

“A Garment of Salvation”

Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3 ¹⁰ I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. ^{NIV} **Isaiah 62:1** For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. ² The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. ³ You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵ to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, {6 Aramaic for Father} Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

“A Garment of Praise”

The way you dress will change the way people treat you. For example, months ago I went to one of the local stations to get gas and I noticed that the cigarette display behind the counter was newly covered over. So, to strike up a conversation I asked the cashier if that was some sort of new provincial law. And she surprised me with a gutter-laced rant about how much of a pain in the bum it was having to flip open all those panels just to find what you're looking for. Well, two Sundays ago after church, I went there to get gas and she was working again. This time I was wearing the collar and was she ever sweet. She was all smiles and looked at me like I was something special. But, her tone of voice was artificially on the pleasant side.

To be honest, I don't feel comfortable wearing the collar the around. Americans view the collar differently than do Canadians. In the first place, most Presbyterian ministers wore ties rather than collars and the consensus among us was that if one of us did, it was because that minister was the type who wanted the congregation to know who's in charge. Moreover, it tended to be that the only people you saw wearing a collar were Roman Catholic priests. So, if you were ever seen in public with a collar on people would most likely call you "Father". Canadians on a whole seem to have a bit more respect for clergy, than Americans do. Up here I feel that I am expected to wear the appropriate apparel and that I'm not such an odd puppy if I do. In fact suspicions seem to arise if clergy don't wear the collar. I find it very hard to adjust.

A question arises as to why ministers have to wear a collar or a robe while the people in the pew do not. There's the simple answer that the apparel represents the uniqueness of the office and the yoke or burden of the call. But, the Bible says we are a priesthood of all believers and to put the shoe on the other foot for a moment, how would you in the pew feel if you had to wear a collar day in and day out to indicate that Christians are a priesthood of all believers? I

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suspect that you would feel at least at first uncomfortably self-aware and that people think we're religious fanatics. It would also mean that you would have to be extra mindful of your conduct.

Well, I have news for you. You are wearing such a garment. Isaiah calls it the garment of salvation. God has clothed us with his very self, the Holy Spirit, so that we are beginning to look like his children who bear the image of Christ. We are dressed in robes of righteousness as beautifully as bride and bridegroom on the wedding day. Righteousness, so you know, is the ability to be faithful to God. Isaiah says God is causing righteousness and a sense of worshipfulness to sprout forth in us like plants in a garden so that all people can see. He says we are a crown of beauty and a royal sceptre in God's hand through which his reign shines forth into this world. He further says God will not keep quiet nor rest until righteousness shines forth from us and our salvation is evidently clear.

Isaiah is abundantly clear here that this is something God is doing in us and not something not we by ourselves are doing. It is God who is dressing us with salvation and he will not rest until we are fully dressed in righteousness. It's just like when children are small and we have to dress them. I remember at the wedding of John and Helen's son, we dressed William up in his kilt and did he ever look good, like a real Scotsman. So it is with us, our heavenly Father is dressing us so that we bear his image rightly. One day we will be able to do more than simply put our little feet in the air so that he can put on our socks and even if he has to fight us to put the socks on, God will see to it that we wear our garment of salvation and robe of righteousness.

In Galatians Paul explains this with a different image and says more about how this has come to fulfillment in and through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus God the Son has redeemed us so that we may be adopted as children of the Father and he has made this redemption and adoption effectual in us by the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes us able to know we are beloved children of God and who causes us to call forth to God the Father with terms of respectful endearment. The Holy Spirit's causing us to know the love of God and to call on him is the gift of faith which has come about as the result of Jesus' faithfulness. In fact it is Jesus' own faith given to us as a free gift. Paul goes on to say that we've been changed in status. We are no longer slaves to the futility and corruption of sin and death. We are free now to be faithful according to the faith we've been given because we know personally the one who has set us free. We are now children of God with full rights as such and thus heirs to his eternal kingdom and reign and are so because the Triune God of grace has made it so.

Let me take a moment to unpack a couple of words and then I'll wrap this up. First, redemption - to redeem in the Bible is not cashing in a coupon where you go to the store with a coupon that is worth 30 cents and get 30 cents off your purchase. The way that actually works is that the manufacturer devalues the product by that much. In the Old Testament, to redeem was to give value to something that has been made worthless. If an ox gores and kills or wastes the life of a person, the owner of the ox has not only to put the ox to death (waste its life), but also he must pay an agreed upon sum of money to give some sense of value to the life of the person the ox killed. As Paul means it here to redeem is to

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purchase a slave so that the slave may be free. It is to give value or status to one whose life had no value.

What Paul is saying here is that Jesus the Son of God by becoming human and living the obedient life under the Law fulfilled the Law for us. The curse of the Law as Paul puts it is death. Jesus suffered that curse innocently so God did not let him stay dead, but raised him from the dead bringing into existence a new humanity. By the gift of the Holy Spirit to us that new humanity is applied to us. We are humans indwelt by the Spirit of God and for now our status has been changed. We are no longer slaves to the Law, but we are God's children. It is not that the Law is bad it is that because of our corruption in sin we are simply unable to fulfill it. The Law is a gift from God so that the community of people who live according to it reflect the image of God. But, we are utterly unable to make it past the first commandment which is to have no other gods before God and therefore we fall down on the rest. The result is that the Law instead of helping us to live the way God wants rather only serves to expose our sin even more.

We the community of God's people are no longer slaves to the impossible and futile task of having to fulfill the Law so that God's image may shine forth in this world through us blessing all peoples. Rather, we've been given this gift of faith, this garment of salvation, by which we are compelled to love as we have been loved. This love of God flowing through us who live by faith fulfills the Law. This is wonderfully good news. God has made us to be his own children by giving the Son for us and Spirit to us. With respect to establishing our relationship to God we are as it was in the beginning and ever will be off the hook. Jesus Christ has brought a new reality into place, humanity in union with God through him in the Spirit according to the love of the Father. We cannot say yes to this new reality for that yes has been said for us so that it is in our lives, everyone's life, as a gift freely given. On the other hand, we can say no to participating in this reality just like children who don't want their parents to dress them. Sometimes God fights us to clothe us. Sometimes he doesn't fight us and lets us run around undressed that we feel the discomfort of being improperly attired with respect to our new nature in him. Regardless, God has clothed us with a garment of salvation. He has freed us from the futility of all forms of religion so that we may live according to faith which he in love and at a great price has freely created in us. Wear your new robe humbly for it shines with compassion, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul says there's no law against these things. You are now free people, free to be children of God. You are free from all hatred, shame, guilt, addiction; indeed, from all those things that evidence humanity's downfall. You are free. Go live in the kingdom of God of which you are heirs. Amen.