

I WISH WE'D ALL BEEN READY

Matthew 22:1-14

INTRODUCTION:

Tony Campolo is a professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. He's also an ordained minister. Campolo has pointed out that Deuteronomy 14:22-27 is about tithing. Now don't panic. This really isn't a sermon about tithing. But I want you to understand something about tithing in the Old Testament. According to Deuteronomy 14:22-27, every year, all the Jewish families set aside 10% of their gross income and then, on a designated day, they brought it all to Jerusalem.

Can you imagine: 10% of the total Gross National Product of the entire nation and it is all taken to the capital city? What do you think they were going to do with all this wealth? Feed the hungry and clothe the naked? Build an addition to the temple? Buy livestock and burn it as an offering to the Lord?

Nope! God's instructions were that all this was to be brought to Jerusalem and used for a super-big colossal blowout party. That's right, a party! It must have been the most awesome party you can imagine. And everyone was invited: the rich and the poor; the blind and lame as well as the whole and healthy; single and married; young and old; widows and orphans as well as large families. Everybody was supposed to be there. There was to be singing and dancing and food...lots of food!

Does it surprise you that the Lord wanted His people to have a big blowout party in His presence? Does it seem out of character for God? Well it isn't. God is into parties but we just don't talk about it very much. We don't talk about it nearly enough.

Tony Campolo took this theme and wrote an entire book about it. The title of the book is: The Kingdom of God is a Party

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A PARTY

Jesus was constantly trying to get his followers to understand what his Kingdom was like. As the time was getting closer for him to die on the cross and then to rise from the grave and later to go back to heaven to be with his Father, he talked about his Kingdom more and more. During the last week before his execution, Jesus said, "Guys, let me put it this way: the Kingdom of Heaven is like a wedding reception that a king threw for his son." A wedding reception? That's right. A wedding reception.

Now I've mentioned before that a Jewish wedding feast is the party to end all parties. That is the mother of parties! And Jesus said that his Kingdom is like that: like a huge party that a king throws for his son.

When Matthew uses the term “Kingdom of God”, he doesn’t just mean heaven. He means that. But that’s not all. For Matthew (and for Jesus), the Kingdom of God is a present reality with a future certainty. The future certainty is heaven. The present reality is the church. Jesus intends for the church to be a foretaste of heaven. There are a lot of things we might want to discuss in relation to that truth but for today, I want to confine myself to how we act in the Kingdom of God.

Let me ask you something: how do you act in church? That’s exactly what I thought. Now, let me ask you how you act at a really big blowout party?

Now that’s what I’m talkin’ about!

Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is a party – it’s like the biggest wedding reception a king ever threw for his son.

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A PARTY AND YOU ARE INVITED

In Matthew 22, when Jesus told this parable, he said that the king looked over the hall and said, “There aren’t enough people here. What’s wrong?” The king heard a lot of excuses but he didn’t want excuses; he wanted a party. So he said, “Go out into the highways and the byways and bring in people. I want this place filled. I want this place jumping. I want everybody to party hearty!”

Jesus said the Kingdom of God is like a party and God has invited you to His party. There are a lot of excuses for not coming to God’s party. Some people are too busy with work to come to the King’s party. Some people are too busy with their hobbies or favorite pastimes so they stiff the King and skip the party. Frankly, some people just don’t think that much of the King so they don’t want to come to the party for His son.

Some people probably think their excuses are reasons – but here’s a news flash: the King doesn’t think there is any reason that is important enough to skip His party. The King...your King, expects you to come to the celebration for His son.

III. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A PARTY, YOU ARE INVITED BUT YOU MUST BE PROPERLY DRESSED.

In Jesus’ parable, when the king came into the banquet hall and looked over the guests, he noticed that one man was there who was not wearing wedding clothes. “Friend,” the king asks, “How did you get in here without wedding clothes?” The man was speechless. Then the king told the bouncers to throw the man out of the party...but not just out of the party but into the lowest, darkest slum where there is weeping, despair and hopelessness.

When I was a kid and first heard this parable, I must confess that I felt pretty sorry for the guest that was thrown out. I figured that since the king sent people out into the highways and byways to invite people to come in, this guy might have been wearing old clothes because he was walking on a long trip. He didn't know there was going to be a party so it didn't seem fair to me that he should be punished so harshly for not wearing the right clothes when he was brought in. I figured it was unreasonable to expect him to travel in a tux.

But since then, I've learned a little more. Historians tell us that wealthy people in Jesus' day provided wedding garments to those who could not afford them. This man is not a victim of poverty, mistreated by some idle-rich king. He is a man whose tux is rented by the king, and given to him scot-free. But he refuses to wear it and insists on wearing what he wants to wear.

In Isaiah 61:10, the prophet tells us that God had clothed him in "the garments of salvation" and has arrayed him in the "robe of righteousness". When you come to the King's party, He doesn't care what shirt you wear or what slacks you have on. But He does insist that you be clothed in righteousness.

Later in his prophecy, Isaiah said that our righteousness is like filthy rags in God's eyes (Isaiah 64:6). God is not asking us to wear our own righteousness to His party. He insists that we put on the salvation and the righteousness that He gives us.

He gives us salvation when we accept Jesus as Lord and as Savior. Then He clothes us with His righteousness by giving us the Holy Spirit

IV. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A PARTY, YOU ARE INVITED, YOU MUST BE PROPERLY DRESSED AND IT IS A "COME AS YOU ARE PARTY"

I told Sandy I was going to preach with a shirt and no pants so I could illustrate what it can be like to go to a "come as you are party." Sandy said I wasn't going to preach with a shirt and no pants. She told me to tell you about a "come as you are party."

I suspect that some of these young people have never been to a "come as you are party." Here's the procedure:

1. The people who plan the party, let you know the date and time so you can make sure your schedule is clear so you can attend.
2. Then, a few days before the party, you get a phone call or a visit from the party-planners and they tell you that when you come to the party, you are to come just as you are right at that moment.
 - o If you had just put on your pajamas, that's the way you are to come to the party.
 - o If you just got into the shower, that's the way you are to come to the party.

- If you just crawled out from under your car and you are covered with grease and dirt, that's the way you are to come to the party.

It's supposed to be pretty funny to see how people come to the party. But nobody would have a "come as you are" wedding reception. The bride and the groom are to be the center of attention, not some grimy guest.

The Kingdom of God is here and now and the King invites you just the way you are to come to the party.

But He also expects you to accept the wedding garments He provides: His salvation and His righteousness. Our life here on earth is a bit like the dressing room at the wedding reception. The most important thing we can do while we are here is to get dressed for the reception.

And then, one day, we will all leave this dressing room and we'll move into the Great Hall of the King. But here's the deal: you will never know for sure when the King will summon you into His presence. And you sure don't want to be caught without the right garments on.

For that reason, it only makes sense to get dressed in His salvation and in His righteousness right now and remain clothed in them until you are called into the presence of the King.