

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

This morning we have a picture of God's repeated calls of grace, one of the themes of Matthew's gospel as God continually repeats his invitation to his chosen people, Israel, to enter the kingdom of heaven, the wedding banquet. God's messengers are killed, stoned and beaten, and the meaning is clear; after repeated rejections, even to the point of the destruction of Israel and the exile to Babylon, God's invitation to his people, has still been spurned.

So others are gathered, "both good and bad" that the wedding hall be filled with guests. So then we read about the guest who is thrown "into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." He was invited 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, but keep in mind this is a parable with a fair amount of allegory.

Now consider that you and I have also been invited to this wedding banquet, so what might this mean for us? So what then, is the "wedding robe"? Is it good works perhaps, or is it faith?

Good works are not a precondition to the invitation, we can't 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. Guests back then were provided with wedding robes, relieving them of the expense of providing their own, and 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? Well, if robes are being handed out and you don't take one, whose fault is that? "For many are called, but few are chosen." Those who hear God's call and know of his grace must not think that a call is the same as a response. 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 helps us understand what grace is all about. I think of grace as 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, saved by grace through faith, 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, clothed in Christ, clothed in his righteousness, this garment, this wedding robe is something we wear in our new lives, reborn children of God, Christ's righteousness embraced by faith, lived out in faith.

AMEN