

## Are You Properly Attired? - Sermon For Proper 23 Year A

Scripture: [Matthew 22:1-14](#), [Philippians 4:1-9](#)

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Here we are again, with another challenging parable, not this time about the vineyard but about a wedding.

What are you wearing to the wedding party?

We are familiar with the wedding at Cana, when Jesus removed the social disaster of running out of wine by creating far too much to be used and in so doing demonstrated the generosity of God. No one there was cast out for not having the right clothes on.

Or do you remember the parable of the lost son who returned home. He had squandered his inheritance and came back smelling of pig muck and yet his Dad ran towards him and hugged him. The son tried to say sorry to his Dad, but he discovered the restoration was far more than he imagined. He was washed and dressed in a fine robe, had a ring placed on his finger and shoes on his feet, all symbolic about being a family member and belonging.

Yet today amongst all the detail of this parable of a wedding banquet we find invited guests too busy to

attend and a guest accepted yet rejected for not wearing the right robe, what is going on?

Remember that Jesus is telling this parable in the last week of his life, he is confronting the religious elite, the priests and pharisees about their attitudes just as Jesus did with the previous parables.

If the imagery of the Vineyard reminds the hearers of the nation of Israel, then the image of the wedding banquet is to teach the people about the celebration at the end of time of God's eternal banquet.

Think if you will of the familiar Psalm 23, which ends with the verses

*You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*<sup>6</sup>Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

The bounty of God is eternal and the banquet is sumptuous. So here is Jesus talking about the banquet of heaven, an image we don't focus on too often, but it is here in this section of Matthew and is a big image in the

book of Revelation. We are told in the first verse that the King is celebrating his son at a wedding. For us post Easter people we know this is symbolic of the wedding between the heavenly groom, the resurrected Jesus, and the earthly bride, the church.

So who is invited to celebrate this wedding. Lets look at the invitations. In Jesus day it was customary to send two invitations to each person, the first to announce the event, "save the date" idea and the second to say its all ready come and join in.

As we find out the first invitations are not valued, rather the first guests don't even bother to reply.

When the servants go out and ask them to come, they sent excuses – how feeble they sound – to see a field, or attend to business. Other servants got harshly treated and killed.

Do you remember last week, the servants then got beaten up and killed. These are the prophets sent by God, and they are rejected by the religious who should have been expecting them, and here what do we find, the religious people are too self absorbed to notice that their heavenly father has prepared a banquet for them. They are not interested, in fact they are rebellious and violent

against the host, God. How sad, the religious elite couldn't see who Jesus was and how he had come to them.

In the parable, the story continues, the King wants guests for his sons banquet, so the servants are sent out to get anyone to come. Those who hang about on street corners, those who are up to no good, those who haven't got homes to go to. Anyone and everyone is invited – how like Jesus, talking to the leper, the prostitute, the tax collector. So the banquet has guests.

Another convention we need to understand, besides the double invitation is that each guest would be supplied with a robe to wear, a fantastic party bag! A new outfit of clothes.

We are back to the robe again. This is another important image to have in our minds. What did Jesus do on the cross, he died that we might live, his red blood washed us clean, his death that we might live. His robe of righteousness for our dirty clothes of sin and shortcomings. Jesus is the one who provides the wedding clothes, he is the righteous one who transforms the poverty of our nature by his generous gift. This image of white robes echoes the psalm which talks about being

given new white robes, just as the saints are in Revelation. The robe symbolises the heavenly transaction of God's forgiveness and cleansing. We have it, do you wear it or are you like the unfortunate guest who spurned the gift and got thrown out.

So in the parable today one guest was obvious that he hadn't put on the gown, he continued in his dirty garments of sin and wasn't prepared to get cleaned up.

God's salvation is for all, and yet we have to be humble enough to recognise we have got it wrong, we are not right with God on our own, we need to wonderful gift of grace, the undeserved favour of Jesus, to wash us clean.

God wants everyone to receive it, its freely available the forgiveness of sins, but it has to be accepted.

Sadly this person had not recognised the value of accepting the grace of God, so they thought they belonged to the banquet but wasn't prepared to accept the free gift of God, how sad. And as we hear in the parable they are bound hand and foot and thrown out, to the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The parable tells us that the ones who think themselves upright people, religious, and in good standing, are not necessarily the ones who realise the banquet is for them.

The beggars and the low lives, who know that life is a mess, and need rescuing, discover that a new beginning is possible with God, if we accept the blood of Jesus to wash us clean and accept the robe of righteousness not of our own making but made with the grace of God.

As we reflect on this parable today, let us ponder which guest are we – the one who receives the invitation but ignores it? Or the one who is compelled to come in and receives a new robe and knows its value.? Or are we still unprepared to receive the robe of grace and risk being thrown out on the ultimate day of reckoning?

For the first hearers of this parable, it would have challenged them. I trust it make us think about what clothes we wear. – ones of our own making or heavenly garments given to the undeserving yet of value beyond imagining.

Once again, we are challenged to consider Jesus and his wonderful grace. Blessed assurance Jesus is mine oh what a foretaste of glory divine.