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PUTTING ON THE WEDDING GARMENT

Once again, this week we have a passage that may seem puzzling at first read.

- JESUS tells a story about a king who gives a wedding banquet.
  - The first group of those invited refuse to come.
  - A second time, the invited are encouraged to come, but again some refuse and now, some even abuse and kill the messengers.
  - Then a second group, those who were not originally invited, are extended the offer to come and do.
- But, here's the puzzling part.
  - When the king comes to meet his guests, he notices one from among this group of last-minute invitees who isn't wearing proper wedding clothes,
    - and the king has him bound and tied and thrown out of the banquet.

This is supposed to be an image of the Kingdom of Heaven.

- What's going on?

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This is why Bible study matters.

- Not just Bible reading, but Bible study.
- Digging down into the story behind the story, or for those of you who remember Paul Harvey, finding out the rest of the story.
  - It's looking into the historical setting and learning about the customs of that time.
  - It's considering who the audience is that is being taught something and why.
  - It's taking from back then and applying it to our times now.

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So, again, JESUS tells a story, or more accurately a parable.

- Parables are earthly stories that reveal heavenly truths.
  - They're told using images familiar to the listeners of that time, which help them to better understand the Kingdom of GOD.

When you hear or read a parable, a good place to start is by asking several questions.

- There won't always be an answer to all these questions, but there will be at least some, and that can be of help.

First, who is GOD in the story?

- In this story, GOD would be the king.

Second, who am I or who are we in the story?

- In this parable, we might find ourselves to be either the first group invited, or the second group invited, or the servants who are sent to do the inviting.
- When JESUS shared this story, among HIS listeners were the chief priests and the Pharisees, as well as many of the people of Israel, to whom JESUS brought the good news of the Kingdom of GOD first.
  - Very likely, the chief priests and the Pharisees, as well as those Jews who rejected JESUS' message were the ones represented by the first group.
  - The second group characterized the outcasts, the harshly judged, and the Gentiles, so we might find ourselves there.
  - But we are also the servants who carry the invitation to the king's banquet, as we are called to tell others to come.

The third question is, what is GOD saying to us?

- Answering this question for us today is what I'll devote most of the rest of this sermon. Let me also add, that the king's son, the groom at this wedding is a secondary character, but represents JESUS, the ONE in whose honor the banquet is given.
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It's helpful to understand the customs of JESUS' day regarding weddings.

- When a couple became engaged, the groom had the responsibility to build a new home for his bride and himself.
  - This could take up to a year and this was the betrothal period, during which the couple might know each other, but have no or very limited contact.
    - (In the nativity story of JESUS, Mary was betrothed to Joseph—engaged, but not yet married.)
  - The bride, however, would choose her bridesmaids and they would keep tabs on the building of the house, reporting back to the bride,
    - because, once the house was completed, the groom and his groomsmen, would suddenly come to take the bride to the wedding.
      - (Remember the story of the ten virgins or bridesmaids, five of whom were unprepared and did not have enough oil for their lamps when the groom came and were left out?)
  - In the case of the son of a wealthy person or a king, as in this parable, the need to build the house was not there as the couple would reside in the mansion or palace of the father.

Once the time for the wedding was near, guests would be invited.

- Guests would be expected to notify the host of their intent to attend and the appropriate amount of food would be purchased.
  - On the day of the wedding, messengers would be sent to call the invited to attend.
    - Once the guests arrived, if there were fewer guests than expected, or more food than could be eaten, others guests would be invited so that no food would go to waste.
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So that's what is happening in this story.

- The king throws a wedding banquet for his son; guests are invited but when their time comes, they refuse to attend; when they are implored to come, they either ignore the invitation to which they have already said they would attend, or they beat and kill the messengers, and ultimately are destroyed themselves; and then others—both bad and good—are invited.

But remember, this is a parable that describes the Kingdom of Heaven.

- So, again, the first group represents those who have rejected the king's invitation to come to the wedding banquet of the son—in other words, GOD'S invitation to be part of the celebration of GOD'S SON JESUS.
  - Those who reject the invitation are those who choose not to accept JESUS, HIMSELF—and that would be the religious leaders of the Jews and those who follow them rather than JESUS.
- The ones sent out to call those invited are first of all, the prophets who ultimately were killed by those who didn't like the message to repent GOD sent through them.
  - And they secondly can be those who go to share GOD'S message and invite others into the kingdom, but who may face refusal and ridicule.
    - And that can include us.

- The third group is anyone who hears the message of GOD and chooses to come and be part of the Kingdom.
    - And that includes, JESUS says, both the bad and the good—the ones that others consider unworthy and worthy.
    - This final invitation of GOD is for all who would believe, even if they don't meet the standards of others who say they shouldn't be there.
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Much of what is happening in our world today, though not directly about the Kingdom of GOD, is still related to this story.

- There are so many who are deemed as being of lesser value by those who have the power and the privilege.
  - There are so many who are consciously or unconsciously considered not deserving of the same opportunities as those in the more dominant or privileged group.
  - There are so many that normally get left out, or pushed away, or rejected because they aren't like the ones who have the control.
    - GOD'S invitation to the Kingdom ends up being for everyone, and only those who reject the call of the king get left out.
      - We need to work to make our world more like the Kingdom.
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But then there's that sticky part about the one who wasn't dressed for the wedding.

- How could the king be so harsh with one asked to come at the last minute for not being properly dressed?

Well, there's one more detail we need to understand about weddings in JESUS' day, especially ones given by the wealthy or a king.

- In addition to the food and drink provided by the king, wedding garments were also made available by the one giving the banquet.
  - That's right. The king had enough wedding robes for all who would attend.
    - And this man chose not to put one on.
    - That's why he is cast out.

In the parable about the Kingdom of Heaven, the wedding garment represents personal faith in JESUS that is also provided by the king—GOD—through the HOLY SPIRIT.

- The one thrown out had been given the opportunity to fully participate in the king's banquet, but had rejected the expectations of the king.
    - Because he failed to put on faith in JESUS, and was just going through the motions, the man was not welcome at the banquet.
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The lesson today is that the way we put on the garment, the way that we put on our faith, is by showing that faith through our actions:

- striving to see others as GOD does and then treating them as GOD wants us to—the way we ourselves would want to be treated—is how we show our faith.
  - This is how we put on our wedding garment for the banquet to which our gracious GOD has invited us, but openly wearing our faith.