

Communion

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[0 : 00] I invite you to turn again in God's Word to John's Gospel, chapter 19, and we read at verse 23. John 19, verse 23.

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. Let's not tear it, they said to one another.

Let's decide by lot who will get it. This happened that the Scripture might be fulfilled, which said, They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. So, this is what the soldiers did.

It's the stuff of detective stories to have a disputed will, to have friends, family, arguing about the terms of their parents' or their relatives' legacy. And we know very well that, especially in the usual detective story, it leads to arguments and envies, and of course, eventually to some murder or other. And what we have here is a disputed legacy.

legacy. But what a legacy. The legacy that the Lord Jesus left, His inheritance in material terms.

[2 : 01] Just a bundle of old clothes. That's all there was. And this evening, I'd like us to just have a look at the significance of that old bundle, those old clothes over which the soldiers cast lots.

I want to look at it in its historical aspect, and then for a longer time, its spiritual aspect.

The historical aspect, what it meant then, and what is some of the significance of the actual facts of the case. And then, because the Bible encourages us to do this, the Bible is full of language about nakedness and clothing, and about our being naked, or our being dressed in filthy rags, or our being dressed in precious, wonderful, beautiful garments. The Bible is full of that. And so, there is, without stretching a point, there is very definitely very real and encouraging and challenging spiritual teaching, too, in this incident of the clothes that the Lord Jesus left there by the cross. Firstly, then, the historical aspect of it. And this will be fairly brief, because I just want to mention three points that come out very clearly from the fact that Jesus' clothes were taken off Him and were there gambled over by the Roman soldiers. And the first of these is a very obvious point, and it is the accuracy of Scripture. We sang just five minutes ago from Psalm 22. We sang in the most amazing detail the very thing that happened there a thousand years later at Calvary. Now, to what extent things that are mentioned in Psalm 22 referred specifically to David and to experiences of David, I don't know.

Some of it very clearly did have reference to David. But it does seem that in this particular Psalm, that is so much that far transcends David, they pierced my hands and feet, they gambled over my clothing, they gave me vinegar to drink. And so, you and I are encouraged yet again, as we see just these old clothes lying there. We're encouraged to thank God for His inspired, infallible, unmistakable, and unmistakable Word that has come down through the centuries to us, and we can trust what the Scriptures say.

This passage that we read here does make this point very forcefully, because at the end of the passage, verses 36 and 37, we're reminded of the same thing. These things happen so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. Not one of His bones will be broken. And again, they will look on the one they have pierced.

[5 : 46] So, these clothes, the only legacy that our Lord left in material terms, these clothes underlying for us, the ones that are underlined for us, so wonderfully, the accuracy and the trustworthiness of the Word of God. But there's another thing that comes out through this scene around the cross, and that is the poverty of the Lord Jesus Christ, His utter poverty.

The Lord Jesus, you remember, on one occasion had commended John the Baptist, his forerunner, because He said, John is not like those who live in King's palaces and are dressed in fine clothing.

We know that's true. He was dressed in the roughest of garments, and he ate the humblest of food, and he lived away there in the desert. So that John the Baptist, he knew what poverty was about. Not that he came from a poor family, because his father was a priest, and we assume that as a family they lived perfectly well with the provision made for them.

But John had accepted poverty for the sake of the kingdom of God. But if that's true of John the Baptist, and Jesus makes a point, how much more true it is of our Lord and Savior. When they asked him whether they should pay tribute to Caesar or not, you remember how he had to ask someone for a coin.

[7 : 32] He had no money on them. He wasn't someone who had personal possessions. As he said himself, the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

And this is so striking, isn't it? Because we're talking about the one who, though we see him in weakness and in humiliation and in shame on the cross of Calvary, the one who is the Creator God, the blessed second person of the Trinity through whom God the Father made the worlds. And we read amazing words like those in the book of Job where God speaks, and therefore the one hanging there on the cross and his nakedness whose clothes are lying there being gambled over on the ground. Here are his words to Job, where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions?

Surely you know. Who stretched a measuring line across it while the morning stars sang together, and all the angels shouted for joy. I was there. I was the sovereign Lord when all that happened. Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment, and wrapped it in thick darkness, and so on. Or again in the verses that we often sing in Psalm 50, where God and the words of the Lord God are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he says, I've no need of a bull from your stall, or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.

I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. The sovereign Lord, creator, owner, provider of all things, and yet here he is in the person of his Son, destitute, poverty-stricken, put to shame on the cross of Calvary. Friends, you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. And these clothes gambled over at the foot of the cross, they are a silent, yet eloquent testimony to the poverty of Jesus Christ for you, for me. So, again in the historical context, they speak of the accuracy and trustworthiness of Scripture, they speak of the poverty of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they speak also surely of the depravity of man. The depravity of man. Now, these soldiers, these Roman soldiers, they weren't the worst. Jesus himself says that. Remember what he said to Pilate? He who handed him over, handed me over to you, he is the greater sin. And he could look back to Judas' betrayal, and then particularly the envy and the hatred and the determination to put an end to the Messiah of the religious leaders of the day. They indeed were more blameworthy in the sight of God than these Roman soldiers. But still, as you look at what's happening and as you listen to what's being said, what a commentary on the degradation and the callousness of these men as the naked sufferer agonizes. What's he hearing? Well, he's hearing the coarse laughter of the Roman soldiers.

[11 : 57] He's hearing the clink of the dice, the exceeding sinfulness of sin. But of course, he knew it in a much deeper sense, not just seeing it personified in these people all around him, but as the weight of his people's sin was laid upon his own soul and as he agonized, abandoned by the Father in those three hours of darkness on the cross. And so, these garments of the Lord Jesus in their historical context, they speak of the accuracy and trustworthiness of Scripture, of the poverty of the Lord Jesus that he accepted for us and of the depravity of our human nature. But I want from there to go on and look at what I'd call the spiritual context. There is a deeper meaning to much of what these clothes speak about historically. As we look at Calvary in this particular context, we see the Lord Jesus naked on the cross, the cross, exposed to the gaze of men all around him, most of them, men who hated him, men who gloated over what was in the cross, and they were in the cross, and they were in the cross. And we see the shame of it all, that he, the Lord of glory, indeed any human being made in the image of God, should be exposed in such a way.

Why? Why shame? We think back to the Garden of Eden when God created our first parents, and they were there, we're told, naked, and they knew no shame in the presence of one another and in

the presence of God. But then we know the story. We know our sin entered in. We know the rebellion. And we know how the whole of our human nature was twisted, and we no longer were what we were meant to be, corrupted, twisted, depraved in our mental faculties, in our physical being, in our emotional makeup, in our sexual makeup, in all of these areas, twisted and under the dominion of sin. And of course, there is going to be shame in the sight of a holy God. God. And there in Genesis in the Garden, we see how there were two ways of trying to remedy this. There's first of all the wrong way, man's way. Adam and Eve, aware that they're naked, what do they do? Well, they scabble around, and they find some fig leaves, and they sew them together, and they cover their nakedness and their shame. But thank God, there is the right way, God's way. And we read of how the Lord God made garments from coats of skin, and He clothed His sinful creatures, and He clothed His sinful creatures, and He clothed His sinful creatures, and He clothed His sinful creatures.

And as we reflect on all of this, we do indeed remember, I'm sure, that this whole topic of nakedness, and of clothing, runs right through the Bible. But it's used to speak not of the outward, outward, sometimes it is the outward, but most of all of inner attitudes, and of spiritual realities. [15:56] You remember perhaps a verse from one of the older hymns where the writer says, Oh, how can I, whose native sphere is dark, whose mind is dim, upon my naked spirit bear the uncreated beam?

We cannot in our nakedness, in our sinful nakedness, spiritually speaking, we cannot stand before the holiness of Almighty God. And so, let's have a look at what I would call the wrong use of clothing, and the right use of clothing, considered always from the material along to the spiritual. Again and again, you find that clothes can be used in Scripture for very, very wrong and sinful reasons. Listen to what Isaiah says about the wealthy women of his day, who were turned away from the worship of the covenant God of Israel, and were seeking their own ends, and their own pleasure, and their own status in the society of Judah of that day. And Isaiah comes with a message of judgment, and it's clothed in the whole language of clothing. In that day, Isaiah chapter 3, verse 18, In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery, the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls. Instead of fragrance, there will be a stench instead of a sash, a rope, instead of well-dressed hair, baldness, instead of fine clothing, sackcloth, instead of beauty, branding. And the apostle Peter, in more sober language, no doubt, but he brings the same idea to us when he gives advice to Christian women in his own day, 1 Peter 3.3, where he says to them, Your beauty should not come from outward adornment such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight." And again, you can think of the rich man in the story of Lazarus and this rich man, how he was dressed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. Now, of course, we're not hearing here in the Bible an intrinsic condemnation of fine clothes or of outward beauty, not in the slightest. You think, for example, of the magnificence of the clothes of the high priest.

God is a God who created beauty, and beauty in its right place, and clothing used aright, the finest of clothing, can bring glory to God as well as be pleasant to us. And again, and we'll be singing these verses later on in the service, you have the great description of the bride in Psalm 45 as she enters in all our finery into the presence of the bridegroom. Or again, you think of the prodigal son arriving in his rags, and the father running out to embrace him and saying, Come on, come on, let's look for the finest robe that there is in the house and put it on him, and a gold ring on his finger, and fine sandals on his feet. So, it's not that these women were being condemned simply because they wore these things, but it was rather because they were expressive of the idea that something of ours can make us acceptable to Almighty God. That if we have all these things, be it clothing, fine clothing, be it a high salary, be it a magnificent house, be it charitable deeds, be it many a thing that we think we can do.