

January 2, 2011
Christmas 2

“Wrapped in the Righteousness of Jesus”

ISAIAH 61:10-62:1-3

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. ^{62:1} For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. ² The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. ³ You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

You have heard it said "Clothes make the man or the woman."

The fashion industry certainly wants you to believe if you have the right clothes you will be more successful, more respected by people and more confident in how you live your life. The right clothes are certainly important for certain job interviews. Apply for a job at a local bank, and don't expect to get hired if you come in baggy pants, sandals and a dirty, well worn T-shirt.

The words just read to you from the prophet Isaiah tell us about being dressed right to be acceptable to our God. We rejoice greatly in our God because he has clothed us with the garments of salvation and arrayed us in a robe of righteousness. He has not left us alone to try and clothe and cover ourselves.

To illustrate how Jesus covers us with his righteousness, I want to share with you a picture that is very special to us. We gave it to Susan's dad before he passed away, because he always talked about being covered with Jesus' righteousness. In this picture we see ourselves covered with our sins and our own unrighteousness. Jesus then covers us with his righteousness so a perfect and holy heavenly Father can accept us, just as our heavenly Father accepted Jesus' perfect life when he lived here on this earth.

Here we are at the beginning of a New Year. We don't know what the future will bring, but we do know who holds the future, and we know that every day will be special to us when we realize how beautifully we are dressed in Jesus' righteousness.

This is a gift to wear given to us by God's grace

This beautiful robe of Jesus' righteousness is not something that we earn or even deserve. It is given to us as a gift by God's grace. Listen again to these words. "I delight greatly in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." It says, "He has clothed me with

the garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness. I like what one pastor said in a sermon on this verse: "God has been in the clothing business since he first clothed Adam and Eve in the garden." Remember how Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness and sin before God. They foolishly thought they could cover themselves with fig leaves they sewed together. God had mercy on them and covered them. It says in Genesis 3, "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam his wife and clothed them." Some of the animals God created were sacrificed so Adam and Eve could be covered with their skin. God's plan was to have his Son sacrifice his life for us and cover people who stand ashamed and guilty before him in their sin. Our God is in the clothing business, the business of covering people with a righteousness they can never find in themselves. He covers them with the righteousness of his Son that he freely provides.

Isaiah joins together with Christians of every age saying, "I delight greatly in my God." To emphasize this tremendous joy that is ours, the Hebrew language takes a word for joy and doubles it up with two different forms. Literally we could translate this as "rejoicing with rejoicing." It also says, "My soul rejoices in my God." The word for "rejoice" is the word "gil" and it has the thought of going around in circles, or dancing around for joy. When people are happy, really happy, they dance around for joy. Every day in this New Year we can wake up and dance around for joy, sing in the shower, praise the Lord, and thank him because he has dressed us in this beautiful robe of Jesus' righteousness. As we sang in the hymn before the sermon: "Jesus your blood and righteousness. My beauty are, my glorious dress. Mid flaming worlds in these arrayed. With joy shall I lift up my head." The whole world can go up in flames this coming year, and we can lift our voices and sing about being dressed in Jesus' righteousness.

Think of where you would be today if the Holy Spirit had not opened up your eyes to see these beautiful garments of salvation and beautiful robe of righteousness Jesus has provided for you. You would still be living in your natural, default position. In this natural default position that you inherited from your parents you foolishly think that your righteousness, your good life, your kind deeds and your good heart can make you acceptable to your God. Your natural human heart that is dead in sin does not comprehend that your righteousness is always dirty with sin and unacceptable to a pure and holy God. This same prophet Isaiah says in chapter 64, "How then can we be saved? All of us have become like on who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like wind our sins sweep us away."

This past week I was reading from John for my personal devotions. In John 5 Jesus says of the religious leaders who were questioning him: "How can you believe in me if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes only from God?" We are living in world where people accept praise from each for their good efforts, but they never realize that their best efforts at being religious and good are never good enough for God. In the early 1970's there was a book called "The Greening of America." It pointed to the value of the hippie moment with its emphasis on peace and love, how this movement would save America. The ink was hardly dry on the pages, when this so called period of enlightenment sunk into a morass of immorality and drugs. The narcissism and hubris of that age has been surpassed by those in our current age who will fawn all over each other and go gaga over each other and praise each for being such good people even though they may be steeped in immorality. As Jesus said, they accept praise from one another but do not obtain the praise that comes from God.

Notice how Isaiah brings in the picture of bridegroom dressed beautifully for his bride, and the bride dressed beautifully for her husband. "As a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." See the bridegroom of ancient times with a turban on his head, and a bride beautifully dressed with jewels. Have you been to a wedding recently? What did the bride wear? What did the groom wear? What would you think of a bride who would try and sew her own wedding dress, using dirty old rags that she has saved up over the years? What if she had friends around her and even a mom who said that this dress of dirty rags was the most beautiful dress she has ever seen?" What if music plays "Here Comes the Bride" and the crowd applauds this bride in her dress made of dirty rags? We are living in a world full of people who think they can make themselves loved by God by their acts of kindness and love which always fall short of God's glory and are marred by sin. They purposely surround themselves with other people who share their foolishness and hopelessness.

So we come to Jesus this morning as we start a new year. God the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to see the truth about yourself. I have nothing to offer God that could ever make him love me. All I can do is confess with Paul in Romans 3, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless." Now we kneel before Jesus. Tears come down our cheeks as we confess, "Forgive me for my sins. Please help me. I have no hope. I am lost." Jesus steps behind us and wraps us in his righteousness. We say with Paul, "That I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

This is a gift our God wants for all

Our God does not want this righteousness limited to just a handful of people. He wants it for all people throughout the world. Isaiah pictures this righteousness we have in Jesus as grass sprouting from seed and springing up all over the world. "For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before the nations." Think of how the winter rains are turning the hills green. He pictures this righteousness as a torch held high in the air for all nations to see. "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch."

God's plan is to use people like you and me to share this righteousness with people who still think they can save themselves with their dirty rags of unrighteousness. "The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God." Picture your life this coming year as a precious crown, or royal diadem in the hand of your God, sparkling with the righteousness you have in Christ. The Lord wants the world to see what you have in Jesus and believe that this is also for them.

In Romans 10 the Apostle Paul writes, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." How will people discover this righteousness that Jesus has for them? They do not have to climb some high mountain or go into some deep depth? This righteousness is offered here in God's Word, the Holy Bible, as a free gift.

Paul asks the important question in Romans 10, "And how can they hear without someone preaching to them." And then he quotes from Isaiah where it says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news?" Look at your feet this morning. How beautiful they are because they carry the good news of Jesus. You have in your hands and in your heart the robe of Jesus' righteousness to offer people in this coming year. The Lord has already planned this coming year of your life in such a way that you will have opportunities to let people know what Jesus has to offer them.

I can think of no better way to end this sermon this morning than repeating once again these words from Isaiah 61: "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." Amen.