Exodus 28:39, 39:27

‘Gems from the Garments of Glory’ (9)

We’re back again this evening to Exodus 28 - by now it should be one of those chapters that your Bible falls open at - this is our penultimate study, number 9, when we are shining the torchlight on the white linen broidered coat.

There are four lines of thought in our study - all easy to remember as they begin with the letter C: one, the characteristics of the coat; two, the colour of the coat; three, the composition of the coat; and, four, the covering of the coat.

1. The Characteristics of the Coat

When you look at your handout you’ll see that the coat was, first of all, **a basic garment** - this was the first main garment which the high priest put on every morning. Because of that, it is something foundational and, as we know, white is always a reference to purity and holiness … this is essentially basic and fundamental to all else. He put it on after being washed ..!

It didn’t matter where he was or what he was doing, the high priest always wore the white coat - whether he was walking in the midst of the congregation of Israel, or going from tent to tent in the camp; when engaged in the service of the tabernacle, or when ministering at the altar - the white coat was never off his shoulders … a powerful reminder that holiness must always be the foundation of our life and ministry.

For you and for me, such purity needs to be guarded at all times - in thought, in word, and in action. In that unique sense, we must be seen to be whiter than white!

It was not only a basic garment, it was also **an inner garment** - you see, it was behind the blue robe and the multi-coloured ephod … underlying every garment was the white coat! Ah, behind everything else was that inner purity, that deep holiness within. Similar truth expressed in Psalm 24:3-4 … ‘Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart …’

OK, there was white elsewhere - next week we shall see that when we meditate on the mitre, the turban - it was seen by one and all … but the most of the white linen coat was only seen by the unseen God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

A lesson there for us to take on board - God sees beyond the outer facade, he sees behind all the externals - he gazes into the innermost depths of our hearts and he knows what makes us tick and what makes our heart beat faster - that’s what the Psalmist acknowledged in Psalm 139.

So it’s a basic garment, and an inner garment, it’s also **a supporting garment** - all other items of dress were placed around this one. In that sense, it acted as a kind of support, a mainstay. There’s no doubt that holiness is the best anchor for any one of us in life and in death.

The pertinent question is, how are we to get it? And the apostle Paul provides the answer when

he says in Romans 13:14: 'Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.' That's the all-time secret - we ditch the old man, we discard the old garments, we dump them; and we dress up with the garments of glory and God - then we delight in them and in Him … as Warren Wiersbe noted: 'we get rid of the grave clothes and put on the grace clothes.'

2. The Colour of the Coat

There's no mix and match here in this garment - it's a case of one colour and only one colour and it had to be white! As we've seen already, white denotes purity or holiness - it speaks to you and I of cleansing.

One look at the Lord Jesus and we stand in awe of one who is thrice holy - recall what happened in the throne room in Isaiah 6; we are utterly amazed, but not surprised, at the holiness of his life and the purity of his impeccable character. I hear words of testimony from a bygone era and this is their verdict:

John, the beloved apostle, writes that 'he did not sin' - he is sinless; Peter, the big fisherman-cum-apostle declared that he was 'without spot' - he is spotless; Paul, who was mightily used of God in and around the world of his day, affirmed that he is 'holy and harmless' - he is harmless; Pilate, who had the nerve to sit in judgment on Jesus, even admitted that he could find 'no fault' in him - he is faultless; the old preacher prophet Isaiah tells us that there was 'no guile found in his mouth' - he is guileless; the dying thief on the cross acknowledged that Jesus did 'nothing amiss' - he was innocent; and the bride saw in him one who is 'altogether lovely' - he is flawless and attractive from the inside out.

So many tributes to who Jesus is and was - but there's one more which I dearly love to read - it's in Hebrews 7:26 where the writer concludes, 'Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.'

His character in each and every sphere is beyond dispute … he is above and beyond reproach … the perfect man … in relation to God, he is holy; in relation to man, he is blameless; in relation to his own heart and life, he is pure; and in relation to this sinful world, he is set apart from sinners - ah, here is one who is different and distinctive … here is Jesus, the holy one. And thank God, the good news is, according to verse 26, our great high priest 'meets our need' whatever that need may be!

3. The Composition of the Coat

I'm referring to this garment as a coat (as we read in the KJV), you'll find that it's sometimes spoken of as 'a woven tunic' in translations like the NIV and 'a skilfully woven tunic' in the NKJV - the ESV and the NASB describe it in an unusual way when it calls it 'a coat or tunic of checkered work' - the NLT sees it as 'a patterned tunic' … even with a few slight variations, I think you can read between the lines as to what we have here

in the biblical text in Exodus 28. So let me try to unravel it for you:

The first striking piece of information is that it is **a linen garment** … and linen, as we know, is from the earth - it comes from the stems of the flax plant - so the thought here is of the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. It also reminds us of the righteousness of Christ - Jehovah Tsidkenu … a link is found in Revelation 19 where we also note that you and I, as the bride of the Lamb, are clad in such a garment … you see, his righteousness is imputed to us, and imparted to us.

One of my favourite hymns echoes that precious truth - it's penned by Charitie Bancroft … *Behold him there, the risen Lamb, My perfect, spotless righteousness, The great unchangeable I AM, The King of glory and of grace. One with himself I cannot die; My soul is purchased with his blood. My life is hid with Christ on high, With Christ my Saviour and my God.*

The second piece of info is that it is **a fine linen garment** … there was nothing rough about the texture of this coat. It was smooth and evenly surfaced. A reminder of the life of Jesus where it was said of him that he was 'full of grace and truth' and that he is 'a merciful and faithful high priest.' Such was the perfect balance in his life - nothing lopsided about him and his character. At all times and in every circumstance there was an equilibrium to his life and ministry.

The third piece of info worth noting is that it is **a fine twined linen garment** … we see that from the added comments in Exodus 39. To be twined means that 2 threads were taken and carefully and skilfully woven together - a double thread which reminds us of some of the titles of Christ: he is Faithful and True, he is the First and the Last, he is the Alpha and Omega, he is the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, he is the King of kings and Lord of lords … and there are many more!

Then, number four piece of info, it is **a broidered linen garment** … we find that term used in some of the older translations - others use the word 'woven' or 'embroidered' … and there's a subtle difference between them.

When a garment is embroidered, it means that a pattern is worked **on** to the material … but when it is broidered, it means the pattern is woven **in** to the material. See the difference? Embroidery is to sew the beauty on from the outside, whilst broidery is a beauty within. That explains why, as I mentioned earlier, a couple of translations refer to it as 'a checkered work' or 'a patterned coat.'

In the trade, this is known as damask linen - it's been around for thousands of years and gets its name from the city of Damascus and the famous Silk Road. Very few companies make it as it takes time, patience, skill, and a Jacquard loom to get it right … the Old Bleach Irish Linen company in Randalstown, Co Antrim, specialised in making it for many years; sadly, not now! It's a luxury item that does not fade and one which long outlives all other linens …

There is a beauty associated with it - I think of the loveliness of the Lord Jesus, as a Son, as a Servant, and as a Supplicant. There is something about him that makes him truly exceptional.

You see, when you're at a distance, the white coat worn by the high priest looks just like any other white coat - nothing much to catch the eye or impress. I mean, a white coat is a white coat! But, the closer we are to him, we see the pattern woven in to the fabric - that's why some call it 'a checkered coat' … the coat becomes more beautiful to the naked eye and so much more appealing and attractive. The bottom line is, the nearer we are to Jesus, the prettier he is …

We see the beauty of his humility in Philippians 2:5-8 where he 'made himself of no reputation' when he climbed down the ladder … we see the beauty of his gentleness at the end of Luke 10 when he said to an over-worked and under-appreciated Martha, 'you are troubled …' We see the beauty of his thoughtfulness when we hear his words in John 19 to his friend John, 'Son, behold thy mother' - even on the cross, Jesus was thinking about others.

We see the beauty of his understanding in Psalm 147:4-5 for he 'sees and knows when a sparrow falls to the ground' - someone said, he attends the funeral of every sparrow! We see the beauty of his touch in many life examples, for we often read, 'the hand of the Lord was upon me' - an old song penned by Bill Gaither testifies that 'he touched me …'

We see the beauty of his remembrance for the Psalmist reminds us that 'he knows our frame and he remembers we are dust' - and, because of that, he makes the burden for the back for he knows what we can take. Finally, and there are many more, we see the beauty of his goodness for the gospel records many instances when he 'went about doing good.'

4. The Covering of the Coat

The Hebrew word 'kaphir' pops up no fewer than 70 times in the Old Testament - it speaks of 'a covering' and is sometimes translated as 'atonement.' In that sense, there is a difference between sinners before Calvary and after Calvary - before Jesus died, the sacrifices were typical and atoning - they were pointing forward … after Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many on the cross, it was actual and our sin was taken away. As the children's chorus says: *Gone, gone, gone, yes, my sins are gone!*

Let me highlight a few examples of the word in the Old Testament: the first is in Genesis 3:21 where we read that '… the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.' So an animal was killed, blood was shed, the coats were put on Adam and Eve - that is, a covering was provided that was acceptable to God's holiness … like you and I, we are accepted in the Beloved.

Another instance is a few chapters later where we read in 6:14 that Noah was to 'make an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it

with pitch inside and out.' That is, it was coated or covered with pitch - Noah and his family were safe on the inside. Just like us, in Christ, we are sheltered and secure for we are no longer living under the dark cloud of condemnation.

There's an interesting scenario in Isaiah 28:18 where it declares: 'Your covenant with death will be annulled, your agreement with the grave will not stand.' The only way for the covenant to be set aside was for stone to be covered in boiling lead - every crevice and crack was entered, the handwriting was all covered … that takes us into Colossians 2:14 where we discover this glorious truth: 'having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us, Jesus took it away, nailing it to the cross …' Ah, when it comes to your sin and mine, God has blotted them out, eternally!

One final illustration is seen in Leviticus 16 and the annual Day of Atonement … that's when the high priest was only dressed in his white coat as he went through the veil into the holy of holies - he went there with a blood offering to make atonement for the sins of the people - it was a yearly occurrence and it was a covering for their sin … so we read in Hebrews 10:3-4 that '… those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins [then down to verse 12] but when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.'

At Calvary, sin is no longer covered, it is taken away, it is removed for ever. A once for all time sacrifice that lasts eternally.

In closing, let me say three things - one, today, we see the Lord Jesus as **the unchanging Christ** - says one of old, he is the same 'yesterday, today, and forever.' Two, when he returns for his own, he will come as **the all-changing Christ** and, thank God, we shall be changed into his likeness. Three, at Calvary, he was **the exchanging Christ** - for he took my sin, he bore away my sin, and he gave me the righteousness of God. That's why we love to sing an old hymn, translated by John Wesley: *Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, My beauty are, my glorious dress.*