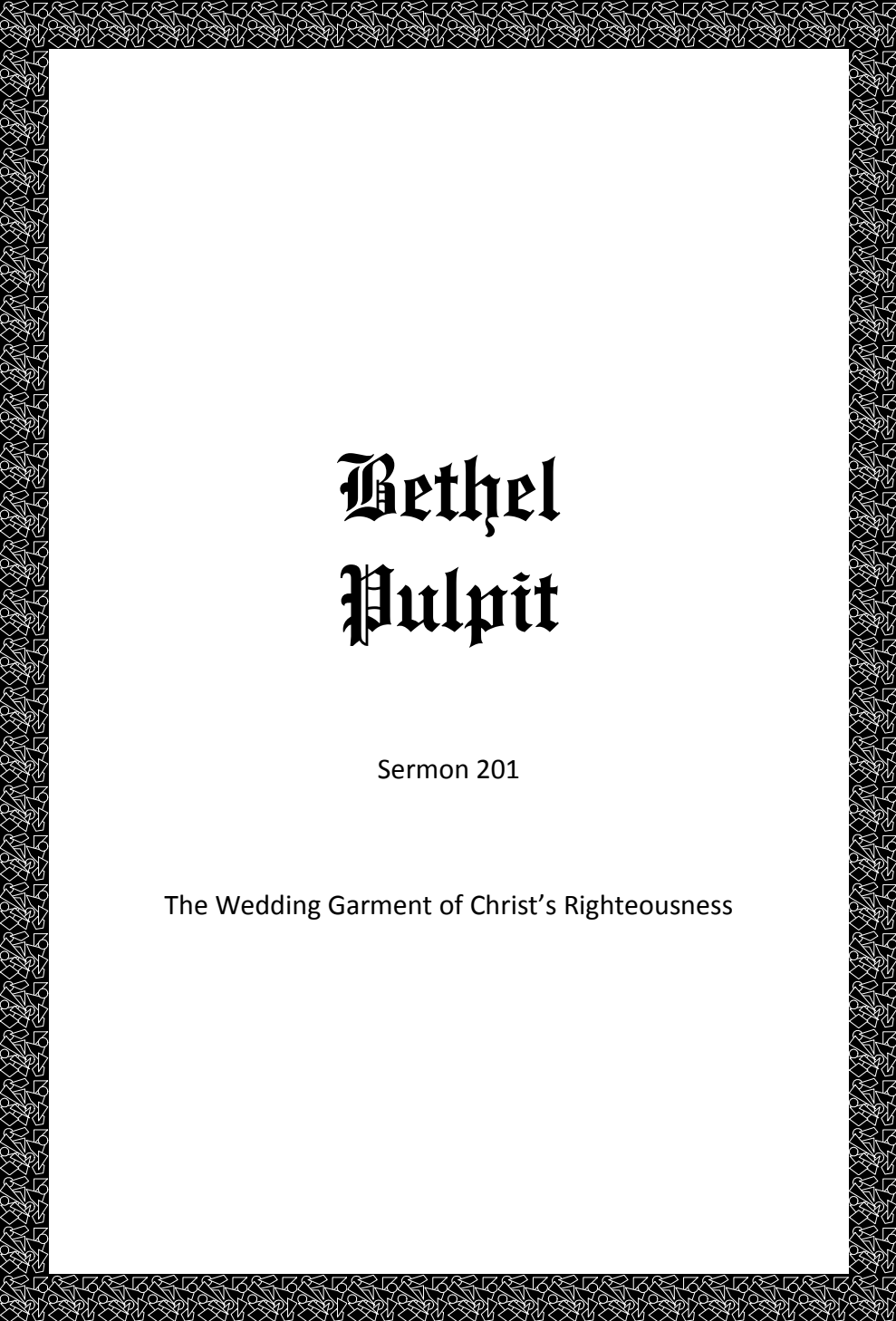




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 201

The Wedding Garment of Christ's Righteousness

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 13th January, 2002**

Text: *“And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless” (Matthew 22. 11,12).*

There is a very great similarity between this parable in Matthew 22 and the parable of the great supper in Luke 14. So much so, that some people have tended to think they were one and the same. But there are differences. In the one it is a man, a certain man making a great supper. In the other it is a certain king making a marriage for his son. But there are so many similarities: the great feast; those who had no desire, who were unwilling to come; the going out into the highway; those who were brought in so that the wedding was furnished with guests.

But then this parable in Matthew goes a little bit further, a little bit deeper, a little bit closer. There is a second separation here. In both of the parables there is the first separation. There is the marriage, there is the call to the marriage, there are those who reject it, who refuse it, who do not want it; there are those who heed it and those who come. So there is that separation: those who come and those who stay away. But this goes a little closer. Even with those who come to the feast, even with those who do not reject the call, there is still that second separation. One is perhaps more an outward separation and the other a more inward separation. The one is a separation which is obvious to all. The other is a separation which only God Himself knows. And woe betide any man or any minister who tries to perform the second separation! “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His.” And only the Lord does know them that are His. In the great day there will be many surprises: some that everybody thought were right who prove to be wrong, and some that everybody thought were wrong who prove to be right. And the great, the vital point, beloved friends, for you and me this evening is this: that we might be right.

Now this is that second separation. “When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.” The first thing that strikes us is how far a man can go in religion without being

found out. It was not until the king came in to see the guests that it was found there was “a man which had not on a wedding garment.” He had gone on a long way. If you will, he had gone right up to the gates of heaven. Remember how John Bunyan said, “So I perceived there is a way to hell from the very gates of heaven.” Well, this man found the way to hell from the very gates of heaven. He went a long way. That is the first thing that strikes us, the obvious thing that strikes us, that he went a long way in his religion without being found out. And the second thing that strikes us: none of the other guests could see there was anything wrong, anything the matter. It was only when the king came in. The other disciples did not suspect Judas Iscariot. They all said, “Is it I?” Even the people of God, the most discerning, did not see there was anything wrong, anything the matter. They did not ask him to leave. They did not turn him out.

“When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” So it behoves every one of us, especially those of us who are church members, to ask the twofold question, How did I come in hither? And, Have I a wedding garment? “The king ... saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The truth here is the vital necessity, the absolute necessity of you and me being completely covered in the spotless righteousness of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Otherwise our end shall be like this poor man’s. There is not any substitute. There is not anything else which will do. It is to be “clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.” Our own righteousness will not do. “Our best is stained and dyed with sin; our all is nothing worth.” We need to be taught by the Spirit of God to renounce our own righteousness. That is hard, painful work. It is like tearing the skin from your body. We must renounce our own righteousness, any hope, any confidence in it. We must be willing to be saved completely, absolutely by the righteousness of Another, even the Lord Jesus. His righteousness must be our hope, our trust, our covering, our confidence. The only religion that will ever take a sinner to heaven: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” Now beloved friends, I urge this point on you tonight. It is the great

necessity, the vital point. Otherwise in the great day it will be spoken to you and me, despite all our religion, all our chapel attendance: "Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?" That is to be completely clothed, completely covered in the pure, spotless righteousness of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Well, this wedding garment. One point for years puzzled me. When these parables speak of the marriage supper of the Lamb and the great day, really it is the bride of Christ who is to be clothed in the wedding garments, His beloved bride. Well, what are all these guests? Now pondering over it, the analogy of Scripture really is this. When you view the whole church of God, chosen, redeemed, called, sanctified, you see them as one glorious body. Now that is the bride of Christ; that is the church. But also in the imagery of it, in these various parables and accounts, individual sinners who are saved by grace, who are called by grace, are spoken of as those who are the guests, those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. So the church is one. That is the bride, shining in splendid robes. But then as you see the other analogy: those who are guests at the marriage supper, these are the people of God viewed one by one, and they must wear the wedding garment.

I read to you those two passages this evening, the one in Isaiah 61, where the church of God cries, "He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." That is the wedding garment. And then of course in the Book of the Revelation, right as the canon of Scripture is coming to an end, the marriage supper of the Lamb. "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." Now these are all the guests wearing their wedding garment. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." That is the wedding garment. That is the robe of Christ's righteousness. That is the robe in which the bride shines eternally complete as you view the whole church of God as one. That is the robe in which every sinner saved by grace personally must appear, these blessed characters who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how

camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” Now I do not want you to misunderstand the parable here or the teaching here. Perhaps some are thinking, Well the poor man, perhaps he could not help it. Perhaps he could not afford it. Perhaps he had not got a wedding garment. I understand in ancient times, and even in more modern times, if there was a great wedding like the marriage of a king’s son, then the wedding garment was provided. Along with the invitation, there was the provision of the wedding garment. It was not that this man was poor and needy and could not afford it. He despised it. He thought it was not necessary. He thought his own was good enough. He was satisfied with his own garment. So he despised the royal invitation and he dishonoured the king. He dishonoured the bridegroom. He came in his own garment. He thought it was satisfactory. He thought it was good enough. Now that is the teaching here.

“And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.” Well, you say, that is the parable, that is the teaching, that is the explanation. But what is this wedding garment? What is this robe of righteousness? Now we are coming to vital things – no hope, no salvation, no heaven without them. Our God is a holy, righteous God. He created the world in righteousness. He created man in righteousness. He put man under a righteous, good and holy law. Now that perfect, spotless righteousness He demands from every one of us, from every one of His creatures. We through the Fall have lost the ability to provide it, but God has not lost the right to demand it, and He *does* demand it. When we stand before His judgment seat in the great day, as stand we must, He will demand that perfect, spotless, holy righteousness from each one of us. Then what hope is there for sinners whose “best is stained and dyed with sin, whose all is nothing worth,” those who are polluted through original sin and actual sin in thought, word and deed? Now what hope is there? There is only one ground of hope, and that is in the Person and work of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now when the Saviour left heaven for earth, He came as His people’s Surety. That meant that He had undertaken to provide for them everything necessary for their salvation. He had undertaken to provide for them everything that they could not provide themselves, and one thing was this perfect, holy, spotless righteousness. I cannot provide it; you cannot

provide it; none of us can provide it. But God demands it. Now Jesus came. I am trying to set before you now the glorious doctrine of imputed righteousness, and I am trying to set it before you as simply as I can. May this glorious doctrine sweetly distil in your heart, and then like Luther you will cry, "Doctrine is heaven!"

"Jesus, I know, has died for me;
Here is my hope, my joy, my rest;
Hither, when hell assails, I flee;
I look into my Saviour's breast."

The Lord Jesus undertook for His poor, sinful, unworthy people to provide that righteousness which God demands, that they cannot bring. And so He lived a holy, spotless, sacred life right from the manger to the cross, and there was not a single blemish. Really it was something like this. I heard a minister many years ago say there is a place where there is a beautiful, crystal- fresh river flows from the mountains and on its way it passes through a dirty, murky, salty lake. But when it flows out the other side, it is just as crystal-fresh as when it first flowed in. That is like the Lord Jesus coming into this world, going through this world, leaving this world. That is a beautiful Scripture: "Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." Do not forget, when the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, He cried with a loud voice, "It is finished." Now what was finished? That holy, pure, spotless life of righteousness. It was finished without spot or blemish or any such thing. That is why Satan assailed Him. If only he could cause Him to stumble and fall!

"But spotless, innocent, and pure,
The great Redeemer stood,
While Satan's fiery darts He bore,
And did resist to blood."

What does *imputed righteousness* mean? That that holy, pure, spotless life, that righteous life in obedience to the Father's law, obedience to the Father's will, is reckoned to the account of God's people just as really and actually as if they had lived that holy life themselves. That is what *imputed* means, something being reckoned to you which does not really belong to you, yet it becomes really yours by imputation. Ah, you say, but what about the vile sins of this people? Well, as He gives them His pure, holy, spotless righteousness, He takes all their sins and He takes them upon Himself, and He bears them, and He for ever bears them away.

That Scripture: “He hath made Him” – Jesus – “to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” The old, godly preachers like Gadsby, Warburton and Kershaw were not always refined, but when John Kershaw preached on imputed righteousness, as he loved to do, he used to say, “What a blessed swap! He takes my sins and gives me His righteousness.” And he used to quote that word,

“What wondrous love, what mysteries,
In this appointment shine!
My breaches of the law are His,
And His obedience mine.”

It is a wonderful truth, imputed righteousness. “As by one man’s disobedience” – Adam – “many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One” – the Lord Jesus Christ – “shall many be made righteous.”

Well then, this is the wedding garment. Why should it be called a wedding garment? Why should it be called the robe of righteousness? Well, because it is not something native to us. It is not something which grows like our skin. It is something provided for us which must be put upon us. God imputes this righteousness; faith puts it on. And this sinner wearing the robe of Christ’s righteousness can stand before a holy, heart-searching God and that God can see no flaw, no blemish. “Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.” That is the people of God standing perfect in the righteousness of Jesus. That is the wedding garment. That is the robe of Christ’s righteousness. It is completely outside the sinner. It is provided for him. It is put on him. It covers him completely. Now when the last great day comes, it will be this when we meet our Maker: to be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. Otherwise it will be said, it must be said, “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” Trusting in your own righteousness? Rejecting Christ’s righteousness? Having no righteousness better than your own? You know what God says about your best and my best. It is just as filthy rags in His sight.

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.” Well, it is to be led into all these things personally and experimentally. By nature, we do not have this wedding garment on. We are clothed in our own righteousness, and sadly, solemnly, we are satisfied with it. You think of a blind man and he is clothed in the most filthy rags, but somebody has told him it is a beautiful garment, fit for a king’s palace, and he believes it. You think of the

awfulness of it. That is you and me by nature. Someone says, Why doesn't anyone tell him? But he does not want to be told. The hardest thing in real religion is to renounce your own righteousness, to cast your own righteousness as filthy rags to the moles and the bats. It is the hardest thing in religion to be made willing to be saved by the righteousness of Another.

Of course, in the history of the church of God there have been many eminent men raised up to write on various subjects. Now the great writer on imputed righteousness was James Hervey of Weston Favell near Northampton, and he wrote those beautiful works on imputed righteousness. When he was a young vicar at first he trusted in his own righteousness. Then he found he was suffering from consumption as they called it then, from which he died an early death (T.B. as we call it now), and from which there was no cure. This was an eighteenth century remedy – the best thing was to follow the plough, to go out with the ploughman. So he used to go out with the ploughman, and found he was a godly man; but he would not go to church. He used to go to hear Dr. Doddridge preach. One day the vicar said, "Let's have some profitable conversation. What is the hardest thing in religion?" The ploughman said, "No sir, you are the vicar; you tell me." The vicar said, "It is for a man to renounce his sins." The ploughman said, "I beg to differ. There is something harder than this: for a man to renounce his own righteousness." That found a place in James Hervey's heart. If you and I are to be brought to heaven, we must come to this place:

"The best obedience of my hands
Dares not appear before Thy throne;
But faith can answer Thy demands,
By pleading what my Lord has done."

That is to be clothed in the pure, white, spotless robe of Christ's righteousness.

"This spotless robe the same appears,
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue;
The robe of Christ is ever new."

So Paul in Philippians 3 gives us an account of how he put on the wedding garment, how he was brought to renounce his own, renounce his very best, to count it all but dross that he might "win Christ, and be found in Him, not

having on mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” “O may my soul be found in Him, and of His righteousness partake!”

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” It is a wonderful thing if by precious, God-given faith you and I have that wedding garment. Often at Bethel we start the service with that well-known hymn which contains this on Christ’s righteousness:

“’Tis Jehovah’s own providing;
Better, wisdom can’t devise;
From His eye for ever hiding
Sins of every name and size;
He that wears it
Is by God exalted high.”

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” We have this most beautifully set before us, the gospel in Zechariah, Christ in Zechariah. In chapter 3 we see Joshua the high priest, representative of the whole blood-bought church of God, and he is clothed in filthy garments. Satan is there mocking him and reproving him and rebuking him. What hope for such a sinner before a holy God, standing before the Lord in filthy garments? And the Lord “answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.” There you see Joshua, his filthy garments removed, and you see him standing before the Lord in those pure, spotless-white, beautiful robes. “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?”

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” Most of you know the well-known story of how William Gadsby was so concerned about some handsome young men who sat at the front of the chapel. He seemed to aim his preaching at them. He thought they would make wonderful members of the church. There was a little cripple boy hidden away in the gallery steps. One Saturday evening he was asked to go and visit a little boy who was dying. He had never heard of him. Reluctantly he went, and it was in a very poor part of Manchester. The little boy said, “I am glad to see you. I couldn’t die without seeing you.” And he began to tell him what a blessing his preaching had been made. Gadsby said, “I think there must have been some mistake. I have

never seen you.” The boy said, “No, I am a poor cripple. I used to creep in to the gallery steps before the service began, and creep out before the end so no-one would tread on me.” The whole of the story is not so well known. He told Gadsby he had hobbled round every church in Manchester and they all told him what he had to do. But he felt he had no righteousness. He said, “Sir, the first time I heard you preach, you preached from, ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.’” Gadsby thought, “Yes, that was the special sermon I was aiming at those young men!” He said, “Sir, you spoke of how our own righteousness is of no avail, and spoke of the righteousness of Jesus, of Christ, the end of the law for righteousness, and that day I rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” And Gadsby said, “Well this is strange dealing, me preaching to these handsome young men, and a little cripple boy I have never heard of, the first time he hears the gospel in his life, he immediately slips into the sweet liberty of the gospel.”

“Friend, how camest thou in hither?” That little boy had on the wedding garment. Joshua the high priest had on the wedding garment. Paul had on the wedding garment. I wonder how many of you have a sweet hope that through sovereign grace you have been brought to that point: you dare not, you cannot trust your self, your own works, your own righteousness. You have to rest completely, entirely on the righteousness of Another, even God’s beloved, incarnate Son. You have to say, “Compelled I am on Christ alone to hang, and plead that blood by which the church is freed.”

Beloved friends, this is the wedding garment. This is the way to heaven, the only way to heaven, to stand complete in the righteousness of Jesus. Now that will be the one thing that matters in the great day when we meet our Maker, when we stand before our righteous Judge: what garments do I appear in? Am I satisfied with my own, or have I realised how vile they are? Have I had to cast them aside? Is my hope, my only hope that I shall appear in the righteousness of Jesus, God’s dear Son? “Clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.” Beloved friends, this is what that beautiful text means: “Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you *faultless* before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” “Clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.”