

11. The Wedding Garment (2Q 2011—Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible)

Biblical material: Matthew 21; 22:1–14; Rev. 21:2, 9; Eccles. 12:14; Dan. 7:10; Gen. 3:9–19; Romans 8:1.

Quotes

- It is not the quantity of the meat, but the cheerfulness of the guests, which makes the feast. *Edward Hyde*
- A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything. *Solomon, Eccl. 10:19 NIV.*
- If most of us are ashamed of shabby clothes and shoddy furniture, let us be more ashamed of shabby ideas and shoddy philosophies.... It would be a sad situation if the wrapper were better than the meat wrapped inside it. *Albert Einstein*
- What a strange power there is in clothing. *Isaac Bashevis Singer*
- Our clothes are too much a part of us for most of us ever to be entirely indifferent to their condition: it is as though the fabric were indeed a natural extension of the body, or even of the soul. *Quentin Bell*
- Clothes are inevitable. They are nothing less than the furniture of the mind made visible. *James Laver*

Questions

How does the image of the wedding garment help us? How is it limited? What is more important—the garment or the giver? Whose wedding is it anyway? How do we understand the image of God’s feast? How do we respond to the invitation, and what are the qualifications for entry? How does God appear in all of this?

Bible summary

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, he continues to teach the people, yet with even greater urgency (Matt. 21). It’s in this context that he shares the story of the wedding banquet, and the man who came in without the provided wedding garment (Matt. 22). This “change of clothes” is used as way of expressing what people will be like at this end-time feast—and that both invitation and clothing come from God. In Rev. 21:2 we read of the New Jerusalem, and by extension God’s people, in bridal imagery. There is to be a final judgment (Eccles. 12:14; Dan. 7:10). Gen. 3:9-19 recounts the effects of the Fall, with all of its natural consequences of decay and death, but we are reassured in Rom. 8:1 that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (NIV).

Comment

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.” Revelation 3:18 NIV. The white clothes are those that God provides, like the wedding garments in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 22:1-14). Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and God wants to take these from us and clothe us in his garments. Note also the eye ointment that is to heal the blindness of sin, and cure us so we can truly see—see spiritually, see the truth. The god of this world blinds us from

seeing the truth about God (2 Corinthians 4:4), and we most of all need this spiritual sight to see reality for what it truly is.

For like the guests invited to the wedding, we are invited to God's banquet. In fact God is a feast, and we should be delighting in the Lord's superabundance! We're told to taste and see that the Lord is good; not living on bread alone, but on what comes from God. Jesus even told his disciples they had to "eat" him! As we come to God, we are assured: "They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights." (Ps. 36:8 NIV). Is. 25:6 (NIV) tells us "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples." The great end-time celebration is God's feast: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast." (Mt. 8:11 NIV).

And how are we prepared for that? Not by our own works, but through the grace of God who renews us, re-clothes us, and makes us fit to be there. The image of the wedding garment helps us see *how* we are there—because it is given to us from God. Of course any image is only partial and limited—we shouldn't in anyway think that we are not changed internally when we are given this new robe of righteousness.

When the prodigal son returns the father pays no heed to the idea he should employ his son as a hired servant. He calls for his son to be completely reinstated, the feast and celebrations begin. Note the feast again!

Even when the older son complains, the father shows his wonderful compassion. He explains his actions to his older son, and shows no favoritism, loving them equally. After all, the older son had had the wonderful privilege of staying with his father all his life and never experienced the terrible loneliness of separation and a sense of being lost. He was always there in the father's presence. But the father, calm and gracious, loves them both and the celebrations continue as one happily reunited family. This truly is what God is trying to say to us. This really is his eternal purpose, the divine objective.

Ellen White Comments

Soon the garments of heaviness will be changed for the wedding garment. Soon we shall witness the coronation of our King. Those whose lives have been hidden with Christ, those who on this earth have fought the good fight of faith, will shine forth with the Redeemer's glory in the kingdom of God. {AH 542}

The parable of the wedding garment opens before us a lesson of the highest consequence. By the marriage is represented the union of humanity with divinity; the wedding garment represents the character which all must possess who shall be accounted fit guests for the wedding. {COL 307}

The man who came to the feast without a wedding garment represents the condition of many in our world today. They profess to be Christians, and lay claim to the blessings and privileges of the gospel; yet they feel no need of a transformation of character. They have never felt true repentance for sin. They do not realize their need of Christ or exercise faith in Him. They have not overcome their hereditary or cultivated tendencies to wrongdoing. Yet they think that they are good enough in themselves, and they rest upon their own merits instead of trusting in Christ. Hearers of the word, they come to the banquet, but they have not put on the robe of Christ's righteousness. {COL 315}