

For Glory and For Beauty
Exodus 28:1-14, 31-43; 39:1-7, 22-31
11/3/2013

Clothes are important. They are important for a variety of reasons. They do say something about us. They are not always an accurate statement of who we are, but they still say something. Originally, clothes came about because Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness, and they needed something to cover themselves. They tried fig leaves at first, which is surely not a very, um, permanent solution. God had a better idea: He decided to sacrifice some animals, and use the skins to make a more permanent solution. We need clothes in our sinful estate. The Bible has a lot to say about clothes. We learn quite a lot about clothes in this chapter. What we learn is that we need to be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That pure spotlessly white garment is the only one we really need, because it is sufficient to undo the shame of nakedness that Adam and Eve introduced into this world.

In our passage, we might think that we have changed subjects. The last few chapters have been all about the tabernacle. Now Moses starts giving instructions about the clothes that the priests would wear. However, as we will see, this is not really a change in subject. The clothes that the priests wore were tabernacles in miniature. Observe, for instance, that the fabric of the ephod was of the same material as the veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place, and the gate to the courtyard. Secondly, notice the fastenings of golden chain in verse 14. They remind us of the fastenings on the curtain of the Most Holy Place. Thirdly, the clothes are also meant to recall the beauty and glory of the garden of Eden. Verse 33 details the pattern of pomegranates and bells around the hem of the robe. We have seen in the past how Adam and Eve were supposed to be priests in the Garden of Eden, particularly in making a distinction between what was holy and what was unholy. They were supposed to guard the garden from Satanic intruders. So also the priests were supposed to do with the tabernacle area. They were supposed to keep out anything unclean. So it is that the garments for the priests here are tabernacles in miniature.

There is, however, one major difference. In the tabernacle itself, the progression goes from least holy to most holy as you go from the outer courtyard into the holy of holies. With the priest's garments, however, it is exactly the reverse. The inner garments, the undergarments, that is, were the least holy, and the outer garments were the most holy. This reminded the priests that the heart was the place that was least holy in sinful man, and that they (and we!) always need to look outward towards Jesus Christ for our holiness.

The key phrase that is repeated in connection to these clothes is that they were for glory and for beauty. We see that in verse 2, and we see it again in verse 40. Holiness is a beautiful thing, and was certainly not opposed in any way to beauty. There is a certain mentality that creeps in every now and then into the Christian church that says that holiness must be ugly and plain. It does not have to be. We need to be careful here, for we do not want to become snooty, either, and say that holiness equals beauty. They are not the same thing. But they can be related, as we see here. A person can be holy to the Lord while wearing the ugliest clothes in the world, and a person

robed in splendor could easily be rotten on the inside. But it does not have to be that way. The question is this: which kinds of clothes will you seek the most? The Bible's answer to that question is that the best robe of all, and the most beautiful and the most holy, is the spotless robe of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. To see that clearly, we must go to the book of Zechariah.

Zechariah 3:1-5 is a key passage in understanding this robe of righteousness:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! *Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?*" Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.

Notice some very interesting things about this passage. The filthy garments are filthier than we usually imagine them to be. The word that describes them is similar in meaning to the crude four-letter word used to describe human refuse. That's how dirty the robes were. It wasn't just mud. Secondly, notice the presence of the accuser, Satan. This tells us just what that muck was: sin, including our sinful attempts at doing something righteous. So we are taught here to have a very strong reaction of revulsion to sin. Thirdly, notice the amazing grace of God. A priest clad in clothes like that would be instantly killed, normally, if he dared to come into the presence of God clothed in muck. However, the Lord rebuked Satan the accuser, because Joshua the priest was like a brand plucked from the fire. Then follows the removal of the dirty robes, and the clothing of the clean robes. This is the sin being taken away, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ being given to him instead. The last element of the clothing is by no means the least. The turban is most important. In our passage in Exodus, we see that the turban had the words "Holy to the Lord" inscribed on it. The clothing of the priest was not sufficient until it became clear that the priest was once again holy. Fourthly, notice the presence of Jesus Christ in the passage. It says "And the Angel of the Lord stood by." Jesus often appears in the Old Testament in the form of an angel. In the immediately following verses the angel speaks the Word of the Lord, which is an indication that the Angel is in fact, the second person of the Trinity before He became incarnated in human form in Jesus Christ. He is the one who clothed Joshua in the new garments.

This is a beautiful picture of our justification before God. Justification has two parts to it. The first part is that our sin is taken away from us. Isaiah speaks of this most particularly in chapter 53, when the Messiah is wounded for our

transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, chastised for our peace, and given stripes for our healing. The clearest part of that verse is the end: "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." The guilt of our sin is taken away and laid on Jesus. The clothes that are full of muck have been laid on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. He has borne our sins on His own shoulders.

The second part of justification (and closely tied to the first!) is that His spotless robe of righteousness is given to us, as it was given to Joshua the high priest in Zechariah. Jesus, of course, obeyed the law in every particular. He was the spotless lamb, with no blemish whatsoever. On no occasion did He ever sin. His righteousness is a seamless robe, made of one piece. Jesus' righteousness results in our being declared "not guilty" in the courtroom of God. We are given new clothes. They include that turban that says "Holy to the Lord" on it.

This kind of language finds its way to the book of Revelation. In the letter to the church at Sardis, we find these words: "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life." Now that passage raises questions, for it seems to be talking about personal holiness and human effort, especially in the words "he who overcomes" and "have not defiled their garments." What we have to realize here is that once we have those spotless robes of white in the declaration of justification, God does not just leave us alone. He continues to purify us so that we may look on the inside like we look on the outside. Remember the increasing holiness of the garments as you go from inside to outside? During our whole life, God is changing us on the inside to look more and more like that spotless robe. That process is never complete in this life. At any given moment, we will always look better on the outside than we are on the inside.

This, by the way, is a great answer to give to those who accuse the church of being filled with nothing but a bunch of hypocrites. My answer to them is, "Of course!" That's how the Christian life works. We start out by being given that spotless robe that is pure white on the outside. But God is working on the inside (which starts out being horribly sinful!) to make the inside start to match the outside. The point is that the Bible itself tells us that that is how it is supposed to work! Rather than being surprised at it, we should be pointing out to people that this is how every Christian actually looks. They are clothed with Christ on the outside, and on the inside, there is a terrible battle being fought all the days of their Christian lives.

Now, if we come to see things this way, we must beware of a very real temptation that comes in the wake of such an understanding. We can look at this situation where we are clean on the outside, and dirty on the inside, and say "that's how the Christian life is, so therefore I do not have to change." The first part of that statement is true. This is how the Christian life is. However, it does not follow that we do not therefore have to change. God takes us where we are, that is true, but God never leaves us where we are. The irony of the faulty way

of thinking is that such people believe they are harping on grace, grace, grace all the time. God treats us through grace. The fact is, they have a very small view of grace! Grace is not just working in our justification, but it is also working in our sanctification! We are not merely saved from sin's guilt, but we are always *being saved* from sin's power. They go together. You cannot separate justification and sanctification.

The last applications have to do with our views on clothing. Modesty is a very important concept here. The priests were to be modest. This was not how ancient near eastern religions thought about their priests. Oftentimes, their priests did not wear any clothing at all. In other words, they denied the fall into sin. Our Lord is not like that. Instead, modesty was important. The New Testament tells us that we are a kingdom of priests, in 1 Peter 2. Modesty should characterize New Testament believers, therefore, in how they dress. Modesty is not just about making sure enough skin is covered, however. Modesty is also about avoiding vanity. There is a fine line here, because we have just been saying that the clothes of the priest were for beauty and glory. There is therefore nothing wrong whatsoever in dressing beautifully, or handsomely. There is everything wrong in being vain about the clothes and how they make us look. Which is more important to you: the outward clothes you wear, or the spiritual robe of white that Jesus Christ gives you?

Lastly, when you come to worship, do you think about the fact that you are entering the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Wear your best clothes! If your best is jeans and a polo shirt, wear that. There is no room for snobbishness in the church of Jesus Christ. But if you were going to be introduced to the Queen of England, would you be wanting to wear your worst clothes or your best clothes? How much more for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

The priests' clothing was for beauty and for glory. Most especially, it was for pointing out the beauty and glory of the white robe that Jesus Christ gives us through faith alone. Is that your robe? Are you wearing it now?