified but Satan himself died on the cross. Now the Christian application is that Jesus paid the punishment for our sins and we are saved by grace.

Occasionally there are some passages in the Bible that we cannot understand what is being talked about. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:29, Paul writes:

what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized on their behalf? (1Co 15:29 ESV) Because theologians have yet to figure out what Paul is talking about, it cannot be applied.

But for the most part even the laity can understand what the Bible is saying. For example, Jesus tells a rich man who asks what he must do to be saved to give his money to the poor and come follow him. Everyone understands those words. But how to apply them is the problem. Is Jesus saying that the way to get to heaven is to follow his advice? Of course not because a few verses later when the disciples ask Him who can be saved, Jesus answers, "With men is it impossible for them to do any work to save themselves.

Most false teaching does not occur because people cannot understand the Bible but because they misapply what the passage is meaning. They can't figure out what God means by what He says; they are unable to decode the words or to unravel the true reason behind God's message.

And that is the problem with this parable. It is easy to understand that a king gave a wedding feast for his son and those invited refused to attend. In fact, they seized his servants, treated them shamefully and killed them. In fact, most laity who have gone to Sunday School can even figure out the application and decode the true meaning of the words. They will conclude that this is what the Old Testament books reveal that God through the prophets invites everyone to the wedding feast of His only begotten Son Jesus but the people mistreat and even kill the prophets. So far so good.

But then we get to the wedding feast in which all the guests who have come are wearing a wedding garment except for one person. And when the king sees him, says: *'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.*¹³ *Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'* (Mt 22:12-13)

It is clear that all of us can understand what occurred at the wedding feast in regard to the man who did not have on the wedding garment. But who of you can now apply or decode what this means for you as to whether or not you have on the wedding garment?

Some apply this passage by teaching that once you believe in Jesus, you no longer sin and that is why you earn your wedding garment. However that notion contradicts the Christian teaching that no one is saved because of their works. In fact, the parable itself teaches what happened when the servants of the king went out and invited others to attend the wedding feast:

¹⁰ *And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.* (Mat 22:10 ESV)

The Greek word for bad can mean wicked in an ethical sense; in other words, sinners. In fact only sinners go to heaven who have been forgiven through faith in JC.

Now we also teach that through baptism you receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. You certainly then have been dressed in the wedding garment of salvation. But the Bible also refutes once saved; always saved. So a person can fall from their baptism through unbelief.

Is there something else that can assure you that you are wearing the garment of salvation? When the king asks the man how he got into the wedding without the garment, he man remains speechless. Why is he speechless? Think about this. You decide to buy groceries but when you arrive at the counter, you are asked, "Where is your badge?" You remain speechless. Why? Because you never thought you had to wear some kind of badge to buy groceries.

Why did the man remain speechless? Because he never thought that he had to be dressed in a wedding garment. So what is this wedding garment? It's referred to in Isaiah 61:10:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa 61:10 ESV)

The man was speechless because he did not think that his sin was so bad that he needed a robe of righteousness. Like the unbelieving Pharisees he was so filled with his own self-righteousness that he thanked God he wasn't like the tax collectors or prostitutes. Do you realize why you have on the wedding garment of salvation. Because you confess that you are a poor, miserable sinner serving nothing but temporal and eternal punishment.

It sounds odd that the assurance of having on the wedding garment occurs because of a preaching of the Law. But that was the task of John the Baptizer who preaching a baptism of repentance in preparation for hearing the Gospel. You have that wedding garment of salvation because you believe that you need it was we said in the liturgy that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. So God did for us what we are unable to do for ourselves. And that is your assurance that through faith in Jesus, you are clothed in the wedding garment. Amen.

May the peace of God that passes all understanding continue to sustain you in the one true faith of Jesus Christ forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer of the Church 19th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23A) 11 October 2020

For the blessing of marriage and the faithfulness of husbands and wives, for the children entrusted to their care, for the loving care of children who have suffered abuse or neglect, and for those who open their homes to children in foster care, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For a welcoming spirit in this congregation, for boldness in our invitation to those without a church home, and for a willingness to serve our neighbor in need and the stranger whose lives cross our paths, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For compassion toward the sick and those who suffer, for our care of those who need our assistance, for the hospitalized and those recovering, and especially for _____ and those we name in our hearts, that God may grant them healing, comfort, strength and peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all elected and appointed civil servants, for all judges and magistrates, for all emergency personnel, for all members of the armed forces, and for all of us as citizens and neighbors, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

*For our communion upon the body and blood of the Lord, and for hearts that burn with desire for the marriage feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom without end, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.***

For gratitude in receiving the Lord's gifts and blessings, for generosity in sharing these resources with those in need, and for the offerings to support the work of the Kingdom in this place, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For grace, that we may hear and heed the invitation of our Lord and joyfully wear the baptismal clothing of the wedding garment of salvation with His righteousness: **Lord, have mercy.**

All these things, Lord, we pray You to grant us according to Your mercy in Jesus Christ and to fill us with contentment, that trusting in Your gracious will for all things, our hearts may enjoy perfect rest and peace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**