

GOD IS ACCESSIBLE BUT ONLY ON HIS TERMS!

Today's Text: Matt. 22: 1-14

Extracts:

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: “*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son; and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants... but they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.... Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore, go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.’ So those servants ... gathered together all whom they found... and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have a wedding garment... The king said to the servants, ‘Bind him ..., take him away; and cast him into outer darkness...*” [Matt. 22: 1-3, 8-13]

Mrs. Hilary Clinton is well-known world-wide. Before her current job as the US Secretary of State, she had practised law, served as First Lady (both in Arkansas and the White House) and as Senator representing the State of New York. In 2008, she narrowly lost the Democratic Presidential primaries to now President Barack Obama in whose cabinet she serves. So, by all definitions, she is a sophisticated Western lady who believes in and practises gender equality. But during her visit in late October 2009 to Pakistan, a Muslim state, she covered her body like a Muslim woman. By her action, Mrs Clinton demonstrated respect for her hosts' cultural values and thereby facilitated her ability to meet and hold discussions with them.

How many of us come to God with that kind of attitude? Yes, Jesus has said that all those who labour and are heavy-laden should come to Him and He will give them rest [Matt. 11: 28]. Does the fact that He is accessible mean that we should come casually, that is, without due respect or reverence for Him? How many of our earthly leaders can we come before his/her presence the way some of us come before God's presence in the church? Are you His mate?

In this week's Bible story, an invited guest to a royal wedding did not wear his wedding garment and he was cast out. Let us learn a few principles from the story to help us to relate better to God and His Christ.

1. Background: By invitation only!

There is the story of a young Nigerian whose girlfriend's family was giving a party strictly for "in-laws," that is, the spouses of their sons and daughters. To make sure that only those invited were admitted, guests were required to sign the register at the security post near the main gate of the family compound. The young man came to the security point and duly put his name on the list. When it came to the column, "Relationship to the hosts" he wrote, "friend-in-law!" That was a good try but it was not enough to admit him. It was not a trivial matter, as he had taken it. He had to first be married to their daughter to qualify. He could only be admitted on her family's terms.

In this week's study, Jesus tells the parable of a king that had arranged a wedding for his son [Matt. 22: 1-14]. The narrative can be analyzed as follows:

a) *Only the invited guests were expected*

An invitation suggests that it is an exclusive event. It is not open to everybody. If you cannot honour an invitation, courtesy demands that you send an apology to the host to excuse your absence. Sometimes, only those who are likely to come are requested to respond. In this case, the host will not bother to crosscheck with those that have not responded if they will be coming.

In the parable, it was a royal wedding. The king's son was getting married. Can you imagine HRM Queen Elizabeth inviting you to her son's wedding? Would you not be thrilled and blare the news to your "less fortunate" neighbours that had not been invited?

b) *But those invited trivialized it!*

The king sent his servants to call those who had been invited but "they were not willing to come." Then, he sent out other servants to tell those that had been invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding." We are told that "they made light of it" and went their separate ways or about their business. The rest seized the king's servants, "treated them spitefully and killed them." The king was furious when he heard what had happened. So, he sent his troops who destroyed "those murderers" and burnt their city [Matt. 22: 4-7].

Oh how many of us trash important or valuable things or opportunities! May be they got them on a platter of gold and so they do not appreciate them. See how privileged children misuse what their parents have built up for them? At an early age, they are into drunken-driving or drug-related offenses. They form the bulk of the subjects for gossip magazines and

blogs. The children of pastors may be among the most wayward in the congregation. For example, the two sons of the priest, Eli, were sleeping with women at the door of the tabernacle of meeting [1 Sam. 2: 22]. Samuel the prophet's sons were not acceptable to the people as his successors because "they did not walk in his ways (and) they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice" [1 Sam. 8: 1-5].

Examine your circumstances. God has invited you to something- an event or a ministry. What is your response? Have you treated it lightly or spitefully? Have you rejected His invitation and, instead, tormented or put to death His messengers by calumny or persecution? Examine yourself!

c) *So the king threw the invitation open to all!*

The king said to his servants, "The wedding is ready, but *those who were invited were not worthy.*" He mandated them to go into the highways (i.e., the busy streets of the city) and to invite as many as they could find to the wedding. The servants did as they had been instructed and gathered together "both bad and good" until the wedding was filled with guests [Matt. 22: 9-10].

The food and drinks were there but rather than allow them to be wasted, the king threw the invitation open to all and sundry. Good and bad people, the poor and homeless, prostitutes, pimps and pickpockets, *everyone had the privilege to be invited.* In like manner, God has extended His invitation to us because others had rejected it. It is not because of our righteousness. We are all sinners, especially because we are all liars! By our own effort, we cannot make salvation. Therefore, God has given us a rare privilege to be called but how have we responded?

d) *And yet one of them had no wedding garment!*

When the king came to see the guests, there was one of them who did not put on his wedding garment. When the king asked him why he did not, he was speechless. So he ordered his servants to bind the man hand and foot, take him out and "cast him into outer darkness (where) there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" [vv. 11-13]. How did the man gain entry if he did not have the wedding garment? Did he wear one to get in only to pull it off later for one reason or another? The bottom line is that he came in on his own terms, not those of his host. So, he was thrown out.

God honours those who honour Him but lightly esteems those who dishonour Him [1 Sam. 2: 30]. You either do it His own way or do not try at all! For example, when Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered profane fire before the Lord, He killed them on the spot. On that occasion, God sent Moses to tell the wayward boys' father, Aaron, "*By those who*

come near Me, I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people, I must be glorified” [Lev. 10: 1-3]. That is the standard by which we must draw near to God.

2. What does the wedding garment represent?

The parable began with, “*The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son*” [Matt. 22: 2]. That suggests that the king in the parable represents God Himself and the son represents His only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ. So, what is the wedding garment that God expects us to wear to His Son’s wedding?

While he was exiled in the island of Patmos, .Apostle John was given a glimpse of the Lamb’s wedding in a vision. He writes [Rev. 19: 6-9]:

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. Then he [an angel] said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’”

We know that the church is the bride of Christ [Eph. 5: 23-32] .From John’s vision, we know that the wedding garment of “fine linen, clean and bright” that the bride of the Lamb wore “is the righteousness of the saints.” Since believers constitute the church, the body of Christ, it follows that *the wedding garment represents our righteousness, measured by faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God [Jn 1: 12; Rom. 4: 22].* Why should you come before God or His Christ without wearing such a garment? Therefore, when you come before God’s presence, bear the following facts in mind:

a) *It is a privilege for God to call you*

We sometimes hear people say that they found God or Jesus. That is unscriptural because God was never lost! For example, was it not God who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush? Was Paul not going to Damascus to persecute Christians when Jesus ‘arrested’ him on the way? How many offenders do you know that find the police? In fact, they hide or run away from law enforcement agents. In like manner, sinners are running away from justice until they are arrested by the love of Christ who has died in our place. Therefore, it is God that calls us and it is a rare privilege. Jesus told His disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you; and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your

fruit should remain” [Jn 15: 16]. Elsewhere, He told the multitudes, “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” [Jn 6:37].

As a chosen generation called out of darkness into God’s marvelous light [1 Pet. 2: 9], it is a rare privilege that you must not waste. Therefore, you cannot afford to take frequent vacations away from righteous living because you do not know when the King is coming into the wedding hall of your heart to check on what the wedding guests are wearing. You have no control over when or how you will die. What will you tell God when you face Him- that you have no wedding garment?

b) *God is not your mate!*

The man without a wedding garment was taken from the street and made a royal guest but the street had not left him. He ought to have been sensitive to the values and expectations of the king who was of a higher social status. With respect to God, it is imperative that we upgrade to His expectations because His ways and thoughts are way way higher than ours [Is. 55: 8-9]. We are to “enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise” [Ps. 100: 4]. But what do we do in our places of worship today? We enter His gates with a wish-list and into His courts with noise that we call praise worship but that is nothing but reality show!

Familiarity, they say, breeds contempt. Some people are not sensitive enough to differentiate between the way they treat people they are quite familiar with in formal and informal settings. That you were classmates in college does not give you the right to call your boss by his first name during a staff meeting. That you knew how a person was raised as a child does not give you the right to continue to treat him/her as a child even now that s(he) is occupying a prominent position. We tend to extend the same attitude to God. That He is accessible does not mean that you can treat Him familiarly. For example, although Jesus was respected and honoured everywhere else, His own townspeople looked down on Him, saying, “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers, James, Joses, Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?” [Matt. 13: 55-56]. Many of us today do not treat Him any better!

However, the experience of those who have had a close encounter with God suggests reverence. For example, in the burning bush, God ordered Moses not to draw near the place and to take his sandals off his feet because he was standing on holy grounds [Ex. 3: 5]. After Isaiah was given the privilege to see a vision of the procession of God, he fell on his knees, crying, “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips; *for my*

eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” [Is. 6: 1-5]. Paul was on his way to arrest Christians in Damascus when he was struck down and blinded by the light of Jesus Christ. The first words that came out of the mouth of the professed enemy of Christ were “Who are You Lord?” and “Lord, what do You want me to do?” [Acts 9: 3-6]. On the island of Patmos, John did not know when he fell down to worship the angel that was speaking to him until God’s messenger told him not to, adding, “I am your fellow servant and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” [Rev. 19: 10]. So why then do you treat God casually? He is not your mate!

3. Conclusion: Prepare for the wedding of the Lamb!

There are millions of churchgoers who would like to be called but they have not. Many have been called but only few have been chosen [Matt. 22: 14]. You happen to be among the chosen by virtue of God’s mercy [1 Pet. 2: 9]. Now the King of heaven and earth has invited you to His only begotten Son’s wedding to His bride, the church. Can you afford to go there without your wedding gown of righteousness?

The guest who had no wedding garment was immediately cast “into utter darkness” where “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” [Matt. 22: 13]. But the worthy guests that have been invited to the Lamb’s wedding are blessed [Rev. 19: 9].. So, *to honour the King’s invitation on His terms is to be blessed.*

Would you not gladly accept such an invitation? Would you not go there on the King’s terms rather than casually? I know you will!