

Sermon Title: Choosing the Right Clothes, April 23, 2011 (Scripture is from ESV)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 59:6, Isaiah 64:6, Isaiah 61:10

Introduction

Good evening everyone. It's been a couple months since the last time I preached, and quite a lot has happened since then. If you haven't noticed, I now have a lovely fiancé and a much better wardrobe. Hallelujah!

Clothes were always a source of trauma for me in the past because I am slightly colorblind and I have no idea how to match colors. I also don't seem to understand the difference between a nice tie and a piece of rope, or nice shoes and shoes that shouldn't be worn in public. I've dressed so poorly that even the kids at my children's home have shaken their heads at me and told me to change before going out in public with them. That's pretty bad.

But thankfully, my fiancé Sky has great taste in clothes and a lot of patience with me. I never realized just how important clothes are. And I really mean that. The fashion world has often been written off as materialistic and filled with lust, but the truth is that God was the true creator of fashion. God made the first clothes for Adam and Eve. God was very clear and detailed about the clothes of the priests and the high priest. Jesus Himself wore such a nice linen garment that the soldiers divided up His clothes before they crucified Him. And whenever prophets in the Bible speak of visions of God they almost always describe what God or Jesus is wearing, and it is always pure and awesome, fitting for the king of kings. Clothes are very important to God.

Clothes usually symbolize a person's identity. Joseph had the coat of many colors and knew he was favored. The priest has his priestly garments. The king has his kingly garments. The prisoner has his prison garments. The soldier has his armor. The leper or beggar has his rags. What you are wearing tends to represent what type of person you are.

So my question for you all tonight is: What type of clothes are you wearing? More specifically, what clothes are you wearing in the spiritual realm?

The title of my message for tonight's joint prayer meeting is, "Choosing the Right Clothes." Please open your Bibles to Isaiah 59. But before we read the Scripture, let me say a prayer for us.

Pray

Let's begin with Isaiah 59:6. In this chapter Isaiah is prophesying a rebuke to the people for how their sins have separated them from God.

Isaiah 59:6 – Their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make. Their works are works of iniquity, and deeds of violence are in their hands.

I want you to highlight the line, "Men will not cover themselves with what they make." I think the New King James Version says it even better...

Isaiah 59:6 (NKJV) – Their webs will not become garments, *nor will they cover themselves with their works.*

In other words, our works here on earth won't be able to cover us when we are in front of God. I am going to hammer this point home tonight. Just listen.

Turn a few pages to Isaiah 64, verse 6...

Isaiah 64:6 – We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. I think you have all heard that verse before, but I want it to sink in tonight. So many of us try and justify ourselves before God and before men by our works. We try and clothe ourselves with our works. If we are doing well, then we walk like we are clothed like kings. But when we are struggling or have fallen into sin, we walk with our heads down like we are clothed in rags like lepers. But the truth is, all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. **ALL OUR WORKS** are like a polluted garment before God. **The salvations as a result of your evangelism, the healings as a result of your prayers, the love, time and effort serving the poor and oppressed... none of that is clothing that will justify your standing before God.** In fact, if those are the clothes you are wearing, God considers you filthy.

I believe the reason God is having me share this word tonight is because it relates both to Korea and to our generation. The Korean people have worked so diligently and sacrificially since the Korean war to make the nation what it is today. But sadly, despite being one of the top economies in the world, people are still striving and making their work their identity. Kids are studying all day and late into the night. Adults are also working late into the night. There is little rest in this nation because there always seems to be work to do. There are always comparisons being made: which student is better in class, which worker puts in more hours, which company is doing better, and even which countries are ahead of us economically. So there is a continual push and pressure to get better and better. Sadly depression and suicide has claimed many who have fallen behind.

And while our generation may lack the amazing work ethic of the Koreans around us, there is still a natural inclination within us to identify ourselves by our works. And for most of our generation, if we are not doing something we consider extraordinary, then we feel insecure and even worthless. **We are the fast food generation and tend to expect quick results. So if we aren't achieving our dreams or making a huge impact, we tend to feel like we are disappointments.** We are encouraged to dream big, but when we don't see much happening in the present we tend to throw away the dreams and perhaps even feel like we failed them. But along with this mindset, if we end up succeeding and achieving our dreams our self worth explodes and a feeling of self-righteousness can step in. The thoughts, "Now I'm really being used by God, now I've really arrived, God really loves me!" can seep in. But God addresses this mindset in His letter to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3...

Revelation 3:17-18 – For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

In this letter Jesus speaks of the works of this church, and then calls them naked and shameful before Him. Obviously this church is unaware of their lack of clothes, their nakedness, in the spiritual realm.

Is it okay if I hammer home the importance of our spiritual garments? Turn with me to Matthew 22. This is the parable of the wedding feast. The king has gathered all the people and filled his wedding hall. We know that this is a parable speaking of God's kingdom.

Matthew 22:11-14 – But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are called, but few are chosen.

Whew! Are you convinced yet that clothes matter to God? Here God calls the guy, “Friend” and then has the guy tied up and cast out because he wasn't wearing wedding clothes. No mercy!

So if clothes matter so much to God, then what is He wanting us to wear? What can we do to get the wedding garments that will allow us to be in God's kingdom? What is God calling us to be clothed with?

The answer is simple: God's grace. **God calls us to be clothed in His grace.** His grace is the wedding garment we are to wear in heaven. No matter how great the works we do here on earth, before God's majesty they are but filthy rags. We can only enter His presence if we are clothed in the garments of grace purchased by Jesus' blood on the Cross.

Adam and Eve tried to clothe themselves with fig leaves after they sinned. As you all likely know, the fig tree symbolizes our quiet time with God. It was under the fig tree that the Pharisees and students of God's Word would study. But Adam and Eve knew they were still naked despite their fig leaves. They knew they still couldn't be in His presence. No acts, no matter how “righteous” they may seem, can clothe us before God.

So what do we do? How do we clothe ourselves apart from our works? How do we learn to be clothed in God's grace? Are you ready for the answer? Here is the main point of this message... **“Relax and rest before Him.”** Relax and rest before Him!!!

Isaiah 30:15 – In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

Adam and Eve couldn't clothe themselves with their fig leaves. Instead we read that God made garments for them and clothed them Himself. Adam and Eve did nothing to clothe themselves before God. God took care of them.

Leviticus 8 is one of my favorite chapters in the Bible. It is the chapter of the ordination of the first high priest, Aaron, and his sons. Do you know how Aaron was ordained as the great high priest over Israel? If you read Leviticus 8 the steps go like this... Aaron is brought forward by Moses and Moses washes him with water and then clothes him with his garments. Aaron just stands there, naked, as his brother Moses washes him and then clothes him. Next Moses takes anointing oil and pours it over Aaron. Aaron isn't allowed to do anything but stand there. Next Moses slaughters a bull as an offering on behalf of Aaron and anoints

Aaron with the blood from the offering. Aaron continues to just stand there. This process of making offerings on behalf of Aaron and anointing Aaron continues. And Aaron continues to stand there. Once Moses is finally done, his instructions to Aaron are to stay inside the tent of meeting for seven days and not do anything but eat and enjoy the meat from the offerings made on his behalf. If Aaron leaves the tent he will die. So he must just stay in there and not do any work for seven days, then he can be considered worthy to serve the people.

What do you think God was trying to hammer home through this process? “Aaron, you are high priest not because you have done anything to merit the position, you are only high priest because of my grace. I washed you. I clothed you. I anointed you. I set you apart. **And if for a moment you think it was because of your works, then you’re going to die.** You got it?”

Are these warnings penetrating your church? If for a moment you think because of your works your identity is secure before God, then you are in danger of death. You have completely missed how we receive true salvation. Let me read Isaiah 30:15 again...

Isaiah 30:15 – In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

Often we hear the commands, “Rest before the Lord” and we try and slow down for a moment and rest. But what usually happens is after a few moments we become restless and begin thinking of all that we could be doing. And so we stop resting and get busy again. Now I am not saying doing works and being active for God is bad, not in the least bit, but what I am calling out is the heart behind the works. Are we stressed? Are we burdened? Do we feel if we fail to follow through that something is going to fall apart?

I don’t know if you have realized this or not, but God repeatedly *commands* us not to worry (Matthew 6:25) and not to be anxious about anything (Philippians 4:6). God commands us to come to Him and find rest (Matthew 11:28). **Did you realize any time you experience stress or feel burdened that you are not walking in faith?** Stress, anxiety, and burdens go along directly with fear and doubt. Those are all in complete opposition of faith. If we are truly walking in God’s peace and grace, then the word “urgent” will no longer dominate our lives. We will do God’s work in obedience, yes, but no longer will we ever feel a burden that it is all on our shoulders or that if we mess up God won’t help us out.

Bill Johnson from Bethel Church has become a big influence for many of us in this room. I believe Bill Johnson understands the power of resting and relaxing before God. In fact, he sounds like one of the most relaxed people out there. His tone and his pace are slow and gentle. I have heard people say that he was a lot more fiery years ago but isn’t that way so much anymore. And obviously the church and his ministry are thriving much more now than it was years ago. Once again, I’m not saying fire and passion are bad, but I can’t deny that some of the most mature and influential Christian leaders today are also some of the most relaxed people out there.

I met Rolland Baker a few months ago and he was so relaxed and chill, despite so much happening around him. I met his wife Heidi Baker a few years earlier while she was going through a tough time in her life. I overheard her share with a close friend that she felt God telling her to go away to her cabin in the mountain for a couple weeks and just rest in His presence. So basically during one of the most trying times in her life God was calling her to stop everything and just be with Him. In our “Go go go” mindset, that seems ludicrous.

Shouldn't she be praying hard and asking for prayer from others and doing everything she can to fix and heal all her problems? And yet how dumb is comparing all that to just being with God and trusting in Him? God is good, isn't He? And hasn't He been the source of everything good in her life up to that point? So why should she suddenly try and take things in her own hands rather than trust in Him?

Last month I attended a healing conference led by Randy Clark. Randy Clark has been in the healing ministry for a few decades now and has amazing testimonies of wild healings that have happened through his ministry. He is well known and has influenced many people in the healing ministry today. During the conference people were getting healed left and right as he would teach and as he would call out words of knowledge. He made it look easy. But the ironic thing was that his translator came down with a bad cold during the conference. While she would translate she would cough, sneeze, and hock up phlegm and have to turn around and spit it in a cup. She wasn't trying to be gross, she was just really, really sick. And there she was, standing right next to and translating for one of the greatest healing ministers in the world today. And he wasn't the least bit flustered by her. I would watch him pray for her on the side throughout the conference, but he never showed any insecurity at her not being healed. He would just exclaim to us, "I don't do the healing, God does the healing. The results are in His hands." Randy knew that God is good, so he knew he didn't have to beg God or act insecure about anything. He would just pray and leave the results to the Lord. Randy was clearly relaxed in the Lord and moving in His grace. I know if you could see into the spiritual realm you would see the garments of grace fitting securely around him.

So what about people in the Bible? Many people point to the life of Paul as the model of excellence for all Christians; that we must be just like Paul and go city to city and never stop working and preaching the Gospel. We must always be in, "Go go go" mode just like Paul was. But you know when Paul did some of his most memorable work? **When he was in prison.** Paul wrote a number of his letters while he was in prison and couldn't go anywhere. The same is for the apostle John. He wrote the book of Revelation while he was in prison. In the places where John and Paul may have felt they could do nothing for God, they actually composed the works that would impact every generation until the return of God. (May it never take having to be put in prison for us to be fully useful for God.^^)

And yet the works aren't even that important to God. Hebrews chapter 11 highlights some of the greatest men and women of faith in the Bible. The first person listed was Abel. Abel's amazing resume included, "Offered an acceptable sacrifice to God." And that is it. I doubt he would be invited to some, "Voice of the Apostles" conference for that, and yet in God's eyes Abel was one of the greatest to ever live. And how about the next amazing man of God?

Hebrews 11:5 – By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

All we read about Enoch in the book of Genesis was that he walked with God and then God took him up to heaven. His works apparently weren't important enough to God to be listed. What was truly important to God was that Enoch walked with Him, and that made Enoch one of the greatest to ever live. Enoch was clearly secure with God.

Can you believe relaxing with God pleases Him?

My favorite example of all is Abraham. Father Abraham. He is the man who unknowingly became the father of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. All three major religions go through him. This man impacted the future of mankind more than anyone outside of Jesus and Adam. And what did the great man of faith Abraham do...?

First, Abraham obeyed God by leaving his home country. But actually Abraham didn't fully obey. If you study the Scripture you will see Abraham brought his father and cousin with him when he wasn't supposed to. His father passed away along the trip and God had to push him along (Acts 7:4). And then what did Abraham do? He wandered around for a while and then he eventually had Ishmael and later Isaac. Abraham's greatest act of faith is usually considered to be when he obeyed God's command to go sacrifice his son Isaac. That definitely required an amazing measure of faith and obedience, but when you look at how long Abraham lived, in total that isn't a super long list of amazing experiences. He left his home country. He eventually had Isaac. He was willing to obey God and sacrifice Isaac. Quite a life!

But I believe Abraham's greatest acts of faith were in the stories between the chapters of him in the book of Genesis. In the book of Genesis, God appears to Abraham six times. The first time God appears he speaks prophecy and calling over Abraham. The following five times God simply restates what He originally told Abraham, encouraging him to continue on in faith. Years and even decades are in between each visitation. Abraham lives for over 100 years before he finally has his son of the promise, Isaac. Abraham had been promised AMAZING things, but after 100 years all he has to show of it is one son. But Abraham never showed doubt. He was secure in who God is. Those wild prophecies that he received from God eventually came true. Abraham ended up impacting the world more than anyone outside of Jesus and Adam. But Abraham could never see that during his life, outside of having Isaac.

For many of us we would be expecting so much more. We have huge dreams! We want to see them come to fruition! We want to walk in the faith of the apostles and the mighty prophets of old. We want to do amazing things!

But God isn't so interested in the amazing things, especially if He isn't in them. Jesus' long prayer to God in the Gospel of John before He was crucified was a prayer for all believers to be one with God and each other. Jesus never made a mention of us doing amazing works. His prayer instead was all about relationship with God and each other. That was His concern. Our impact on the world will come out of relationship with Him. Abraham saw only Isaac during his lifetime, but he drastically impacted the history of the world. Many others do amazing works, but the fruit does not last. The reason for this is that the acts aren't done out of a relationship with God. God isn't interested in our works, He is interested in a relationship. It is out of relationship that the works are to come.

In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus gives a strong warning about how we must know the will of the Father...

Matthew 7:21-23 – Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

Jesus says many, I repeat many, will prophesy and drive out demons and do great miracles and think they are known by God, but God will reject them and say He never knew them. They will be standing before God thinking their righteous acts justify their standing before Him, but God will only see filthy rags. Their acts did not come out of relationship with God. They did not know the true will of the Father.

How can you say you are doing the will of God if you do not have a relationship with Him? And how can you say you have a relationship with Him if you don't know how to relax in His presence?

Many of you know that there is a calling over my life that includes North Korea. I have a great heart for North Korea, especially the children. God has released many prophetic words to me about the nation and many dreams to others about what is to come for me and for the nation. I long to go into the nation and rescue the orphans and the poor, begging children. I long to shelter them, clothe them, feed them, and bring healing to their hearts. There is a desire to go in as soon as possible.

I have met many other people with huge hearts for North Korea. Most of them are super excited and want to get involved in any way possible as soon as possible. They will ask me excitedly, "So when North Korea opens up, you're going to go in right away, right?" And I will surprise them with this reply: "No. No way will I ever go into North Korea. Not unless God opens the door and tells me to go." I know just how dark North Korea is. I know just how difficult, in fact impossible, serving there would be without God's blessing. And I know just because North Korea may open up doesn't mean that God is telling me to go in. I must wait on Him. He is the one who will open the door. He is the one who will release the favor. He is the one who will heal the nation. He is the one who will carry all that weight. If I ever try and go ahead outside His will, I will be crushed by the burden.

Is it God's will for North Korea to be saved? Of course! Then shouldn't we go in as soon as possible? No way. Was it God's will for the Israelites to go into the Promised Land? Of course! So then shouldn't they just run ahead and go for it? No way. They knew if they ran ahead of God's Spirit that they would be destroyed, and that even happened to a group of them (Numbers 14:39-46).

Is it God's will for you to achieve the dreams He has given you? Of course! So then should you try and do everything in your own power to achieve your dreams? **No.** Instead, God is calling you to walk with Him and learn how to fully rest in His presence. **God is calling us to repent of our striving, of us allowing ourselves to be clothed by our works rather than by His grace and His presence.** He is calling us to be still and let Him clothe us with His grace. Our identity is secure in Him.

Isaiah 61:10a – I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

Lead prayer of repentance for striving

*There is a joy and a peace in knowing you are fully accepted and fully covered by God's grace... declare this joy and peace over Korea..."