

An Invitation to a Wedding, Matthew 22:1-14 Sunday, Oct. 15, 2023

An older couple was being married. Both had lost their spouses to death and had grown children. The combined children sent out this wedding invitation in their behalf: **“Phil, Richard, Karen and Allison, and John, Matt and Steve request the honor of your presence at the marriage of their Mother and Father. Because they are combining two households, they already have at least two of everything. So please, no presents! Reception and garage sale immediately following the ceremony.”**

There is no more hopeful event on earth than a wedding . . . at any age. Jesus loved weddings. His first miracle was at a wedding. On one occasion he referred to himself as a bridegroom. So it is not surprising that at least one of his parables should feature a wedding.

The kingdom of heaven is like a king, he said, who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they did something quite extraordinary they refused the invitation. This was most unusual to refuse the king’s invitation. Nevertheless, there were those who refused to come. Then the king 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 butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”** Again his invitation was spurned. Some of those who received the invitation went back to their field or back to their business. The rest seized the king’s servants, mistreated them, then killed them.

The king was enraged, as you might imagine. He sent his army and destroyed those who were guilty of these crimes and burned their city. **“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So, go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 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.”**

This parable sounds very much like the parable we dealt with last week about a landowner who rented a vineyard to some rebellious tenants. But this story takes a strange twist. The wedding did go on with those who chose to come. However, **“when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’** The man was speechless. He was not wearing the right clothes. Everyone else wore tuxes and evening clothes and he was in jeans. **Does wearing the right clothes matter?**

Some of you will remember when David Brinkley was one of America’s favorite newscasters. In his book, David Brinkley, A Memoir, Brinkley tells about coming to work for NBC in the 1940s. At that time, NBC considered itself the elegant network. The rule was that after 6:00 p. m., radio newscasters were required to read the news wearing tuxedos. Can you imagine that? **Their radio audience couldn’t see the newscasters**, but NBC management believed their attitude and presentation skills improved dramatically when they were properly attired. Interesting, don’t you think? What’s your take on that? Would you prefer that newscasters wore tuxedos? Do you think it would make any difference? Do you have a dress code where you work? Would you prefer to dress more casually during the week?

Some of you may agree with Linda Ellerbee who says, **“If men can run the world, why can’t they stop wearing neckties? How intelligent is it to start the day by tying a little noose around your neck?”** Some of you men would agree with that assessment.

Comedian Gilda Radner once said, “I base most of my fashion taste on what doesn’t itch.” Sounds like a good practice to me. Let’s face it, the times are a-changing, particularly when it comes to apparel. The whole world seems to be moving toward “casual Friday,” all week long. A certain woman is employed by the human-development department of a corporation in the Midwest. Her job is to train employees in proper dress codes and etiquette. One day as she was stepping onto the elevator, a man casually dressed in jeans and a golf shirt got on with her. Thinking of her responsibilities, she scolded him. **“Dressed a little casually today, aren’t we?”** The man replied, **“That’s one benefit of owning the company . . .”**

Executives, particularly in relatively new high tech companies are dressing more casually. Doctors are dressing more casually. Teachers are dressing more casually. [Even pastors are dressing more casually. Attend a worship service in some of the fastest growing churches in our country and the pastor may be attired in jeans during worship.]

DOES WHAT YOU WEAR TO THE JOB REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE??

Jesus tells a parable about a wedding guest who was not appropriately attired. This was not because he could not afford wedding clothes. Some of you may have been invited to be part of a wedding party in which bridesmaids or ushers were required to provide their own dresses or tuxedos. This might provide an economic hardship on some people. Not so in this story. Scholars tell us it was the custom in Jesus' time for the host to provide free garments for all the guests. There was no excuse for this guest to be dressed inappropriately except for either ignorance or stubbornness'. **The attitude of the king indicates that it was the latter.** The man knew better than to be dressed as he was, but he evidently did not care. **The king didn't cut him any slack:** He said to his attendants, ***"Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are invited, but few are chosen."***

This is a shocking text for many people. **FOR YOU SEE, THIS TEXT IS NOT ABOUT CLOTHING AT ALL—IT IS ABOUT THE CERTAIN QUALIFICATIONS WE NEED TO FOLLOW JESUS.** *This text implies that God cares how His children live.* Many people today have heard the message of grace: "Jesus loves me, Jesus accepts me just as I am. Whoopee! I'm saved. I'm headed to the Promised Land." But wait just a moment. **That is only a part of the Gospel message.**

British bishop N.T. Wright comments: "We want to hear a nice story about God's throwing the party open to everyone . . . We don't want to know about judgment on the wicked, or about demanding standards of holiness, or about weeping and gnashing of teeth." He goes on to say, "[Jesus'] love reached [those who were invited to the feast] where they were, but his love refused to let them stay as they were. Love wants the best for the beloved. Their lives were transformed, healed, and changed." "Actually," he continues, "nobody really believes that God wants everyone to stay exactly as they are. God loves serial killers and child molesters; God loves ruthless and arrogant businessmen; God loves manipulative mothers that damage their children's emotions for life. **But the point of God's love is that he wants them to change.** He hates what they're doing and the effects it has on everyone else and on themselves too. Ultimately, if he's a good God, he cannot allow that sort of behavior, and that sort of person, if they don't change, to remain forever in the party he's throwing for his son . . . **"The point of the story is," continues Bishop Wright, "that . . . God's kingdom is a kingdom in which love and justice and truth and mercy and holiness reign unhindered.** They are the clothes you need to wear for the wedding. And if you refuse to put them on, you are saying you don't want to stay at the party . . ."

You may think those are hard words, but they are very much a part of the Gospel. **Yes, God loves us as we are, as He made us initially, but GOD EXPECTS US TO CLOTHE OURSELVES WITH THE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST.** That's one reason we come to worship. To get to know Christ, so that we might be more like him.

Some of you might remember one of the best-selling songs of the 1970s, ***"My Sweet Lord"*** by former Beatle George Harrison. The song was about Harrison's sincere desire to find God through various kinds of religion: ***"My sweet Lord/ Oh, my Lord/ My sweet Lord/ I really wanna be with You/ I like to see You, Lord/ Oh, it takes so long, my Lord/ I really wanna know You/ I'd like to go with You/ I wanna show You Lord/That it won't take long, my Lord."***

Shortly before his death in 2001, Harrison was asked about his spiritual journey. The question was appropriate since it was Harrison who introduced the Beatles to Eastern Religions in the 60s and (after the group broke up) wrote "My Sweet Lord." To the end of his life, Harrison continued to investigate spiritual matters. He summed up his priorities this way: ***"Everything else in life can wait, but the search for God cannot wait."*** Harrison's song cut across all religious faiths. We can't claim it as a Christian song. **It was for all who seek God.**

John Ortberg in his book Faith and Doubt tells about Mortimer Adler, one of the great philosophers of the twentieth century. For most of his life Adler was convinced by philosophical arguments that there must be a God. These

arguments convinced him that there must be a powerful, intelligent force behind creation. But he did not worship this being, for he believed that these philosophical arguments could not show that God was good and that God was interested in him. ***Philosophically he believed in God in the same way he believed in the ozone layer. God was a fact, but not a Friend.*** Then one day as an old man Mortimer Adler lay sick in a hospital bed. A friend came to pray for him, and while his friend was praying, Adler found tears streaming down his face, and he found himself praying. ***He knew only one prayer the Lord's Prayer.*** He found himself praying it day after day and believing the words of that prayer. He said the leap of faith was, for him, not a "jump to conclusions" based on insufficient evidence. It was a leap from assent to devotion. ***He had always known there was a God, but now he knew God cared about him.***

We all want that, don't we? We all want God. We want to know Him. We want to see Him. BUT DO WE WANT TO BE LIKE JESUS? That is the ultimate question. Do we really want his willingness to forgive others? Do we really want his compassion, his concern for the least and the lost? ***We want God, but are we willing to let Him change us into the image of His Son?***

God wants us at the wedding feast, but He wants us to put on the proper wedding garments. He wants us to put on Christ. YES, HE WANTS US TO PUT ON CHRIST THE BEST WE CAN....

YES, HE WANTS US TO PUT ON CHRIST THE BEST WE CAN!

Lee Strobel, in his book The Case for Faith, tells about a man who did that in a dramatic fashion. His name is William Neale Moore. In 1975, Moore committed a horrible crime. He broke into an old man's house, stole his life savings, and shot him to death. Moore was caught, convicted, and sentenced to die. While in prison, William Moore gave his life to Christ. I know what you are thinking. Another Death Row conversion. A matter of convenience when you're about to meet your Maker. But it wasn't like that for William Moore. Immediately, he was a changed man. He began counseling other prisoners and leading Bible studies. He converted so many prisoners in his cell block that it became known as the most peaceful, safest area in the whole prison. He contacted his victim's family and was granted their forgiveness. After sixteen years on Death Row, the state of Georgia voted to release William Moore. Never before had they taken a guilty person off of Death Row and set him free. But William Moore's great witness and influence in prison convinced the state officials that he was truly a new man.

Such things happen to people who yield their lives to Christ. The difficult thing for you and me to see is that God wants to make dramatic changes in our lives. We think we're pretty good people, but God wants to make us so much more. A man was at the party without the proper clothes. Could that have been you? Could it have been me? We have accepted God's grace, but have we sought to yield our lives to His direction? Have we sought to put on Christ? I like the way Marianne Williamson puts it. She compares us to a house. She writes, "You think God is going to come into your . . . house, look around, and see that you just need a new floor or better furniture and that everything needs just a little cleaning . . . then you look out the window one day and see that there's a wrecking ball outside. It turns out that God actually thinks your whole foundation is shot and you're going to have to start from scratch." Let me ask you, friend, is it time you checked your foundation? Is it time you got serious about your faith? Is it time you ***accepted the free garment that Christ wants to give you so that you can enjoy the wedding party.***

SCRIPTURE SAYS, "***But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes.*** He asked, '***How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?***'

"The man was speechless. 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.***'"

God loves us as we are, but God expects us to CLOTHE OURSELVES with the character of HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, and become a full Participant in making his KINGDOM KNOWN to ALL. Amen.