

Matthew 22 vv. 1-14.

In a beautiful, large royal palace many servants are hard at work. The banquet hall is being thoroughly cleaned. Long tables are set out and benches or couches are placed around them. The lamps are checked and fitted with fresh oil. In the kitchen too there is a great scene of activity. There is cooking and roasting going on. Mmm! Lovely!

What is it all about? It looks as though everything is being prepared for a feast!

Indeed, that is so. There is to be a feast in the palace. A marriage feast! The king's son is to be married and now the wedding feast is being made ready. Neither trouble nor expense is to be spared. Many have been invited to come to the wedding.

At last all is ready. The long tables are laden with the finest food. Expensive wine sparkles in the glasses.

The king looks upon it all once more and then commands that the guests who have been invited be called. How happy they will be, for it is a great honour to be permitted to come to the king's table, and there to eat with him.

Look, there go the servants to fulfil their master's command. But ... after some time they come back alone. They look sad, and they inform the king with indignation that the guests have refused to accept the invitation. They will not come.

What an insult to the prince. Does he burst out in anger? ... No, not yet. The king is patient and long-suffering. He sends other servants to those who were bidden. They are to tell the expected guests: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage."

Those servants go and repeat the message. How kind of the king, wasn't it, to call them yet again?

And, what then? ... Do they come now? ... Can they see how wrongly they have acted? ... Just look!

Here comes a royal messenger to one of those who were invited. He calls him kindly but urgently to come to the marriage. Without saying a word the man turns about and goes away. He is going to his field, and he leaves the royal servant standing. Could he be more impolite? ...

Another goes to his merchandise. We would say he goes to his shop or his business. One after the other refuses.

Yes, some of the servants are ill-treated and beaten. A few of them are even killed. Is it not terrible? ... Is it not disgraceful? ... How dare they act like this?

There go the servants of the king, returning to their lord. Some of them are wounded and bleeding. They tell their lord what has befallen them.

Then indeed the king is angry, very angry. Truly that is not to be wondered at either. He sends out an army against that wicked city. The murderers of the king's messengers are killed by the soldiers and the city is burned down. There is nothing remaining of that city but a smouldering, smoking ruin. And they deserved it. The punishment was quite just!

What now? ... The banquet hall is ready; the food is prepared, but the guests had refused to come. Must the feast now be cancelled? ...

No indeed! The king sends off his servants once again. Now they are to invite people from outside the city and from the highways and byeways to the marriage. Whoever they see they are to call.

And so it is that slowly the great hall is filled with people. They are not indeed smart or prominent people. Most are poor and quite ordinary. At last all seats are taken. The hall is filled with seated guests.

In comes the king. He surveys the waiting host. Suddenly he discovers someone who is not wearing a wedding garment. At once he goes to this man and asks "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?"

The man blushes and remains silent! He cannot answer that question. In the Bible it says: "And he was speechless."

The king becomes angry. He calls some of his servants. And what then? ... O, just look. The man is taken hold of. His hands and feet are tightly bound. He is dragged outside and thrust into a dark dungeon. God's Word says: he was "cast into outer darkness".

But ... but ... was that right? The guests who sat there were mostly poor and simple people. They had brought no wedding garment, nor had they the money to buy one. And now that poor man is dragged out to be cast into outer darkness. Once more we ask, is that a just verdict? Is that not a cruel sentence? ...

Yes, that is an awkward question, is it not? ... It seems to be unjust and

even cruel. And yet in fact it is not so at all, for the guests did not need to have a wedding garment of their own. To each one who entered the hall there was ~~gix~~ given by the king's command a wedding garment. Their own filthy, worn, perhaps even torn clothes were to be removed and then they received the royal wedding garments.

This man had refused to accept the royal clothing. "No, that's not necessary," he had thought. His own clothes were fine enough. He was too proud to put on a proferred garment. There he sat then, clothed in his own filthy garments among the other guests. That was an insult to the king and that is why the prince was so angry. That is why he was thrust out of the chamber and shut up in darkness. He had certainly deserved that heavy punishment, for he had been too proud to receive a garment from the king's provision.

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This story is a parable, boys and girls. The Lord Jesus is still to be found in the temple. He is surrounded by a great multitude. But at the front there stand in their smart robes, many Pharisees and Scribes. They stand there with hatred in their hearts, with angry looks in their eyes.

And the Lord spake this parable especially to the chief priests. It is a solemn warning.

You doubtless realise that this parable has a deeper meaning. No, the Lord Jesus is not just telling a story, but He means something by it. He wants to teach the chief priests something by its meaning.

The King in the parable is God. God was indeed Israel's heavenly King. The Son of the King is the Lord Jesus. He came to this earth to give His people joy. He came to save them from the bondage of satan and of sin.

The wedding feast represents the glory of heaven itself.

Now, God has sent His servants, His prophets to the Jewish people, to call them to the wedding feast.

But what sort of answer did those people give to this kind invitation? ... They smote the prophets of the Lord and ill-treated them. Some they killed. They did not want to listen. They preferred to serve idols of wood and stone.

Again and again God sent other prophets. Again and again God's call was repeated, to come to the wedding feast. But always they refused to come.

Now, by means of this parable, the Lord Jesus warns these proud Pharisees for the last time, not to cast God's call to the wind, for the punishment shall come.

The city of Jerusalem shall be destroyed and burned down. Thousands shall be killed by the Komans. God shall use the heathen Romans to chastise the Jewish nation for its wickedness.

Yet, thereafter the servants of the Lord shall be sent outside the city, they shall set to work among the highways and byeways. That is to say that the Gospel shall be made known among the heathen.

Children, the call of God's servants still comes to you also. You too are called to the marriage feast. You too are still told that you must be born again.

What is your answer to that solemn call? ... Do you laugh at God's servants behind their backs? ... Do you make fun of them? ...

How terrible if that is so. God shall surely punish such behaviour. God is not to be mocked and does not allow His servants to be mocked.

But the Lord is patient and long-suffering. He bears with us and spares us still, though we are deserving of endless punishment. He calls us still through the blessed Gospel. That Divine invitation comes to all who hear God's Word.

No, we shall never enter everlasting glory in our own garments. We must have on a royal wedding garment.

Do you know what that means? ...

The Pharisees had no need of a Saviour, did they? ... They considered that they could earn heaven by means of their own almsgiving and long prayers. They were too pious, too good for a Saviour. They thought that they could reconcile an angry God through their own works. Those were the garments of their own SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS. But they were mistaken.

None can ever earn salvation of himself. Through sin that has become impossible All of us lie dead in trespasses and sins.

But now the Lord Jesus has come to this sin-ridden earth. He has borne the curse and the wrath of God. Through His suffering and death He has woven the heavenly wedding garment for all His people. Through grace, by the working of the Spirit, salvation is bestowed upon them. How happy God's people are, do you not agree?

Yet, for you too there is still a hope of salvation.

True, we read in God's Word: "Many are called, but few are chosen." But it does not say WHO are chosen. The call of God comes to us: "Seek ye the Lord, while He may be found." Kneel down then daily and plead with the Lord to discover to you your sins. Ask Him to make room in your hearts for the Lord Jesus.