

Necktie Party Matthew 22:1-14

October 11, 2020 Pastor Bill Mosley

Colonel Ron Cox says that once he was CONDUCTING INSPECTION in the quarters of a young enlisted man. His room was spotless, but something wasn't right. Then he noticed the man's pants were cuffed, not hanging straight as regulations call for.

He snapped, "Airman, have you decided to change the Air Force dress code?"

He replied, "No, sir. My mother did. She thought the uniform looked better this way." -FD-118837, Contributed by COLRONCOX@RET

A cowboy went to a fancy big city restaurant. The maitre d' wouldn't let him in without a necktie. "Do you have one I could borrow?" he asked. The reply was, "No, they are all loaned out." Undaunted, and hungry, he went to his pickup truck hoping to find something he could use for a necktie. Soon he was back with a pair of jumper cables neatly tied around his neck. "Will this do?" he asked.

"Well okay," said the maitre d' "Just don't start anything." DALE HUNT, JOKES, 5279, 12-7-1997

In the Gospel reading, Jesus has entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, to the praises of the people proclaiming him messiah. He turned the buyers and sellers out of the temple, proclaiming himself the messiah by accepting the title from the people. The next day Jesus is face to face with the chief priests and elders at the temple. He speaks of judgement, and his own authority to give it. He tells three parables about who receive judgement and who receives the kingdom: the two sons, the wicked tenants, and today's gospel is the third parable of those, the marriage feast. Note the similarity to the parable of the vineyard with the wicked tenants.

Jesus told this basic story, but by the time Matthew and Luke are writing, about 75 or 80 AD, some variations have crept in.

Luke's version deals with more common people, and they give excuses, and nobody dies. Luke, remember, is a doctor. Matthew worked with the Romans as a tax collector. Rome invaded Judea (again) and this time sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple of Solomon in 70 AD. Matthew, probably writing in Jerusalem, must have seen the ruins every day, heard the despair of the people, and needed to address it. Matthew puts political elements in the story.

A king gives a wedding feast for his son. Right away it's a political event. Royal marriages signified treaties and alliances. An invitation to a royal wedding means you are asked to support your nation's well-being. The people are not just making excuses, they actively resist with force, killing the king's messengers. Matthew wants to bring to mind the sack of Jerusalem when he says, "The king ... sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." (v. 7)

Now here's a curious thing. Part of the point is that the original intended guests are not worthy. Yet, when the king sends the heralds out to bring in more guests, he says, "bring in everyone, both good and bad." He wants his hall filled. So Matthew has not rejected Jesus' original point: there is forgiveness for the worst of sinners. Is Matthew including himself?

And Matthew adds this curious ending about the guest with no garment. Even today, we dress a certain way for certain events. Some restaurants require a tie. Uniforms must be regulation. You dress up for a wedding. These days you wear a mask and keep your distance. And I'm not saying anything about political parties!

If you go to a party you wear the party hats they give you. In Jesus' time, Normal folks might give their guests an armband or a ribbon. The king provides robes. He's generous, magnanimous. But one guest doesn't want to wear his. The king throws him out.

The garment image comes up a lot in Scripture. It's a reference to baptism. Paul echoes this language when he says we who have been baptized into the body of Christ have put on Christ. It's the white garment of salvation that covers our black sin.

I argue some with Matthew's king requiring the proper garment.

It's not what we do or how we look that gets us into the banquet. The king provides the garment. The guest refuses to wear it.

Pete and Jerry had not seen each other in many years when they bumped into each other by accident. After trying to catch up on all those missed years, Pete invites Jerry to visit him in his new condo. "I'd love to," replies Jerry, "what's the address?"

"Here's the address," says Pete. "And there's plenty of parking behind the apartment. Park and come around to the front door, kick it open with your foot, go to the elevator and press the button with your left elbow, then enter. When you reach the sixth floor, go down the hall until you see my name on the door. Then press the doorbell with your right elbow and I'll let you in."

"Good, I'll be there," Jerry says happily. "But tell me something - what's this business about kicking the front door open, then pressing elevator buttons and doorbells with my elbows?"

"Well," Pete answers, clearly puzzled. "You're certainly not coming to visit empty-handed, are you?"

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We certainly come to God empty-handed. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. Everything we have already belongs to God.

How can we refuse the king's invitation, his generosity, his hospitality? He has given us a world full of good things. As my Auntie Mame used to say, "Life is a banquet and most poor fools are starving to death." Maybe it's because they refuse to participate.

This parable is an allegory, and it is filled with meaning. It raises so many questions for us.

Are we accepting the invitation and attending the banquet? Do we put on the baptismal robe of salvation given to us by God's grace? Do we look like we belong at the king's banquet?

On the other hand, what do we do to fill the banquet hall? The king really wants it filled. Shouldn't we want to start something?

And the banquet hall is filled with good and bad – and some folks at the banquet don't like each other. Yet they are here, and that's how the king wants it.

So what is Jesus saying? Love God, he invites you, accept his invitation. And with all the forgiven wear the garments of faith and salvation he provides.

Lord, we come to your wedding feast dressed in the garments of your salvation. Help us to say no to whatever makes it more difficult to say yes to you.