Exodus 28:31-35, 39:22-26 **‘Gems from the Garments of Glory’ (7)**

We’re turning back again this evening to Exodus 28 for study number 7 out of 10 on the garments of Israel’s high priest … it’s a series I have called: **Gems from the Garments of Glory**.

Last week, we spent some time considering the girdle or waistband - a reminder that we are served day by day by one who appears on our behalf in the Glory. He’s there at the Father’s right hand, and the upbeat news is that he always has our best interests at heart. That’s a ministry unique to him, and it’s one in which he never grows tired or weary - the truth is, round the clock, 24/7, he’s there for us! And we sure need him, don’t we?! I certainly do.

So, this evening, we remove the girdle, we take off the breastplate of twelve precious stones, we handle it carefully as we don’t want to drop the Urim and Thummim from within its pouch, we undo the two onyx stones - one on each shoulder; when we’ve done all of that, we are then in a position to easily take off the multi-coloured ephod - and what do we see?

We catch a glimpse of the beautiful robe of blue, we lower our eyes and we see and hear the tinkle of the golden bells interspersed with coloured pomegranates attached to the hem - not surprisingly, they were blue, purple, and scarlet in colour; the blue robe was the garment worn under the ephod and on top of the white linen, broidered coat … again, as we shall soon discover, we are pointed towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our aim this Wednesday evening is to ‘turn our eyes upon Jesus, to look full in his wonderful face, when [we know] the things of earth [will] grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.’ In the robe of blue, therefore, we have an unblurred, undimmed vision of Jesus … we have 5 main points to focus on this evening:

1. The Idea behind its Identity

It’s vitally important for us to realise that we’re not talking here about any old garment - no, this is specifically referred to as a robe of blue … and the key word there is the word ‘robe’. The white broidered linen garment is not called a robe - it’s always spoken of as a coat, a covering, or a tunic - it was the only piece of clothing worn by the high priest on Yom Kippur, the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar, the Day of Atonement.

So far as I’m aware, this is the first time that a ‘robe’ is mentioned in Scripture, and that makes it extra special and significant. If you are familiar with hermeneutics, there is what we call ‘the law of first mention’. What does that mean? At its simplest, the first time something is mentioned in the Bible it normally carries that meaning the whole way through.

Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation - that tells me, there are basic rules for interpreting the Word of God. Beyond

knowing these principles, you must also know when and how to apply them! That's where seeing biblical truth in its proper context is paramount. As the old saying goes - take a text of Scripture out of context and you make it a pretext!

The robe speaks to us of office - you see, Aaron and his successors were occupying the office of high priest. It's clear from verse 35 that he wore it when he was ministering in God's name to God's people - we read something similar in 39:26. He wore it when he was fulfilling his God-given responsibilities in and around the tent of meeting, when he was doing the ministry which he was called and chosen to do.

It's fascinating to note that when the Hebrew word is used elsewhere it often refers to an item of clothing worn by a king or a prince, as with Saul in 1 Samuel 24:4. That is, it was a garment of special dignity - it gave a princely character to the high priest. It typifies the kingliness of the priest.

We know from Hebrews that the Lord Jesus was a priest not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek - we know from Genesis that he was both a king and a priest … in the Lord Jesus, as our Great High Priest, we see the King and the Priest combined in a robe of blue!

Before we move on, did you notice that there is no mention of the material used in its making? The coat, the ephod, etc are all made of finely twined linen … but we don't know what the robe of blue is made of. Scripture is silent on that one. Could it be that the emphasis here is on the colour - it is all of blue. There's an abundance of blue … I sometimes think of the words in Psalm 45 when it says in verse 8 that the king's robes '… are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.'

2. The Suggestiveness of the Shade

We have noted already that the robe is to be 'all of blue' … we read: 'Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth' (NIV). Primarily, that single colour speaks of two wonderful truths, which are related - one is grace, and the other is glory. Think about it: when you look up and see an azure blue sky, your spirits are lifted, and your heart is cheered - there's no thought of judgment or a pending storm. No. A blue sky reminds us of the goodness and grace of our faithful God.

Blue was a colour which abounded in the tent or the tabernacle - it was there in the veil, in the curtains, on the door and entrance gate; every piece of furniture was draped in a blue cloth when in transit across the desert sands; a blue lace fastened the crown to the mitre and a blue lace secured the breastplate to the ephod.

As a colour, it was worked into both the ephod and the curious girdle, whilst the robe was all of blue - making it quite distinctive and different! A potent reminder of the abundance of grace that there is - an overwhelming supply to cover all of our needs - it's evident everywhere.

So it is with the church of Christ for we are all sinners saved by God's extravagant grace. We testify with one of old that 'by the grace of God' we are what we are. Ah, that's amazing grace … and it's available, and adequate, and abundant.

It was John Newton who expressed it so well, so succinctly, when he penned those words of personal testimony in the hymn, Amazing Grace: *'Twas grace that wrote my name, in God's eternal book; 'Twas grace that gave me to the Lamb, who all my sorrows took.*

It covers the white linen coat or tunic which speaks of the righteousness of God. That is something we could never achieve or attain - see what he has done … he has covered law with grace! We are clothed in the garments of his righteousness because of his grace. Paul speaks so movingly in 2 Corinthians of 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The robe was behind the ephod - it was under it … when we looked at the ephod we saw him in the gold as God, in the blue as Lord of lords, in the purple as King of kings, and in the scarlet as the Saviour of sinners - those were just some of the titles he wore …

ah, behind his titles and his amazing ability lies the robe of blue - all that he is and all that he does is undergirded by an inward heavenly character - he was, in the best sense of the phrase, heavenly minded. We read in Psalm 45:2, 'thou art fairer than the children of men, grace is poured into thy lips.'

Yes, the blue speaks so vividly of grace, but it also focuses our thoughts on glory for he is the Lord from heaven. We see him here as the heavenly man! From heaven he came, of heaven he spoke, to heaven he lifted up his eyes, toward heaven he walked - heaven was continually in his thoughts and heaven was the environment in which he lived. He stands in stark contrast to the first man, Adam, of whom it was said by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, he was 'out of the earth, earthy.'

It's essential for us to recognise that when Jesus came from heaven to earth that he was still Lord the whole way through - he didn't lose any of his lordship or waive any of his attributes … that's why the robe is ALL of blue! Can we prove it? Yes, we can … here's a few examples:

Luke 2:11 - in the manger he was the Lord; Mark 1:12 - in the wilderness he was the Lord; Matthew 8:23 - in the storm he was the Lord; Luke 9:32 - on the mount of transfiguration he was the Lord; Luke 23:42 - on the cross at Calvary he was the Lord; Matthew 28:6 - in the grave and out of the tomb, he was the Lord; John 20:28 - after the resurrection he was the Lord; Philippians 2:11 - in the Glory he is the Lord; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 - when he comes back again he will be the Lord …

The old hymn, penned by Benjamin Hanby in the mid-1800s, asks the pertinent question over and over again as it traces the life of Jesus, 'Who is he …?' And after each stanza, the chorus gives a resounding answer:

'Tis the Lord, O wondrous story; 'Tis the Lord, the king of glory. At his feet, we humbly fall, Crown him, crown him, Lord of all.

3. The Benefit of the Binding

A close reading of verses 31-32 gives us an intriguing piece of information - the neck of the robe was strengthened so that it would not rend or tear. It never frayed. It was done so effectively that it was like armour plating (that's the thought behind the Hebrew word) - ah, dear friends, the grace of God is not in tattered shreds - it's not coming apart at the seams … there are no loose threads - it is unfailing. And unfaltering.

When we weave our way through the gospel narratives, it's clear that the inner heavenly life and mind of Christ was often tested, but it did not tear. How?

It was tested by time - for a little over 33 years, he lived down here in this sinful world, rubbing shoulders with fallen humanity, never once did he have to apologise and say 'I'm sorry.' It was tested by the tempter - remember the incident after his baptism in the Jordan river when he was taken by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness - and for forty days the devil did all in his power to trip him up … and he failed every time!

There were a number of occasions when he was tested by the team - I think of the weakness of Peter, the unbelief of Thomas, and the betrayal of Judas. He was tested by torture - those hours leading up to Calvary when he faced the horrors of agony and anguish - and, on the cross, when he was brutalised by many and forsaken by his heavenly Father.

He was tested by the tomb - but the grave could not hold him, death could not rend a tear in his robe - for up from the grave he arose. Victorious. Triumphant.

4. The Wonder of the Workmanship

Again, here's something unique about the robe of blue - it was woven in one single piece. There was no seam to be seen - it was without a join. Ah, here is the work of a skilled craftsman. The truth of the matter is that no loom on earth could ever produce the wonderful fabric of the incarnate God. That shows for us his eternal union with the Father - speaks of his divinity.

The prophet Micah reminds us that his 'goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting' (5:2). He, himself, declared, 'I and my Father are one.' We read in John 1 that 'the Word was with God and the Word was God.'

In that sense, his life is without beginning and without end, and without change - he is eternal in his existence … without seam.

5. The Significance of the Stitching

This is something that is repeated a few times in the space of a few verses, so it must be worthy of our attention - we're talking about the hem. I'm sure we all realise that a hem speaks of a work that is finished - it is complete - it's done! That's the thought behind Jesus' terrifically loud shout in John 19:30, when on the middle cross

at Calvary - ‘it is finished …’ Not I am finished, but it is finished. Shortly before Calvary, we read in John 17 in the opening words of his high priestly prayer that he affirmed to his Father, ‘I have finished the work …’

All could see the hem no matter where they were or what angle they saw him from - so it is with the Lord Jesus Christ … from behind him, from before him, from beside him - they could touch the hem of his garment and be made whole. That highlights his availability to all and sundry - just need to come to him, reach out and touch him … and be blessed forever. The familiar story of the woman with serious gynae problems in Mark 5 illustrates that point …

So, when we think of the robe of blue, we thank God that Jesus is Lord … and we rejoice that we are, in the words of Peter, ‘a royal priesthood’ - yes, you and I are ‘kings and priests’ - John tells us that!

On that note, I call to mind a chorus, first heard in the early 1970s: *He is Lord, he is Lord, He is risen from the dead, and he is Lord, Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess, That Jesus Christ is Lord.*