

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST (2)

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### Matthew 22:1-14

We will continue today our study of the Parable of the Wedding Feast. We concluded the lesson the last time by saying that the believer must wear the appropriate clothes at the wedding feast. He must wear a wedding garment. Without that garment, there can be no guarantee of salvation. The parable mentions a man who was without such a garment. He was later thrown *into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 22:13), a common biblical description of hell.

### *How did you get in here*

What then is the meaning of the wedding garment? This will be the topic of our lesson today. Let's first look at v. 12 and the question that is stated there. Here is what it says.

*Matthew 22:12. Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?*

We often assume that the meaning of the question is, 'Why are you not wearing a wedding garment?' But that is not exactly the question. It is wider than that. Look at it carefully. The question is, 'How did you get in here without a wedding garment?' It is not just 'why', but 'how'. 'How did you come in here?'

This sentence is very interesting because the implication of the question is that he could not have been in the banquet in the first place without a wedding garment. And if he did have a wedding garment when he first came in, then where is the wedding garment now? Why is he not wearing it? That would be a secondary question.

There had been much scholarly discussion about how the guests just invited off the streets could be expected to be well dressed. If we say that the king's question implied that no guest could be at the banquet without wedding clothes, then we have to conclude that those clothes were being supplied as people entered the wedding. The man who did not have it was wearing it initially. But then, for some reason, he decided to take it off. Maybe it was too hot. Maybe he dirtied it and he felt embarrassed to wear it. The point is that he did have a wedding garment and he should have kept it on.

Notice his reaction to the king's question. *He was speechless* (v. 12). He could not provide any answer. You know how easy it is for human beings to find excuses. We all have a surprising ability to make an excuse out of nothing, and sometimes out of a direct lie. This man could have said, 'I'm too poor to afford a wedding garment.' Or, 'I didn't have time to go back home and get changed. I was too excited to attend the wedding.' But here was a man who could not speak. Why was that? Because he

knew that he was inexcusable. The wedding garment had been provided for him at the door and he is without excuse for not wearing it.

## **Putting on immortality**

Here we need to turn to the apostle Paul to understand this matter more clearly. Paul uses the Greek word for 'putting on a garment' 15 times. And if you look at them one by one, you realize that he never uses it in the literal sense of actually putting on physical clothing. It is always in the spiritual sense that he uses it.

For example, in 1Corinthians 15:53-54, Paul speaks about putting on immortality.

*1Corinthians 15:53. For this perishable nature must **put on the imperishable**, and this mortal nature must **put on immortality**.*

*54 When the perishable **puts on the imperishable**, and the mortal **puts on immortality**, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*

Immortality is pictured as a clothing that we put on. There is a day of resurrection that is yet to come. On that day, our corruptible body will be changed. We will be given a new spiritual body which will never die. Our mortal nature will put on, like a clothing, immortality.

Paul has the same idea in mind in 2Corinthians 5:2-4 where he says that we will put on life.

*2Corinthians 5:2. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling,  
3 so that by putting it on we may not be found naked.*

*4 For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further **clothed**, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by **life**.*

We groan and sigh in our present bodies. But one day, at the resurrection, we will put on life, we will be clothed with life as with a garment.

From the way Paul uses the expression 'putting on' something, we can see that he is thinking of the garment as a symbol of a new way of life. In this case, the new way of life is called immortality, or eternal life.

It is God's own life that we put on. That is why Paul said in Galatians that we have put on the Lord Jesus Himself like a garment in this present time.

*Galatians 3.27. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ **have put on Christ**.*

We see again this action of 'putting on' something. If you are a Christian, you have put on the Lord Jesus Christ. You have clothed yourself with Christ.

How do we put on Christ? In two related ways. In the previous verse, v. 26, Paul said, *For you are all sons of God through **faith** in Christ Jesus*. And then, in v. 27, he wrote, *For as many of you as were **baptized** into Christ have put on Christ*. So v. 26 has faith and v. 27 has baptism. We put on the Lord Jesus through faith and baptism. One is not without the other. Faith must find expression in baptism.

## **God has clothed us**

It should be noted that this garment of salvation is provided for us by God. Remember the man in the parable who was speechless. Because the garment had been provided for him at the banquet, he

had no excuse for not wearing it. The garment of salvation is a free gift to us. We can do nothing to earn it. And when we put on Christ, God's gift to us, we can look forward to eternal life.

This is stated beautifully in Isaiah 61:10. In my opinion, Isaiah 61:10 is probably the best OT cross-reference to the topic of wedding garment. Isaiah said, *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for **He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness...*** God gives to us the garments of salvation. He gives to us the robe of righteousness. Those are God's gifts. It is always God who provides the salvation. Nobody earns it.

Notice another point. When you look at the expression 'put on,' you will notice that it always occurs in the middle form. You know the active and the passive form. The active form expresses the idea that the subject of the verb is the actual doer of the action. In the passive form, the subject of the verb is the recipient of the action. Greek is peculiar in that it has a middle form. The middle form indicates that the subject performs the action for himself or to himself.

And the verb 'to put on,' or 'to cloth,' as used by Paul, is always in the middle form. This means that you cloth yourself. You put on the garment yourself. Here we see the perfect balance of the scriptural teaching. God provides the garment of salvation. But we have to put it on. We have to wear it. God will not do it for us. He has done His part in providing the garment. But we have the responsibility to put it on and to keep it on.

### **Keep the garment on**

We saw that Paul spoke about 'putting on Christ' in Galatians 3:27. He used the same expression in Romans 13:14. When we compare Galatians 3:27 to Romans 13:14, we have the feeling that there is an inconsistency. Paul said in Galatians 3:27 that 'those of you who have believed, who have committed yourself to Christ in faith and have been baptized, have put on Christ. You have already put on Christ.' But in Romans 13:14, he seems to imply that the believers have not put on Christ yet. Let's read that verse.

*Romans 13:14. But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

Notice. Paul is telling Christians to 'put on the Lord Jesus Christ.' There is no need to say that if they have done it already. But in Galatians, he said that we have put on Christ. How can this be? What is the point of putting on something that you have already put on? So here we are stuck with an apparent inconsistency.

The way to approach this problem is to look at the context. In Galatians, Paul was speaking about the initial commitment of faith. That was the context, that when you made that initial commitment of faith, you put on the Lord Jesus Christ. But later, some Christians start taking off the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is the point of Romans 13. The context of Romans 13 has to do with conduct. Notice v. 13. *Let us **behave properly...*** The whole chapter is concerned with the actual living out of the Christian life. 'Let's behave properly.' Paul has to say that because some people did not behave properly.

Now let's return to our parable. You see, when we first became Christians, when we responded to the invitation and we entered into the banquet, we gladly accepted the wedding garment. We put on the wedding garment in that initial commitment. But later, some are found to be without the wedding garment. Why? Because they returned to the way they used to behave before. And when we return to our old carnal way of behaving, we have literally taken off the Lord Jesus Christ and put on the old cloth again. We are still in the banquet. We are still in the church. We are still known as Christians. It does not mean that we still behave as Christians. If the situation does not change, we will be treated like the man without a wedding garment. We will be thrown outside into the darkness. In the last

judgment, what counts is not just that initial commitment, but whether our conduct will continue to be the conduct of an authentic Christian until the end.

In Galatians 1:6, Paul writes, *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.* 'You were invited by God. You responded to His call. And now you are turning away from Him. You accepted the wedding garment. Don't you remember that you put on the wedding garment,' as he says in chapter 3. 'When you made your commitment in faith, when you were baptized, you accepted the wedding garment. You put it on. And now, you are turning away from Him who called you!'

### **The garment and our behavior**

When Paul speaks of this garment that we put on, he often ties it up with our behavior. He has in mind our way of life. As we saw in Romans 13:14, he used it in the imperative form. *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.* If you profess to be a Christian, then behave like a Christian.

Let's look at another example. Ephesians 4:21-24.

*Ephesians 4:21. Assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.*

*22 **Put off your old nature** which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,*

*23 and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,*

*24 and **put on the new nature**, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

The believer is asked to put off one form of life and to put on a new form of life. If you say you have put on Christ, then let's see it in your life. Let it be evident in the way you conduct yourself.

The same point is made in Colossians 3:9-10.

*Colossians 3:9. Do not lie to one another, since you have **put off the old man** with his deeds, 10 and have **put on the new man** who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.*

Those who have joined the family of Christ have become very different people. They have put off the old man, like a shabby set of clothes. And they have put on the new man 'who is being renewed in the image of his Creator.' Here again we see a reference to putting on a new way of life which brings with it a new kind of conduct.

*1Thessalonians 5:7. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, **putting on** the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*

Here we put on faith and love. They are portrayed as a clothing that we put on.

The wedding garment then tells us quite simply this. Those who have put on the Lord Jesus Christ must behave in such a way that people see Jesus in them. You see, if you put on a garment, when people look at you, what do they see? They see you wearing that garment. They see your cloth. Paul therefore is saying, 'When you made the profession of faith, when you were baptized, you have put on Christ. If you have put on Christ, then, when they look at you, they see Christ in your life. They see you wearing Him. They see Him in your conduct.'

## **The ethical responsibility of the believer**

I think the meaning of *the man not dressed in wedding clothes* is now becoming clear to us. Let me summarize. As Christians, we have responded to God's invitation. We have entered into His church, into His kingdom, into His banquet. But though we have made that commitment of faith, though we have been baptized, though we have indeed put on the Lord Jesus Christ in that initial commitment, the important thing that God wants to see is whether on that day, the judgment day, we will still be wearing that garment, whether we are still conducting ourselves as Christ-like persons. That is the crucial issue. And every person who is found not to have behaved in a Christ-like manner in his life will be thrown out of the wedding feast.

The attitude that says it does not matter how one looks in God's presence, either because of an 'orthodox' faith in imputed righteousness or because of a simply careless faith, is a dangerous attitude. True faith in God's imputed righteousness should move the believer to want to be righteous. This righteousness is of course not a basis for standing before God. Only Christ can provide that. But it is the evidence of wanting to please God who was gracious enough to invite.

Let that be clear. God wants good people. God wants people with right behavior. If we don't want to be good, or we don't want to try, or we don't think that it is even necessary to try, then this parable is a warning to us. An interpretation of grace that emphasizes the gratuity of the invitation and dismisses the ethical responsibility puts believers in danger.