

# Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 299

The Feast and the Wedding Garment

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,  
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,  
on Lord's day evening, 21st March, 2010**

**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 are some glorious truths revealed to us in the Lord's parables, but as I have reminded you so often over the years, we do need to handle the parables very carefully, not try to make everything mean something, otherwise we end in confusion. The parables usually have one great point, one vital point, though often a few precious truths are bound up with them. But we must not try to make everything mean something, or what confusion we end in. For instance, some have taken the parable of the prodigal son, and remarked that his father did not go to meet him until he had come halfway back himself. We have to avoid things like that. That is not the point; it is the loving welcome. Others have taken the parable of the vine and those branches cut off and they have taught the doctrine that a person can be saved one day and lost the next. That is not the point. It is just those who profess to be part of the vine. And even the chapter we read this evening (Luke chapter 14), that word, “Compel them to come in,” was the great foundation text of the Roman Catholic church in the Middle Ages in persecuting to death those that they described as heretics.

Well, here in this parable of the great supper, this marriage supper of the king's son, we have some very important truths. The gospel is so often set down as a feast, the blessed provision of the gospel, the rich provision of the gospel.

“Here every bowel of our God  
With soft compassion rolls;  
Here peace and pardon, love and blood,  
Is food for dying souls.”

O the glorious provision of the gospel, the glorious feast of grace, and all this for sinners, for those who are unworthy! The Holy Spirit in the new birth brings the sinner hungering after the blessings of the gospel, and nothing here below can satisfy, and then in Christ and Him crucified there

is that sacred revelation, the gospel feast, and the wonderful mercy that it is for sinners. You remember what Gadsby says:

“The guilty, vile, and base,  
The wretched and forlorn,  
Are welcome to the feast of grace,  
Though goodness they have none.”

So this wonderful provision, this gospel feast. And then many were not interested, many had no desire to come. Beloved friends, let us be absolutely clear, the simple, fundamental truth of this parable, and the similar one – it is not an identical one but a similar one – I read this evening in Luke chapter 14, the simple truth the Lord is setting down: the awful sin of the Jews, how they despised the Saviour, how they rejected Him. “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” And then the rejection of the Jewish nation, and then the glorious message of the truth of the gospel among the Gentile nations of the earth. So in a sense, that is the basic point in the two parables.

But there are many, many things for us today. This glorious provision, but when the word was heard, “Come; for all things are now ready,” the multitude despised it. Now as it was then, so it is now. The great majority see no attraction in the gospel. They have not any appetite for it. Their appetite is for the world and the things of the world, whether they are evil things or more refined things. And you and I were there by nature – in the world, of the world, without this appetite for divine things.

So in that similar parable I read to you this evening, “They all with one consent began to make excuse.” Now one of them said that he had bought a piece of land, that he must go and see it. A second one said he had bought some oxen and he must try them out. A third one said he had married a wife and therefore he could not come. There was a variety of excuses, but there was only one reason: they had not any appetite for the gospel. They had not any hunger for it; they were satisfied with themselves; they were satisfied with the world. So “they all with one consent began to make excuse.” As it was then, so it is now. The glorious gospel of the grace of God is preached, but to most people it is “the savour of death unto death.” There is no desire for the Saviour. The world sees no beauty in Him that it should desire Him. But the solemn thing, you and I were there by nature and it is a wonderful mercy if our hearts have been

changed. And the mark of divine life is always this: there is a hunger after the gospel, a hunger after Christ. Wherever there is life, there is that hunger. With newborn babies there is the cry, there is the hungering. Where there is no hungering, there is death. Where there is not much hungering, there is little life.

But, “They all with one consent began to make excuse,” and the same thing in this chapter in the marriage of the king’s son. They made those excuses, but they were not hungry. Just lingering here a moment or two – those excuses they made why they could not come were all what you might call lawful things. One did not say, I cannot come because I am going to go out and get drunk, and another did not say, I cannot come because I am going to go to a dance. They were good things, they were lawful things they were talking about. And that is a solemn point which the Lord Jesus emphasised a lot. The devil will use anything to keep you away from Christ, and the devil is not concerned whether he keeps you away by evil things, wicked things, vile things, or whether he keeps you away with good things, right things, lawful things, things which are good in themselves.

Let us linger on this point, because it is an important one. The Lord Jesus said, “As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” Listen what He said: “They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away.” What is wrong with eating and drinking? You have all been eating and drinking today. What is wrong with marrying and giving in marriage? These are good things. And building and planting. Well, some of you are building and some of you are planting. Buying and selling. What is wrong with these things? Before the flood, the world was sunk in evil, vile things, wickedness. You think of the things that the Lord Jesus could have mentioned, but He did not. He chose the very best there was before the flood, but what was it if they were satisfied with these everyday things, they were happy with the things of time and sense, they were quite pleased for things to be going on yesterday as today, and tomorrow as the day after? They were satisfied with earthly things, and what about this warning, and what about this flood, and what about this ark? “Until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away.” As it was then, so it is now.

“They all with one consent began to make excuse.” Well, they were not bad things; they were good things. But they were satisfied with worldly things, satisfied with this life, and there was not any hunger, there was not any appetite. But what about when they went out into the street to the maimed and the poor and the lame and the blind? Well, they had an appetite. They were hungry, and they had no money to buy food. And this royal invitation for them to come without money, without price, to a rich feast, to be partakers? With what holy delight and gladness did they come to satisfy their appetite! As it was then, so it is now, and as it is in nature, so it is in grace. The glorious gospel of the grace of God, an amazing feast, the best quality, plenty of it, without money, without price, and the world despises it; the world does not want it. You do not desire it, I do not by nature. We are satisfied with worldly things, until the Holy Spirit begins to work in our hearts and where do we come to then? Sinners needing salvation, a judgment day to be prepared for, eternity, meeting our Maker, unfit, guilty, rebels in God’s sight. Where does it bring us? Well, we look at all these things that we used to delight in, and we say,

“These can never satisfy;  
Give me Christ, or else I die.”

I wonder how many of you in this chapel this evening have been brought there. That is the mark of divine life. “These” – the very best that the world can give – “These can never satisfy; give me Christ or else I die.” And then the glorious gospel of the grace of God.

“The vilest sinner out of hell,  
Who lives to feel his need,  
Is welcome to a Throne of Grace,  
The Saviour’s blood to plead.”

So we come to the sad and solemn ending at the conclusion of this glorious feast. “When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.” He was not graciously prepared. He had not been made ready. He had not what was necessary to be a partaker. And “when the king came in to see his guests, he saw there was a man which had not on a wedding garment.” Have you noticed this point? We must not press things too hard or too far, but this man went a long way in his religion, and it seems none of the other guests could discern anything the matter with him. They thought he was just one of them. He had gone in with all the other guests and they were sitting down

at the table, but when the king came in, he discerned there was something wrong. This man was out of the secret. He was not a saved character. He was not right.

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.” We might go a long way in religion. We might deceive ourselves; we might deceive the Lord’s people; but when the King comes in, we will never deceive Him. It is that same point that John Bunyan makes in the conclusion of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, where there was that character who came to the deep, dark river, and unlike Christian who had such a struggle, he got over so easily. He had a ferry man to help him over. Bunyan says the ferry man’s name was Vain Hope. He ran gladly to the gates of the Celestial City, and when he came there, the king – it is the king again – the king asked him for his certificate. Bunyan says he fumbled in his bosom and could not find it, and he was cast out in chains and utter darkness. And Bunyan says, “So I perceived that there is a way to hell from the very gates of heaven.” What an unspeakable mercy that there is a way to heaven from the very gates of hell!

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not have a wedding garment? And he was speechless.” So the vital point this evening, what is the wedding garment we must have on to be accepted when the King returns, to be accepted in the day of our death, to be accepted at the great judgment day, to be accepted now? Really, to give an answer to this you need an exposition of the whole of the glorious Epistle to the Romans, especially those early chapters. It is the righteousness of Christ which is “unto all and upon all them that believe.” Now that is the wedding garment without which we can never reach heaven and we can never be accepted by a holy God.

And of course this was the glorious truth of the Reformation that Martin Luther discovered. He was trying to appear in garments of his own, working out his own righteousness, meriting his own salvation, and the more he tried, the more guilty he became. In the end, he worked himself almost to a skeleton. He was in black despair. And the Holy Spirit revealed this sacred, vital, foundation truth to him, that a sinner is not saved by his own righteousness, what he is, what he can do, but by the righteousness of Christ, freely given to him as he renounces his own righteousness and as he receives the righteousness of Christ by faith. Beloved friends, that is the wedding garment, and that was the glorious

truth that turned Europe upside down in the days of Martin Luther, justification by faith alone through the righteousness of Christ.

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” Now look, beloved friends, I do not want you misunderstand the analogy here. I do not want any of you to be feeling sorry for this poor man. You say, Perhaps he had not any money; he had been called out of the street; he could not afford this beautiful wedding garment; it was not his fault. You are missing the whole point of it. As I understand it, in Biblical days it was the custom at a wedding feast, especially if it was a great man whose wedding feast it was, a royal feast like this, that the wedding garment was always provided with the invitation. Now this man thought his own was just as good. He despised the king’s gift of a wedding garment. He rejected it. He did not want it. Now that is the analogy, that is the teaching here.

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” You and I by nature are satisfied with ourselves, aren’t we? Just like Adam and Eve when they sinned and fell in the Garden of Eden. They thought they could manage it themselves, to hide their sin and shame from a holy God when He walked in the garden in the evening of the day. They made coats of fig leaves – something they could do themselves – and Almighty God said, “Adam ... where art thou?” He knows where the sinner is, lost and ruined. He sees through all those wretched fig leaves that all of us would try and make for ourselves. And this glorious gospel was beautifully foretold in the Garden of Eden. They were stripped of those fig leaves they used, the work of their hands, their own devising, and God Himself clothed them with coats of skins, which meant one thing: an animal must have been slain, blood must have been shed, and then God clothed them with coats of skins.

It is this righteousness of Christ we need. One of the hardest things, perhaps *the* hardest thing in real religion is for a sinner to renounce his own righteousness. Our own righteousness, our covenant of works righteousness clings to us like our skin to our body, but Almighty God says our very best righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We have to be willing to renounce them, to be stripped of them. The righteousness of Christ that is put upon His people for their acceptance, for their salvation, for their title to heaven, is compared to a garment, a beautiful garment, because it is something completely outside us. It is not something that grows on us like

our own skin. It is something outside us. It is a garment. It must be made. Someone must make it for us, and then it must be put on us.

So you have this beautiful figure right through the Word of God. Psalm 45: “She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework” – the righteousness of Christ. Isaiah 61: “He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.” So you might go on. Jeremiah chapter 23: “This is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord our righteousness”; and chapter 33: “This is the name wherewith *she* shall be called” – the very same name – “The Lord our righteousness.”

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” Well, in all its simplicity it is this: a holy and righteous God demands a perfect, holy righteousness from all His creatures, and every one of us fails to bring it. In His holy law He has revealed what that righteousness is. We fail to bring it. Sadly, solemnly by nature we are completely satisfied with our own garments, our own profession of religion, our own self-righteousness. God is not satisfied with it, but we are, every one of us by nature. O but if the Lord opens our eyes, then what is it?

“My best is stained and dyed with sin;  
My all is nothing worth.”

If I am ever to get to heaven, if I am ever to be saved, if I am ever to be accepted, then my sin must be taken away and I must be clothed in something completely outside myself, a beautiful, pure, white, spotless robe. And that is why the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came to this earth. Our hymnwriter says,

“Thus Jesus came the poor to bless,  
To clothe them with His righteousness;  
The robe is spotless, full, and free;  
And why, my soul, why not for thee?”

So we see the Saviour coming into this world. “God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” You see Him living that spotless, holy, sinless life, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.” And then He takes that beautiful, holy, spotless life and He gives it to the sinner as if the sinner had lived that life himself. What does He do with the sinner’s sin and guilt? He takes it and He bears it to

Calvary, and there He suffers, the Just for the unjust, and sheds His precious blood, and so He for ever takes away the sin, the guilt of His people.

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” May that never be said to you and me in the great day. Well, what is it personally? We are brought by the Spirit of God to see we have no righteousness, to see that we are sinners, and as led by the Spirit of God we are brought to the Saviour to trust in Him alone, no hope but in Christ.

“Glad we renounce our former pride,  
And wholly in His name confide;  
Only in Him we make our boast,  
Who came to seek and save the lost.”

And what is it? We confess our sin and we plead the blood and righteousness of Jesus, and through grace renouncing our own righteousness, by faith we receive the righteousness of Christ. The Holy Ghost puts it on us as that beautiful, pure, white, spotless robe. What did we sing just now?

“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.”

A holy God now looks on a guilty sinner and He sees in him no “spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing,” washed in the blood of Christ and clothed in the beautiful wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness. I think most of you are familiar with Robert Murray M’Cheyne and that lovely hymn he wrote, “When this passing world is done.” Every verse ends up,

“Then, Lord, fully shall we know,  
Not till then how much we owe.”

And one verse:

“When I stand before the throne,  
Clothed in garments not my own.”

So sinner, as you go home tonight with the question to answer: when you appear in worlds unknown, will you appear satisfied with your own garments, not having on a wedding garment, to hear this awful question: “How camest thou in hither?” to be speechless, to be cast out into

outer darkness; or will it be “clothed in garments not my own,” Christ my only hope, to be found complete in His righteousness, nothing in self, everything in Him? And then you will be able to sing that hymn we sang:

“Bold shall I stand in that great day,  
For who ought to my charge shall lay?”

May it never, never be said to us at last, “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?”