

Devotional Blog

Sunday 11th October

As the Pandemic continues, we are painfully aware of the tension at the heart of the Government's Coronavirus regulations. It's a balance between lives and livelihood. The health of the nation versus the national economy.

Of course, we are used to tensions in our lives. The daily struggle between what we want to do and what we can find time for; or between what we would like to buy and what we can afford.

There's a tension also for many Christians in their faith. It's between judgement and love; or put another way between the idea that God's Grace and love is freely given and the need for obedience to God's word.

This tension often shows in how folk approach their Bible reading. If you ask what someone's favourite parable is, then expect the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son to be high up the list. Yet parables that deal with judgement are often skipped or dodged.

Towards the end of Matthew's Gospel, we find the striking and troubling story of the Wedding Banquet for the King's Son (Matthew 22:1-14).

Blood and gore drip from the parable just as it does from the parable of the tenants of the vineyard. So, it is not surprising that people prefer the Luke version of the parable (Luke 14:15-24).

One particular aspect of the story that offends our modern sense of fairness is when one of the guests at the Wedding turns up in the wrong clothes. The guest gets tied up and thrown into a dark place of wailing and grinding teeth. Oh dear!

There appears to be a stark tension between inclusive grace with its lifestyle of love and forgiveness with a harsh demand for obedience and a penalty for refusal.

However, if we dig a little deeper into Matthew's version of the parable, we find that parts of it don't really work. In verse 9 while the dinner is waiting the King wages war, destroys cities and kills those who dishonoured and rebelled against him.

Matthew, the Gospel writer, is employing a shocking worldly story in a symbolic way. Take the invited guests who do finally make the Wedding banquet. Where do they get their costumes, when one of them doesn't? Unless the King provides the wardrobe. You see, this is not about clothes at all.

The early Christians pictured conversion as donning a new set of clothes. A way of putting on a Christian identity.

This is the answer to the apparent tension in the story. If we want to be at the heavenly banquet with God – we must be clothed in Christ. What God is saying to all of us is “Be clothed in Christ; live your life to his will, be blessed, be loved, be fruitful”.

The Apostle Paul picks up this idea in his letter to the Colossians when he writes, “God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience”.....above all “clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony”.

You see, it's our choice, it's our judgement call. As Christians all our values, all our actions, all our desires become empowered by the Holy Spirit. The very spirit of Jesus within us.

Yes, even when we get things wrong, which we all do, the Holy Spirit will enable us to ask for forgiveness and for us to remain clothed in Christ.

God has sacrificed himself for us. He has lifted the burden of judgement. We do not have to earn his love and salvation by our own endeavours. It has been given freely.

There is also no tension in wanting others to notice the faith clothes we are wearing. Our identity in Christ is not about boasting, not about us thinking that we are good, but is making the bold statement that we are loved, and we want others to be loved also.

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