

The Wedding Garment (Robe)



SABBATH—JUNE 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 21; Matthew 22:1–14; Revelation 21:2, 9; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Daniel 7:10; Genesis 3:9–19.

MEMORY VERSE: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus are no longer under God’s sentence” (Romans 8:1, NlrV).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY IS FULL OF DARK PAGES. People who claimed to be Christians have done some horrible things. And our understanding of prophecy¹ tells us that more evil will be done by so-called “Christians” before Jesus returns.

This week we will study an interesting parable.² This parable shows the painful truth that not all who claim to be followers of Christ really are Christians. Of course, we cannot judge between the faithful and the unfaithful. How can you see “the speck [bit of dust] in your friend’s eye, but you don’t [do not] notice the log in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3, CEV). No, we do not make that judgment. But God does.

“The guests at the gospel (good news) feast are those who claim to serve God. Their names are written in the book of life. But not all who claim to be Christians are true disciples (followers). Before the final reward is given, God must decide who is fit to receive heaven’s reward. This decision must be made before the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven. This is because when Jesus comes, His reward is with Him. ‘I will reward each person for what he has done.’ Revelation 22:12.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 310.

1. prophecy—a message from God about what will happen in the future.

2. parable—a short simple story that teaches a truth.

SUNDAY—JUNE 5**EXCITING DAYS (Matthew 21)**

Matthew 21 describes some of the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry (work). As the Bible often does, this chapter shows that the human heart can deceive (fool) us. It also shows Satan's ability to blind our minds to the clearest truths. It is easy for us to think: how could those leaders have been so hard, so blind, so stubborn in the face of all the evidence (proof) that Jesus had given them?

But we must not fool ourselves. Is there any reason for us as Seventh-day Adventists to think that we are much different from other people? Are we not sometimes hardened to truth? Do we not have our pet sins and desires and worldliness? Sure, God loves us, Christ died for us, and forgiveness is available to all. But we could say the same thing about the people in Matthew 21. They are the ones who turned their backs on Jesus and worked against Him. How careful we need to be! This is because we deceive ourselves if we think that we cannot be deceived.

Read through Matthew 21, which gives the background for the parable in the next chapter. So much is happening there. But what is the basic theme (idea) of the chapter? If you had to write a summary of it in a few lines, what would it be? More important, what spiritual lessons can we learn from it for ourselves?

Perhaps the most interesting sentences in the entire chapter are the last two sentences. The people's hearts were hard to Jesus. But something of His message must have gotten through. This is because the people knew Jesus had been talking about them. They seemed to have understood the message well enough to want to get Jesus out of the way. It is interesting, too, that the people themselves prevented the leaders from arresting Jesus then. How sad! Those who should have been teachers of others had the most to learn. In many cases, they never have learned. When they finally do, it will be too late (Romans 14:10).

MONDAY—JUNE 6**THE KING'S INVITATION
(Matthew 22:1–8)**

It is nice to have a wedding. But for a king to have a wedding is even nicer. And to be invited to a wedding that was given by a king for his own son would have been a very high honor too. The wedding of the son in Matthew 22 is used to show the relationship between Jesus and His church (Revelation 21:2, 9; Ephesians 5:21–23).

Read Matthew 22:1–8. How does this part of the parable fit in with what we saw in Matthew 21? What same theme appears?

Notice, too, how the king prepared everything. He arranged for the mar-

riage. He got the dinner ready. He had the animals killed. “Everything is ready. Come to the wedding dinner” (NIRV) was the message. In the end, all the people had to do was accept what the king offered them.

Notice, too, the things that caused the people to refuse the invitation. Some did not take it seriously. They did not think it important. That could symbolize (show) those today who just do not take the promises of God seriously. For different reasons, they never open themselves up to truth. Others “went their ways.” Jesus said that the path to salvation is narrow (Matthew 7:14). People can find all kinds of excuses to avoid and refuse the invitation. For other people, it was simply the temptation of worldly things. Others really attacked those who gave the invitation. And finally, some just ignored the invitation. Whatever the reason, they all were left out. Think, too, about the words of the king. He said that those who had refused the invitation “were not worthy.” With all human sin and sinfulness, is any one of us really worthy of being invited to the king’s feast? In the end “worthiness” in the Bible means what Christ does for us. Our worthiness is not in ourselves but in what we let God do for us and in us.

Think about the reasons given above for those who refused the invitation. Which one do you find the most difficult to deal with in your own life? What promises can you make that will help you to avoid it?

TUESDAY—JUNE 7

THOSE WHO CAME TO THE FEAST (Matthew 22:9–14)

When the people refused two calls, the king now sent out another one to “as many as ye shall find” (Matthew 22:9, KJV). The king ordered his servants to invite them to the wedding. But this time the answer to the invitation was different. This is because, according to the verse, the servants went out and “gathered all the people they could find” (Matthew 22:10, NIRV).

Read the rest of the parable in Matthew 22:9–14. Who came to the wedding feast? What does it mean that some who came were “both bad and good”?

Have you ever noticed that some of the meanest and most hateful people are those who claim to be Christians? Or that some of the most judgmental, two-faced, and downright evil people go to church, claim the promises of salvation, and say they have assurance (promise) of salvation?

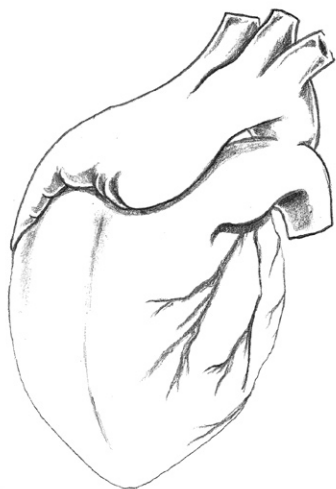
This is nothing new. How do we understand the faith of the Crusaders?³ For example, they were dedicated to the Lord Jesus, but they stole and killed their way to the Holy Land. One eyewitness reported that “our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking-pots, they impaled [speared] children on spits and devoured [ate] them grilled.”—Amin

3. Crusaders—European soldiers with red crosses on their chests sent by the pope to recapture Jerusalem from the Moslems between A.D. 1000 to 1300. There were several trips, but most of them were failures.

Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, translated by Jon Rothschild (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), page 39. How could the Crusaders do those horrors in the name of Jesus?

You might say, “*That is easy! These people were not real Christians.*” But how do you know? How can you judge their hearts? What were they taught? What opportunities (chances) did they have to know better? Did some of them repent (turn away from sin) later? Did they claim the same promises of forgiveness and grace⁴ that we do? What about the past horrible acts of those who did repent later? Who are we to judge hearts?

We should not judge, but God does, should, and will (Romans 14:10; Hebrews 10:30; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Daniel 7:9, 10). Seventh-day Adventists call it the “investigative judgment.”⁵ And it is shown in this parable.



Only God can judge the heart.

Think through some of the bad things Christians have done throughout history, and sometimes in the name of Jesus too. How does this parable help us to understand how God will deal justly (fairly) with them?

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 8

WITHOUT A GARMENT (Matthew 22:1–14)

What does the garment mean in the parable? Why should refusal of it mean death?

Suppose one believes in once-saved-always-saved. Then what is wrong with the idea that God separates the wheat from the tares (weeds among grains) (Matthew 13:24–30), the wise from the foolish (Matthew 25:1–13), the faithful from the unfaithful (Matthew 25:14–30), and those who are truly covered in His righteousness from those who have only claimed to follow Him (Matthew 22:1–14)? What if some of them have done and might still do horrible things, and maybe even in His name too?

Will there not be some kind of final judgment among the true and the false?

Think it through: if salvation were purely by our works, it would be simple! Just count up our works. Either they add up, or they do not. Period. But what about a faith where salva-

4. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives to us to take away our sins.

5. investigative judgment—the first phase of three which takes place between 1844 and the Second Coming and in which the fate of all people, both living and dead, will be determined before Jesus comes to gather His people to heaven.

tion depends on what someone else has done for us? It is the kind of faith in which the righteousness (goodness) needed for salvation depends on someone other than ourselves. Then the issue gets deeper. So, a judgment by God who never makes a mistake would seem more necessary than in a religion that depends on good works. Right?

And that is what this parable is all about: how God separates the true and false from those who have claimed to follow Him. And where do you draw the line? The line clearly shows whether or not they have been clothed in the wonderful garment of righteousness that Christ has freely offered to all.

This parable shows a clear difference between being a member of a church and being a sinner saved by the righteousness of Christ. They clearly are not the



God's robe of righteousness is offered freely to all.

same thing. Think about your life, your actions, your words, your thoughts, your attitude (thoughts and feelings) toward friends and enemies. Do they show someone wearing Christ's robe of righteousness or someone who has just come to the feast?

THURSDAY—JUNE 9

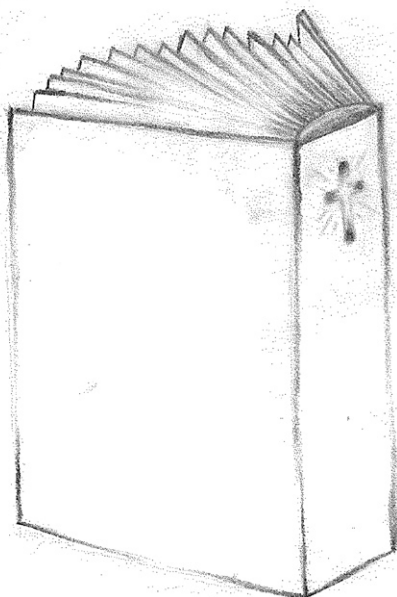
THE INVESTIGATION (INSPECTION) (Genesis 3:9–19)

Suppose you believe that once a person is “saved,” that person can never fall away. Then it is hard to imagine that God would not have a final separation between those who are clothed in His righteousness and those who pretend to be. That is what this parable is really about. Again, suppose there is a religion that is not based on our own works. Instead, it is based on someone else's works for us (which we claim by faith). Then how could there not be this final separation made by God?

Compare Ecclesiastes 12:14 and 1 Corinthians 4:5 with Matthew 22:11. What is the one point that is nearly the same among these three verses? Why is that point so important?

Seventh-day Adventists understand the concept (idea) of the great controversy (war; Revelation 12:7–9; 1 Peter 5:8; Job 1; Job 2). And we understand the interest of the entire universe in

this great controversy (Daniel 7:10; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Ephesians 3:10). So, we refuse to accept the argument that an investigation of works is not from the Bible. The Lord *does know* His people.



An investigation of works is based on the Bible.

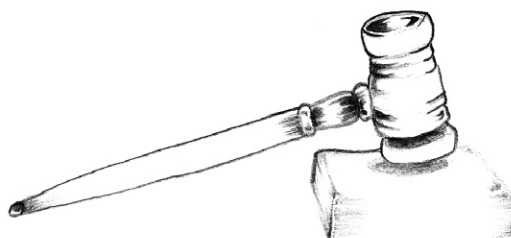
It is so important that we keep this big picture in mind: the whole universe is very interested in what is going on here with sin, rebellion (turning against God), salvation, and God's plan to deal with everything in an open, just, and fair way.

The idea of a judgment of *any* kind usually means some kind of investigation. Look at Genesis 3: 9–19: from the first moment after sin entered, God Himself got involved by asking questions. He already knew the answers, but He asked because this “investigation” was not really for Himself. It helped Adam and Eve to

understand the seriousness of what they had done. The same thing can be said of the “investigative judgment.” It does not show anything new to God. It is really for the good of others and to help them to understand why things have turned out the way they did.

This Genesis judgment shows where God's grace overruled the death sentence (see Genesis 3:15). God's grace does the same for all of God's true followers, now and in the judgment—when they need it the most!

An investigation of your works? Is there any wonder that you need to have Christ's righteousness covering you at all times? Or that salvation has to be by grace and not by works? What hope would you have if you did not have Christ's robe covering you?



God's grace overruled the death sentence brought by sin when Adam and Eve fell.

FRIDAY—JUNE 10

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Without a Wedding Garment,” pages 307–319, in *Christ's Object Lessons*.

“But the plan of salvation had a deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth. It was to clear the character of God [who God is] before the universe.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs⁶ and Prophets [Special Messengers]*, page 68.

“But Satan was not then destroyed right away. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles [important rules] at stake were to be more fully shown later. And for the sake of man, Satan’s life must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the sharp difference between the Prince of light [Jesus] and the prince of darkness [Satan]. Man must choose whom he will serve.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 761.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Think about Christian history. Think about all the horrible things done by people who claimed to be Christians, and often in the name of Jesus too. Think how people have used their

faith as a cover, a cloak, or an excuse for some horrific crimes. How does this unfortunate fact help us to better understand the need for the kind of separation among the people who claim to follow Jesus, as this parable and other Bible verses show?

❷ Ellen G. White makes it clear that Christ’s robe shows the righteousness of Jesus that both covers us and lets us show His character (goodness) in our lives. How are we to understand the differences between these two important truths? And why is it important that we do?

❸ Think about how real the great controversy is and how much it influences our beliefs as Seventh-day Adventists. Go through the Bible and pull together all the verses you can find that show just how closely this theme (idea) follows the Bible.

❹ Jesus ended the parable of the wedding garment with these words: “Many are invited but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14, NIV). What do you think Jesus meant by that, according to the theme of the parable?

6. patriarchs—leaders in Israel in early Bible times, men such as Moses or Abraham.