

Evening Lesson. Isaiah 61.

JUNE 18 1978

TEXT 2 CORINTHIANS 5.4

You will see, beloved friends, that wisdom and grace is needed by the unworthy preacher to seek, according to the mind of God and for the edification of the saints, to expound the second clause of this beautiful verse, and to discover by revealing grace and the corresponding spiritual teaching the meaning of the apostle in the divinely inspired words. You will notice that the second clause falls into three sections: first, to express his overwhelming wish and desire before God; "not for that we would be unclothed," and the second part; "but clothed upon." and the third part, the whole of the work of the Spirit issues triumphantly in a specific manner to the glory of our Triune God; "that mortality might be swallowed up of life." You who are spiritually minded will see how sublime and fathomless these holy truths are, and the difficulty for us is to try to elucidate and deliver them to you. We may claim to see several vital terms of holy doctrine and points of divine truth in living experience that will help me to clothe the points with beauty, unction and energy by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. What is your approach to the subject? The apostle had been speaking ^{of} groaning, being burdened, and we made it clear, as we hope, that it was in the context of blessed assurance and holy expectation of a glorious immortality. It is not expressed in the dark or uncertainty, but against a glorious background and wonderful vista he had of an assurance of faith relating to him; a sure expectation of bliss in Heaven. He is saying in the revealing, invincible teaching of the Spirit first in the sacred language, "Not for that we could be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." I might approach the subject in this way, though I shall steer a different course to night. It could be, I desire, subject to the will of God, that I may be here at the Second Coming of our blessed Lord. For those who will be alive and remain at the coming of the Lord will never see the grave, never see death, never be buried, never be unclothed, as such. They will be translated, and by a divine process soul and body will be glorified. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." One may take that line with the Text.

I will take ^{it} in perfect harmony with the line briefly referred to. All of us of the Lord's people, as we hope, will experience this. I expect to be unclothed, and each of us in a certain sense; stripped of the tent or tabernacle we dwell in, the human body. Our spirits being liberated will stretch their wings, and fly to realms of endless day, where the Sun of our souls reigns 'in Glory's ineffable light.'

I propose to deal first with unclothed. We shall arrive at the blessed stage in experience where the child of God is never unclothed. Prior to that I shall speak of how even the Lord's people are unclothed so they will be permanently clothed. First, unclothing. We shall refer to a small section of the morning's discourse. I said, our federal heads in their pristine innocence were clothed in a righteousness of pure creation. They needed no earthly clothing because they had no sin and shame. We saw this morning how they were unclothed in succumbing to the terrible temptation. It is a mystery. One may deeply contemplate the point of the fall: they received temptation, and yielded to it. The first sin was the sin of pride. "Ye shall be as gods." Sin was entering and death by sin. They were unclothed; they lost their primitive righteousness. O the solemnity of it! and soon they recognised it. If the Lord leads you into this portion of Scripture it is an interesting point as to how soon they were re-created. It appears that they were quickly born again of the Spirit: this is beautifully demonstrated in the fact that the Lord God made ^{them} coats of skins and clothed, and gave them the promise of His Son. They were unclothed, and we are all born in that state; we have no righteousness of our own.

I want to go to the next point. When the Lord quickens His chosen people into divine life and brings them under the application of His ~~holy~~ law, what happens? They may have accumulated a righteousness that is false, as the apostle did by his strict adherence to Pharisaism, and so on. He thought he was well prepared to stand in the presence of God and was proud of his religion. The second point is, when the Lord begins a work of grace in our souls and brings us under the moral law, He strips us of all our righteousnesses which are as filthy rags. I remember from my earliest days, old ministers speaking of God stripping them. As divine teaching in His school He strips sinners of all their fancied

meetness, to approach the dread I AM. He strips them of all their strength and wisdom; all they thought they could rely on. Nor is this work and operation the Spirit confined to initial days. Right along the line there are seasons when the Lord strips us of things, and this is painful. "From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you." The Lord knows how to strip us. You may enter experiences in life that are to you initially profoundly mysterious, and how to understand you know not. It is beyond your comprehension to understand. If you have ever walked in a complete mystery you could not fathom, I would suggest to you by the sanctifying grace of the Holy Ghost, over a considerable period you may be brought to a conclusion that the Lord was stripping you of your idols or the earth or flesh. He was loosening your tent pegs, ready to take down your tent. Something that was so mysterious to you, you will see the general scope of the wisdom of God in it. This is my second point in unclothed; until in the work of the Spirit we are stripped naked before God. How many are able to find the location of this phase in their spiritual experience? How shall we come to the two parts of being unclothed, disrobed? "Not for that we would be unclothed." Are you not seeking that the Lord will bless you by stripping you of your filthy rags? It is the blessed work of the Spirit to strip you of all but Himself, and you praise Him for it. He strips of self, pride, strength, wisdom and our supposed goodness, and from every prop. Well do we know of it in the ministry of the gospel. Where shall we begin? At this point: how much better the clothing the Lord has provided for us than the filthy rags that once we wore! I will speak to this clothing of the Lord. When the Lord clothes a sinner, that sinner will never be unclothed.

Let us seek to expound by His grace, the wonderful clothing wherewith the Lord clothes the naked. When we see our righteousnesses they are filthy rags, and they stink. If we try to bring any thing of our own before God or to rely on it, it will stink, and you will know it. I have to my shame known this: I have had a really good prayer ready for a special Prayer Meeting, and it was as though I hoped to be called on, and I was. I had a good part of the prayer out before God and it stank. I never want it again. Do you know that? If we try to bring anything

of our own, it breeds worms and putrefies, and we hardly know how to bear the stench. This applies through life to a child of God. Always rely on your Beloved and lean on Him. So, the stripping of our filthy rags, and the change of raiment. What is the next point to name before the wonderful act of clothing?

"My best is stained and dyed with sin;

My all is nothing worth." (959)

What does He do? clothe you? No; not immediately. He washes you and makes you clean. He takes a poor, repenting, broken-hearted sinner and puts you in the fountain to cleanse you. What do you do for your children? take off their soiled garments and change them before they are cleansed? They must go to the bath and be cleansed, and then clothed. That is what the dear Lord does. This is a vital experience that souls have, and they will pray for it. He will wash you and make you whiter than snow. And there is something else: you will have the holy perfume of the graces and virtues of the Spirit. He will wash you and make you attractive to Himself; to your Bridegroom, and to the daughters of Jerusalem. Then He proceeds to clothe you. "Not for that we would be unclothed." He clothes you.

There are three things in this: do you know what they are? First, there is the provision of garments: they had to be provided. And in the second place, the appointment of the blessed provision to you. We had in our Lesson, "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." It is by divine appointment that you are to receive the garments He has prepared. Third, the arraying. You are arrayed. The word that covers this in holy doctrine is imputation. It is beautiful, fadeless, of glistering purity. It fits you for Heaven; to have the Lord as your Guest. If you have wonderful clothing He will be your Guest. He fits you for Heaven; to be with your King. Think of the clothing! "The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework." He has prepared the clothing. Dr Watts has a beautiful couplet in the Hymnal. He says that Jesus spent His life to work the robe of righteousness. Every step Christ took as our Surety from the womb to the tomb, until He said, "It is finished." and

bowed His head, and gave up the ghost, He was working the garment. It is woven without a seam from the top throughout, as His own garment was.

"Without a seam this garment's wove,
Bequeathed in everlasting love;
Ere time began, designed to be
A royal robe to cover thee." (113)

Think of the holy perfection of every stitch! all He wrought on the perfect garment. He spent His life to work it. You ladies who are interested in skilled needlework; it could take you a long while to do all you have set heart on. There is skill and beauty in it. Christ's whole life was spent in producing this beautiful garment. It is one of the supreme miracles in the Kingdom of His grace, this clothing that is provided. When the spendthrift son returned, his father said to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe." What about this poor sinner? If you are favoured with all that we have named, the stripping and the washing, the best robe is there. The righteousness our blessed Redeemer wrought by His holy obedience to the death of the cross He needed not for Himself. It was for His bride. He has the righteousness of His Deity and His pure humanity. This righteousness He wrought. It is the appointed clothing, and where there is divine appointment there will never be disappointment. He has appointed to those 'that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.' You are invested with high honour from Heaven by divine decree: it is yours by heavenly appointment.

Thirdly, you are arrayed. The Father takes the obedience of His dear Son and imputed it to you, gives it to you. Faith receives and puts it on, and you are clothed and you will never be unclothed. I well remember the heavenly experience of it in my soul in 1930. I clearly recollect the blessed stages and the sequence,- coming up from the washing; wonderful it is to get your guilt, filth and corruption washed away! What would you say to it? and to be arrayed in raiment of needlework, the royal robe and rich vest.

"And, lest the shadow of a spot

Should on my soul be found,

He took the robe the Saviour wrought,
And cast it all around,

Lord

How would you know the ~~Saviour~~ had arrayed you in it? The answer is profoundly simple. You will have your Bridegroom with you. He is next to you. He will not stay away. You are 'married to the Lord the Lamb'. "not for that we would be unclothed," This dear soul is never unclothed. In a sense we may say when death comes we are unclothed: the tabernacle is taken down; but those clothed in His righteousness are never unclothed they stand complete in Him. Nothing alters your state of justification. Death itself will never unclothe you. You will pass through the river wearing His robe and enter the King's palace. How many of you are clothed?

"not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon." What does that refer to? You have already been clothed upon by His righteousness. There are two other things in it. You are clothed upon with your house from Heaven. All the heavenly bliss and joy of the heavenly mansions, "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" you are clothed with and upon. When in the immortal glory of the first resurrection your body is raised, spiritual, powerful, glorious, and united with your glorified soul it is clothed upon. O the wonder of it! Salvation extends to the whole person. We have a glorious Forerunner and Captain of our salvation, made complete as our Saviour by suffering, and we have His example. When He said, "It is finished", and bowed His head and gave up the ghost, into His Father's hand He commended His Spirit, and He entered into the territory of death and condescended to be buried. He rose on the third day. Think of the wonder of being clothed upon! What is the issue? "that mortality might be swallowed up of life" Mortality is not only that we are subject to death: we are in this category; death is necessary. We must needs die. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." "that mortality might be swallowed up of life."- that mortality might be consumed by life. When was it? I will go through the blessed points with you concerning our Saviour and Surety. When He had said, "It is finished", and gave up the ghost, the fountain was opened by the spear. He condescended to be buried, and demonstrated the glory of His resurrection. Mortality was swallowed up of life. Amen.