

NO JACKET REQUIRED

*I shook my head in disbelief. This couldn't be the right place. After all, I couldn't possibly be welcome here. I had been given an invitation several times, by several different people, and had finally decided to see what this place was all about. But, this just couldn't be the right place. Quickly, I glanced down at the invitation that I clutched in my hand. I scanned past the words, "**Come as you are. No jacket required.**" and found the location. Yes, I was at the right place. I peered through the window again and saw a room of people whose faces seemed to glow with joy. All were neatly dressed, adorned in fine garments and appeared strangely clean as they dined at this exquisite restaurant.*

*Ashamed, I looked down at my own tattered and torn clothing, covered in stains. I was dirty, in fact, filthy. A foul smell seemed to consume me and I couldn't shake the grime that clung to my body. As I turned around to leave, the words from the invitation seemed to leap out at me... "**Come as you are. No jacket required.**" I decided to give it a shot. Mustering up every bit of courage I could find, I opened the door to this restaurant and walked up to a man standing behind a podium. "Your name, sir?" he asked me with a smile. "Jimmy D. Brown," I mumbled without looking up. I thrust my hands deep into my pockets, hoping to conceal their stains. He didn't seem to notice the filth that I was covered in and he continued, "Very good, sir. A table is reserved in your name. Would you like to be seated?" I couldn't believe what I heard! A grin broke out on my face and I said, "Yes, of course!" He led me to a table and, sure enough, there was a placard with my name written on it in a deep, dark red. As I browsed over a menu, I saw many delightful items listed. There were things like, "**peace,**" "**joy,**" "**blessings,**" "**confidence,**" "**assurance,**" "**hope,**" "**love,**" "**faith,**" and "**mercy.**"*

*I realized that this was no ordinary restaurant! I flipped the menu back to the front in order to see where I was at... "**God's Grace,**" was the name of this place! The man returned and said, "I recommend the '**Special of the Day**'. With it, you are entitled to heaping portions of everything on this menu." You've got to be kidding! I thought to myself. You mean, I can have ALL of this! "What is the '**Special of the Day**'?" I asked with excitement ringing in my voice. "**Salvation,**" was his reply. "I'll take it," I practically cried out. Then, as quickly as I made that statement, the joy left my body. A sick, painful ache jerked through my stomach and tears filled my eyes. Between my sobs I said... "Mister, look at me. I'm dirty and nasty. I'm unclean and unworthy of such things. I'd love to have all of this, but, but, I just can't afford it."*

Undaunted, the man smiled again. "Sir, your check has already been taken care of by that Gentleman over there," he said pointing to the front of the room. "His Name is **Jesus**." Turning, I saw a man whose very presence seemed to light the room. He was almost too much to look at. I found myself walking towards Him and in a shaking voice I whispered, "Sir, I'll wash the dishes or sweep the floors or take out the trash. I'll do anything I can do to repay you for all of this." He opened His arms and said with a smile, "Son, all of this is yours if you just come unto me. Ask me to clean you up and I will. Ask me to take away the stains and it is done. Ask me to allow you to feast at my table and you will eat. Remember, the table is reserved in your name. All you must do is accept this gift that I offer you." Astonished, I fell at his feet and said, "Please, **Jesus**. Please clean up my life. Please change me and sit me at your table and give me this new life." Immediately, I heard the words, "**It is finished.**"

I looked down and white robes adorned my squeaky clean body. Something strange and wonderful had happened. I felt new, like a weight had been lifted and I found myself seated at His table. "The '**Special of the Day**' has been served," the Lord said to me. "**Salvation is yours.**" We sat and talked for a great while and I so enjoyed the time that I spent with Him. He told me, me of all people, that He would like me to come back as often as I liked for another helping from God's Grace. He made it clear that He wanted me to spend as much time with Him as possible. As it drew near time for me to go back outside into the "real world," He whispered to me softly, "And Lo, I am with you always."

And then, He said something to me that I will never forget. He said... "My child, do you see these empty tables throughout this room?" "Yes, Lord. I see them. What do they mean?" I replied. "These are reserved tables... but the individuals whose names are on each place card have not accepted their invitations to dine. Would you be so kind as to hand out these invitations to those who have not joined us yet?" **Jesus** asked. "Of course," I said with excitement as I picked up the invitations. "Go ye therefore into all nations," He said as I turned to leave. I walked into God's Grace dirty and hungry. Stained in sin. My righteousness as filthy rags. And **Jesus** cleaned me up. I walked out a brand new man...robed in white, His righteousness.

And so, I'll keep my promise to my Lord. I'll go. I'll spread the Word. I'll share the Gospel... I'll hand out the invitations. And I'll start with you. Have you been to **God's Grace**? There's a table reserved in your name, and here's **your invitation...**

"Come as you are. No jacket required."