

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

It's hard to imagine a king repeating his invitation to a wedding banquet after it's been turned down, what I've heard described as a "true picture of God's repeated calls of grace."

That's been a theme all through the gospel of Matthew; God has continually repeated his invitation to his chosen people, Israel, to enter into the kingdom of heaven, only to have his messengers maltreated and even killed. To those who heard this parable from Jesus, and those who read it later in Matthew's gospel, the meaning is pretty clear; after repeated rejections, even to the point of the destruction of Israel and the exile to Babylon, God's invitation to respond to his love, his yearning for his people, has been spurned.

God's servants, his slaves, are sent to gather others, "both good and bad" to fill the wedding hall with guests. And then we hear about the guest who is thrown "into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

So how can this be? He was gathered in with all the rest and then, then he's thrown into the outer darkness just because he's not dressed right? Not quite what we were expecting, does this mean we should establish a dress code for Sunday morning church attendance? Not really, keep in mind this is a parable with a fair amount of allegory, nothing to do with Sunday morning dress codes or even with burning the cities of those who spurn our evangelism efforts.

But consider that you and I have been gathered into this wedding banquet, so what might this mean for us? So what then, is the "wedding robe"? Is it righteousness of life i.e., good works, or is it faith? Well, it's not good works as a precondition, to earn our way into the banquet, the parable itself shuts the door on that idea, otherwise then man would have had an answer to the king's question. Notice that good and bad were gathered into the banquet hall, no one first goes home to put on a wedding robe. This man has no wedding robe, everyone else does. Here's what is going on, there is evidence that honored guests back then were provided with wedding robes, relieving them of the expensive burden of providing their own, while at the same time adding to the magnificence of the banquet.

In both the Old and News Testament, fine clothes are often used as an image of something else, as we read in Paul's letter to the Romans: "...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ," (13:14). In Isaiah (61:10) we read "For he has clothed me in a robe of righteousness," in Revelation (19:10) "Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." And in Paul's letter to the Galatians: "...you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ," (13:27). Now I've done baptisms where the infant being baptized is wearing the christening dress worn by a parent, grandparent, or older siblings, the baptismal dress as a symbol of the child's baptism into Christ.

So what about the guy who doesn't have the wedding robe? Let's go back to what some historians say about the custom of the king giving his guest appropriate wedding robes to wear. I don't want to get hung up on this but if robes were being handed out and you didn't take one, well whose fault is that?

"For many are called, but few are chosen." Sounds to me like some folks simply go through the motions of answering the call, but they don't put off the old ways of living, they don't accept grace, they reject faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, while others don't answer the call at all.

Now God isn't looking for reasons to not admit us to the kingdom of heaven, but this is important because it might help us understand what grace is all about. Remember that I like to define grace as the gift of the unconditional love of God. And the invitation of grace may be accepted by the means of grace that is literally in the invitation, or it might be rejected. Grace is a gift, a free gift, no conditions attached, no preconditions to meet, it can't be earned, it's not deserved, it's simply given, offered to all.

Baptized into Christ, clothed in Christ, we wear his robe of righteousness all through our lives, not just on Sunday, not just on our festival days, but all the time. Baptized, born again, a new garment given us, clothed in Christ, clothed in his righteousness, this garment, this wedding robe is something we wear in our new lives, reborn children of God.

Here's the thing, the king is looking for the wedding robe, it's freely given, but it can be rejected. The king is looking for the wedding robe, Christ's righteousness embraced by faith, lived out in faith.

AMEN