

“THE BEST-DRESSED MAN IN THE WORLD”

(Mark 14:50-52)

“And they all forsook Him, and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.”

I was in a preaching meeting in a church in another state during the week before Easter of 2004. It was my intent to preach in every service of the meeting on the Cross of Christ. This intent was spurred by two things: First, the timing of the meeting, and second, the incredible national impact of Mel Gibson’s powerful movie entitled “The Passion of the Christ.” During my intensive study in preparation for the meeting, I stumbled onto a Passion story which I had never given a great deal of attention to previously. This time, I examined it a bit more prayerfully and carefully, and the Holy Spirit began to move in my spirit. “What an illustration this is of a basic Gospel truth, a picture of one of the great Gospel realities,” my spirit exclaimed within as the Spirit was tutoring me in His Word. Mind you, this is a picture, an illustration, not the actual meaning of the passage. I take full responsibility for stretching this text like a rubber band; I cannot blame anybody for such a use of the text. I repeat: I am using it as an illustration; I am not attempting to merely follow the historical account. The passage is an historical narrative of a real event, but the picture which was suggested to me by the narrative is much bigger than the narrative. So I am “hitchhiking” on this text to get quickly to a great Gospel truth. Please go back to the text at the top of the page and read it even more carefully, trusting the Holy Spirit to register in you the great doctrinal and devotional truths He has given to me in my study.

Let’s begin with two words in verse 51 of the text, the words, “fine linen.” Any serious and careful student of the Bible knows that, in the Word of God, fine linen represents righteousness (or a *covering* of righteousness for sinners). In interpreting the great account of “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb” in Revelation 19:6-9, the Holy Spirit said, “The fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” The verse does not tell us the full meaning of the word “righteousness” or the term “the righteousness of saints,” but it does tell us that fine linen is a representation of that righteousness. With that interpretation in mind, and using our text as a picture, a parable, a representation, an illustration, let me draw out and explain some great Gospel truths.

When the brief account given in the text begins, the young man is clothed in “a linen cloth about his body.” The Greek word used in Mark 14:51 is the word *sindon*. One Bible commentary says, “The *sindon* was a fine linen cloth, indicating that this young man belonged to a family in good circumstances.” Later, the same commentary says, “It is said that the *sindon* takes its name from Sidon, where the particular kind of fine linen was manufactured of which the garment was made.” Bible students generally agree that “the young man” in question was the writer of the Gospel in which the text is

recorded, the young man John Mark himself. The information given of Mark in the New Testament suggests that he was a son in a wealthy Jerusalem family.

Even so, *man was created with an original righteousness that allowed him to fellowship with God. That righteousness was 'manufactured' in a special place and had a special quality and value. When man's story opens, he 'belonged to a family in good circumstances.'* What an understatement! Adam and Eve lived in a real paradise, and walked and talked openly with God. Genesis 3:8 suggests that God walked with Adam and Eve daily in the Garden of Eden in a special time of fellowship and communion. In that particular verse, a time is specified, "in the cool of the day." I am convinced that there is a great deal more in this phrase, in this verse, and in the entire third chapter of Genesis than meets the casual eye. Adam and Eve had apparently been conditioned to expect God to visit with them on a daily basis. Furthermore, there is nothing in the story to indicate that God was uncomfortable with them or that they were uncomfortable with God. They were "righteous" with an original righteousness which God had given them by creation. *But this time*, when they "heard the voice of the Lord God," they either detected displeasure in His voice or they attributed anger to Him because of their own guilt. Previously, there had been full, free, happy fellowship between them and God, but now, the Presence of God had been violated by their sin and the fellowship was broken. How did that happen?

In the text, "the young men laid hold on him; And he left the linen cloth, and fled away naked." Even so, *man abandoned his original righteousness under the heavy assault of an alien force.* Satan subtly (Genesis 3:1) and deceitfully tempted Adam and Eve and they succumbed to his subtle assault. Jesus later said that Satan "comes not, except to steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10), and here he exercised his stock in trade and accomplished his deadly purpose. Adam and Eve disobeyed the clear command of God (Genesis 2:17) in self-favor, and thus forfeited the original righteousness God had given them. Also, because Adam was the man appointed to represent the entire human race, he cast a moral vote that adversely affected us all.

"In Adam's fall,
we sinned all,"

an old rhyme says. Another rhyme shows each man's choice and responsibility in agreeing with Adam. It says,

"In Adam's sin,
we all joined in."

An enemy has put heavy hands on man and stripped him of the righteousness God provided for him at his creation.

The story also says, "And he left the linen cloth, and fled away from them naked." *Even so, as man remains away from God, outside of Christ, and turns toward other preoccupations and false trusts, he remains naked before God and exposed to destructive*

forces. The Apostle Paul looked at the human race and declared, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). Ecclesiastes 7:20 says, “There is not a just (righteous) man on earth who does good and does not sin.” Because of this, man is “naked... before the One with whom he has to do” (Hebrews 4:13). Worse, he is exposed to forces that are dead-bent on destroying him. Jesus said, “He who believes on the Son of God has everlasting life, but he who believes not the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God abides on him*” (John 3:36). Outside of Christ, every man is the enemy of God (Romans 5:10, Colossians 1:21) and is subject to the continuing enmity of Satan. *Outside of Christ*, the old adage is true of every man: he is “damned if he does, and damned if he doesn’t.” *There is no winning in sinning!* The person outside of Christ continues to receive the full hatred of Satan, but he also receives the full effects of the wrath of God against sin. Romans 1:18 says, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Surely the young man in the story hurried away from the scene of his loss to clothe himself with some other garment as quickly as possible. Because he would accept the first covering he could find, he undoubtedly clothed himself in a garment which was much inferior to the original “fine linen.” Even so, when man lives away from Christ, *he begins immediately to clothe himself in inferior garments which offer no real covering or protection in the real issues of life.* In Romans 10:2-3, the Bible says, “I bear them record, that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and *going about to establish their own righteousness*, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” The course of self-justification is the invariable course of sinners facing away from God (*fleeing* from Him to use the word of the illustration).

What did Adam and Eve do after they sinned? Genesis two closes with these words, “And they both were naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Where there was no sin, there was no shame. When Satan tempted them, he said, “God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). However, the outcome of their choice to agree with Satan was not what they expected. Genesis 3:7 says, “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; *and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.*”

Jesus gave a new twist to the same story in Matthew 22, which records His parable of the king who gave a wedding feast for his son. Of course, the king represents God, the son represents Jesus, the feast represents God’s provision of salvation, and the wedding garment that was given by the king to each guest represents the one requisite for receiving and enjoying God’s salvation, the covering of Christ’s righteousness. Let the fact of the king’s graciousness register in your mind. The host provided the wedding garment, with which each guest was clothed when he arrived. “And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment: And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here not having a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.” Jesus may have had clearly in His mind a passage from Zephaniah 1:7-8,

which says, “Hold your peace at the Presence of the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is at hand. For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, He has bidden His guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, that *I will punish . . . all such as are clothed with strange apparel.*”

There are hosts of people within the church and outside who are trusting in something other than Jesus Christ and His righteousness and are not wearing the Wedding Garment the King Provided for them! Though many of them are self-opinionated and vocal (even loud-mouthed) now, they will be “speechless” under the examination of the King! Incidentally, the word translated “speechless” in Jesus’ parable actually means “muzzled.” This is very vivid to me at this moment because I have just watched as my wife muzzled our Sheltie dog to brush him—because he tends to be open-mouthed and aggressive at such times! The outcome which Jesus declared in the “King and Son” parable is not pleasant to consider: “The king said to his servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matthew 22:13). Friends, it is serious, serious business to stand unclothed or wrongly clothed before a Holy God in the Day of His Examination!!! Though He loves you dearly and deeply, He will not relax the just demands of His holiness to accept a sinner who disregards the Perfect Covering of the Righteousness of His Son. On the other hand, consider the celebration of the best-dressed man in the world on that day: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10). “Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), but the Lord Jesus Christ has been made unto us righteousness (I Corinthians 1:30) and we are to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh” (Romans 13:14).

The “Good News” is that God has provided a perfect righteousness for our full recovery—and more. Here are the four basic facts about this righteousness: (1) It is *required of man*. *Dear friend, you must be perfect in order to get to heaven!* This is bad news only if you refuse to accept the perfect covering of God’s Perfect Righteousness, which He prepared for you through the Death of His Son. This is truly Good News to the sinner who will confess his sin and need before God and receive Christ’s righteousness by simple faith. (2) The required righteousness is *resident in Christ*. Jesus was/is righteous in His Person and in His Performance. He is righteous in Who He is and in what He has done. Both He and the accomplishment wrought through His Death are perfectly righteous. (3) That righteousness must be (and *may* be) *received by sinners*. I repeat; the only way to Heaven is to enter clothed with a garment of the King’s providing. The righteousness of Christ is a perfect garment woven on the looms of Heaven! And it can be *yours!!! You can be the best-dressed person in the universe!!!* (4) The righteousness of Christ is *reckoned to sinners only by faith*. The moment a confessing, repenting sinner trusts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, the perfect righteousness of God’s holy Son is credited to the account of that sinner in heaven and the righteousness of Christ covers him before God.

Dear friend, there is a “garment” of “fine linen” available to you, though your own “righteousnesses” (note the plural--the very best you can offer God in yourself) “are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). When you “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” by faith, you are regarded as righteous before God—*as righteous as Christ Himself!* And you are received by God as if you were Christ! How will you appear before God—dressed in your rags or in His righteousness? When you get there, you will want to be

“Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before His throne.”