NEW FOCUS

The Lilac Envelope

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The lilac envelope on the doormat had the personal touch of being homemade. It was addressed in practised calligraphy with a formal RSVP in the corner. The wedding invitation it contained was not exactly a surprise, we had heard about the engagement and sent our congratulations. But the wedding date was problematic, it was a busy time at work and a great distance to travel. Next morning we picked up a ‘with sincere regret’ card.

In the stationers an old friend beamed. He too had received an invitation and his excitement was evident. He had not expected to be asked to the wedding but was informed that arrangements were already in place. His dress-suit was ready and awaiting collection compliments of the groom. All was paid for and in the envelope was a receipt. His hotel room was booked, the account also settled. Even his travel tickets were enclosed.

Our invitation brought no tickets and no receipt. No wedding outfits were ordered, no travel arrangements made. Having decided not to attend nothing was lost, but the groom did not know this. What if we had wanted to go? What arrangements had been made for us? Where was our wedding outfit and confirmation of accommodation?

Then the penny dropped. It was never expected, nor intended, that we would attend the wedding. It was an empty invitation sent out for show. Nothing necessary for us to make the journey was arranged or supplied. The lilac envelope was for appearance only. It sounded good, it looked good, it made us feel valued and wanted, it was ingenious, but it was not sincere. What appeared as a grand invitation to attend a grand wedding was really a grand deceit. Despite the invitation, nothing was prepared, nothing was provided, nothing was supplied.

What kind of person sends such an invitation? Who would mock their friends by appearing to invite them while failing to provide what was necessary for them to attend? Certainly not a man of integrity, not an honest man. Yet today, preachers in pulpits are making just such offers and sending out such invitations, on behalf, they say, of God Himself. It is a genuine invitation, they tell us. "Come to the wedding of God’s Son". It is a sincere offer, they say, lovingly given in the gospel to all who hear. A free offer, without condition, without restriction.

But is there with the offer an enabling to accept? Is there cleansing blood

applied? Is a robe of righteousness supplied for the guilty, naked sinner? Is the ransom paid? Is the soul redeemed from the curse of the law? Has Christ carried their sin and died in their place? Is He now preparing a mansion for them? Is all that is needful most certainly supplied? No? Then it is an empty offer, a grand deceit and an insult to our sovereign God. Shame on the free-offer preacher who mocks a sinner thus.

When God invites a sinner to the wedding of His Son He provides everything required for him to come. With God’s invitation comes the gift of faith and power to accept, with His offer of mercy comes the gift of grace. He cleanses with precious blood, anoints with perfect righteousness, and by Jesus Christ opens the way of reconciliation into His holy presence. God never mocks the sinner with an insincere offer. Nor will He deceive those condemned already by offering them what can never be theirs. God’s invitations are full and gracious, never deceitful, never empty.

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