

THE PERFECTION OF BEAUTY

A SERMON

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“And white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the same of your nakedness does not appear.” Revelation 3:18

This white raiment is a figure and form of speech, denoting everything which the Christian has in Christ Jesus. It denotes his sanctification, in contrast to his state by nature, and hence it is that those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb are represented as white. It also denotes his justification before God by the pure righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It also denotes his victory; it is a kind of robe of victory. It also denotes his citizenship; it is a kind of robe of freedom; and it also denotes the superiority of his standing, as when it is called the best robe therefore this white raiment, taken in the scriptural and proper sense of word, will mean, in a word, everything that the Christian has in Jesus Christ, by which he is approved of God, by which he is accepted of God, by which he is accepted of God, and by which he shall forever enjoy the presence of God. We shall therefore notice our text this morning under two main points. Here is, first, *the perfection we have in Christ*, for this certainly is the subject intended in our text; and then, secondly, here is *the essential importance of our abiding by that perfection that is in Christ*. “White raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear.”

First, then, here is *the perfection we have in Christ Jesus*, a subject that at all times, for myself, I must confess I enter upon with a very great deal of pleasure; for while I see there are precepts, and excellent things and rules given for us to walk by and act by, and for us to regulate our practices by, yet on the other hand we all of us, more or less, have to lament, in these matters our shortcomings; we all of us have, more or less, to lament as says the Apostle James, that in many things we all offend. There are so many faults, and in so many respects it is true that the things the Christian would not he does, and the things that he would he does not; there are so many feelings, that he hardly know sometimes, when he looks within and without, what to make of himself. But then, when he is enabled to look away from all these, and to look to the delightful truth, “You are complete in Him,” that is a remedy for it all. It is a sweet exercise of mind, when we can meet the enemy with that perfection that is in Christ Jesus. If the enemy tells me that I am a poor, unholy creature, and tells me this in order to sink me into despair, then my reply is, But then Jesus Christ is holy, and he is my sanctification. I am not my own sanctification; Christ is my sanctification; and therefore, if I were my own sanctification, I might despair; but Jesus Christ is my

sanctification; it is his blood that cleanses from all sin; if I were my own justification, then indeed I might despair; but Jesus Christ is my justification, and he being my justification, I am free thereby from condemnation. And Satan may point out many faults in my life, but then I am not my own life; Jesus Christ is my life, and

“His life was pure, without a spot,
in all his nature clean.”

And again, Satan might say, Well, you have not that entire and universal dominion over sin that you ought to have. Well, but if I have not, Jesus Christ has; he is my victory; I am not my own victory: “This is our victory, even our faith. Thanks be to God that gives us the victory.” If we were our own sanctification, our own justification, and our own life, and our own salvation, and our own victory, then we should not need to buy, without money and without price, white raiment of the blest Redeemer; we should not need that redemption that is in him. So that I say at all times I seem to be quite at home in this beautiful subject of completeness in Jesus Christ. Oh, the more we live here the higher thoughts we shall have of our God; the more we live here, the more boldly we shall face a dying hour; and the more we live here, the less we shall think of the world that is, and more of that world which is yet to come. And I may, before I enter upon this subject of perfection, I may just remind you of a very sweet privilege, among others belonging to those who are brought to know their need of this perfection that is in Christ, and that they can be approved of God, and accepted of God, nowhere but in Christ; that one of your privileges is this, to judge all things, while no man can judge you. You will perceive that the world will judge of our religion by our personal character. If they see any wrong about you, they will judge your religion by that; they will look at you after the flesh, and just judge your religion by what you are after the flesh. Now, there is no man without his faults; everyone has his faults; and if I were to judge any man, I care not to what sect he belongs, if I were to judge any man’s religion by what he is after the flesh, I should be driven to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a perfect religion in existence, because there is no such thing as a perfect man. They judge us after the flesh, but they know nothing of that Scripture, the truth of which every child of God knows, that “the heart knows its own bitterness.” Ah, there is a bitterness we experience under the hidings of the Lord’s face; there is a down casting and a mourning in the Lord’s absence that they know nothing of, and a stranger does not intermeddle with. Thus, you see, that while they judge us by what we are, we judge our religion by what *Christ* is. What a difference! They judge a poor, feeble creature like me, and judge of my religion by what I am; that’s the way they judge. But then, that is not the way for us to judge; we must take Jesus Christ, and judge of our religion by what he is, and then we shall not say, as the world says, that our religion is a poor thing; we shall not then say that we have a poor life to live, and a dim light in which to see, and a poor, faulty righteousness to wear, and that there is something very defective. Oh, no. Here, then, is one of the privileges, that the spiritual man judges all things, yet he himself is judged, that is, not rightly judged, of any man. We see where the world errs, then, by judging us after the flesh. Well, let them go on; never mind; if the Lord has opened our eyes, and brought us to receive that perfection that is in Christ, let us cleave to that, let us abide by that, for if we wish good to our fellow-creatures, we can be the means of ministering that good to them only by abiding by that which is good. If I leave that which is good, how am I to minister good to others? If I myself leave that which is good, give up that which is good, I have no good to minister; whereas, if I abide by the perfection that is in Christ, and insist upon that work of the Holy Spirit that shows a sinner his need of this, and shows a sinner the adaptation of this, and the

all-sufficiency of this, then I have some good to minister; and hence “a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things.” And the man who is taught of God receives this precious treasure of completeness that is in Christ; he receives it into his heart; “Christ in you the hope of glory.” Here, then, we may love God, have access to God, freely confess all our faults to God, fall down with the elders you read of before the throne, and with a united and loud voice ascribe salvation to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever.

But let us come to definitions. I have said that this white raiment indicates the perfection we have in Christ. But then the preceding clause, that speaks of gold tried in the fire, speaks of buying it; that is obtaining it. I last Sunday morning preached that sermon with some degree of confusion of mind. I could not get on; I felt dead, and I thought the sermon was not worth printing. Well, on Friday afternoon, I thought, I will just take up the sermon again, I will read it through; and I did, and I read it with a heart full of gratitude to God that enabled me to bear such a testimony. Now, it is perhaps not right for me to say it, but positively I felt I had preached a better sermon than I thought I had, and I felt thankful to God for the experimental and vital testimony there given; and I said to myself, Bless the Lord, the time will never come when I shall have to exclaim, “Alas, master, it was borrowed.” I can truly say, every sentence there of soul trouble is what I have gone through, and shall, no doubt, more or less, go through again. And I really felt refreshed; and if I had read that a day or two sooner it would have saved me some trouble; I felt encouraged and comforted. Mind, I am not saying this to advertise the sermon, but I am saying it as a declaration of the encouragement I got from my own work, I was going to say, or rather the work of the Lord, enabling me to bear such a testimony. Instead of repeating anything I said last Lord’s day morning, there is the sermon, you can buy it for a penny, and only half an hour to read it if you read it to yourself. Well, now, this white raiment is to be obtained, just the same as the gold, by faith, prayer, and decision. Now let us go to the word of the Lord and see how this is obtained. “What shall we say then?” says the inspired apostle. Why, we will say this, and when we say this, it is a truth; “that the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.” There it is, that beautiful little word, “Faith.” Perhaps I shall be forgiven if I use the common-place phrase there, “attained to a *readymade* righteousness;” they attained to a righteousness that was already wrought, that required not a thought, not a word, not a thread, not anything to be added; a righteousness divine, a righteousness eternal. And you must take the word “righteousness” there to mean the whole of the mediatorial perfection of Christ. Some good people have said sometimes that we are not justified by the blood of Christ; they say we are justified by his righteousness but redeemed by his blood. But then the word *righteousness* and the word *justification* are words used sometimes to denote the whole mediatorial perfection of Christ. Hence you will find, in the fifth of Romans, the apostle says, “Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from the wrath through him;” so that justification there means exemption. So, then, the Gentiles attaining unto righteousness, there I say the word *righteousness* means the whole of the mediatorial work of Christ, and by which the Gentiles were exempted entirely from sin, and wrath, and the curse, and the law, and death, and tribulation, in a word, exempted from everything into which sin had brought them, “even the righteousness which is by faith.” Oh, the sweet truth, my hearer, let us have another word upon this. What says it? “The word is near you;” whereas works are a long way off; you must have a life of perfection; and if you live a thousand years, you do not attain the righteousness until you come to the end, and even then, it will be no use as we now are sinners. “For Moses describes the righteousness which is of the law, the man that does these things shall live by them.” The man that cleaves to the legal system, whether the

law literally, or the gospel legalized, may go on, and on, and he will get no farther, and when he gets to the end of his life, even if it were possible for him to keep the law all he could say would be that he has done that which was his duty to do. But what says it? The word is near you, even in your mouth, and in your heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus," only confession must be a confession of understanding and a confession of necessity; to confess your need of him without understanding your need of him is an ignorant confession, amounting to nothing; but if you understand your need of him, see your need of him, and know your need of him in this perfection, and thus confess him, "and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved." Ah, then, my hearer what do we want this morning what do you want this morning to soften your heart, to enlighten your eyes, to expand your soul, to get rid of your burdens, to get rid of your fears, and your doubts, and your troubles, and to have grace to be reconciled to whatever you have to endure or pass through. What do you want this morning? Simply faith in exercise to believe in Christ's perfection, and to believe that God is leading you forth in the right way; and if you could see as God sees you, you would not have things altered for all the world; you have not one sorrow nor one trouble too many, nor one adversary too many; it is just as your heavenly Father sees good, and that perfection that is in Christ is a remedy for all, an end to all; and whenever you read of the days of their mourning being ended, they are ended by the perfection that is in Christ; when you read that they shall sorrow no more at all, that is fulfilled by the perfection that is in Christ; for Christ suffers no more, he has tribulation no more, he dies no more, because there is no necessity for him to do so. Here, then, lies that perfection that puts an end to all our troubles. Here is the white raiment, then, the Gentiles attained to. "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness." No; they do not. Why, when I first came into the religious world, and heard these legal men talking so much about the precept, and about the commandments, I actually was weak enough to think that they themselves did do what they told others to do; and I have sat in the pew and thought, "Oh! if I were like that holy man, that pious man, that dear creature, that good creature!" One gentleman I heard, he used to wear a gown, and I thought his very gown was holy; and I used to be distressed and grieved, and thought, "Whenever shall I be as pious in the flesh, and after the flesh, and with the flesh, and about the flesh, as these men are?" But in the Lord's own time I learnt the mighty difference. They had never been wounded as I had; they had never been convinced of their state as I had; the fountains of the great deep within their wicked hearts have never been broken up, to overflow all the banks of their supposed holiness and righteousness, and therefore I have learnt since that there is not one among them that practices what he preaches. They may practice it in part, but they don't practice one quarter of what they preach. And you may depend upon it, whenever men make a great pretension to perfection in the flesh, there is something dreadfully hollow somewhere; whereas the man that is made honest for God, he confesses what a poor sinner he is, and he falls in with the Gentile way of attaining righteousness, even the righteousness of Christ. He believes in Christ's perfection; he receives that perfection; and the others, that follow after a legalized gospel, they attain not unto the law of righteousness. "Wherefore?" says the apostle; "because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." Not abstractedly by the works of the law, no; these men take the law into their own hands, and they carnalize the law, and legalize the gospel, and think they take great care of both. Not like your high doctrine men, that don't take the law into their own hands, we bless God that the law was ordained in the hands of a Mediator, and that the dear Redeemer took the law into his hands, and that he was made under the law, and that he is the end of the law for righteousness; and that the law is dead to us, and that we are dead to that; that by the perfection that is in Christ, sin is

dead to us, and we are dead to that; Satan is dead to us, and we are dead to him; the world is dead to us, in this respect, and we are dead to that, in this respect; and tribulation is virtually dead to us by this, and we shall be dead to that. So that we rejoice that Jesus took the law into his own hands that he has made it honorable. He has established and honored it, and now we have nothing to do with it whatever, only to learn by it what we are as sinners. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." It is the Gospel that ministers life, and righteousness, and glory, and liberty, and peace. And so, speak, and so do, then, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Now the Jews stumbled at that stumbling stone, just as most professed Christians do now. Be assured, my hearer, of this, if your religion does not drive you to receive the ready-wrought, the complete work of the Lord Jesus Christ as your only plea in prayer before God; as your only way to obtain eternal life; as the only way in which God can approve of you; as the only way in which you can enter heaven; if you are not driven to that, you will never be saved. Your sins have nothing to do with it; your good works have nothing to do with it; no, nothing whatever; you must bring no goodness nor badness. If you set your sins up as hindrances, or your good works up as helps, I hardly know which is the greater sin of the two; whether to make out your sins as more able to destroy than Christ is to save, or to put your paltry doings, in whole or in part, into the place of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. No, my hearer; let us acknowledge the evil of sin, the defiling power of sin, the destructive power of sin; but, at the same time, don't let us acknowledge that sin is stronger than the Savior; and, on the other hand, let us have all the good works we can, only keep them in their place, don't put them into the place of Jesus Christ. If you come before God and put them before God as your plea before him, they will then become offensive in his eyes, and a stink in his nostrils. No, my hearer; if we come before God acceptably, it must be in the name of Emmanuel; it must be in all the victory of his atoning death, and in all the glory of his wondrous life. Hereby we shall have the white raiment, obtain this perfection, possess this perfection. And that perfection of blessedness that follows accords with the way in which that blessedness is obtained; for if the blessedness be obtained by perfection, the blessedness so obtained will accord with the perfection by which it is attained, and therefore must of necessity be fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. Now they stumbled at this stumbling-stone, and so they do now; they think they don't, but they do. I will not turn aside to point out the paltry resorts of men to keep up religious excitement in various departments; we see enough of it to make a man that loves the truth sick to his very soul, and turn away from such a carnal, scheming, professing world one can see the devil, in all shapes and forms, setting everything forth, by all the means the pulpit and the press can command, rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. Let then the afflicted and the poor and needy, let them stand out faithfully for that perfection we have in Christ Jesus the Lord. We must take his perfection as our religion, and that rule by which we are to judge our religion; for I must not judge it by my feelings, or else it would often be a very distressing thing, a very poor thing, a very weak thing. I often have to lament with the poet,

"All things of feeling show some sign,
But this unfeeling heart of mine."

All feeling is gone; I seem stripped and empty; and there I am in solitude, wretched, poor, miserable; neither faith, nor hope, nor prayer in exercise. There I am, more like a man that is dead, than like one that has life in his soul. If then, I judge of my religion at such times, by what I feel, it would be nothing; but if I judge of it by what Christ is, it is as good then as when I am on the

Mount of Transfiguration; it is as good then as when I go home to glory. There is nothing in my wicked heart or infidel nature that can affect my religion. Christ is my religion. I want no other. Christ is all in all.

While then, this perfection is a stumbling-block to the natural man, the apostle says, "He that believes on him shall not be ashamed." So then to obtain this white raiment is thus to be brought to know our need of this mediatorial perfection and receive the same.

But let us see if the Old Testament knew anything of this. Yes, almost numberless Scriptures in the Old Testament bear upon it, but in my little, short sermon, I must name only one, that in Solomon's Song. "I am black", sin has blackened us, darkened us, defiled us, corrupted us, destroyed us, "as the tents of Kedar," which were made of goat's hair, and they were thoroughly black, "as the curtains of Solomon," and they were thoroughly white, the finest linen that could be obtained. "Black, but comely." Where was her comeliness? In Christ. How she speaks in that beautiful book of her Beloved. She knew that her perfection was by him. You can almost see Satan coming in and saying, "Ah, you think you are comely; I'm afraid you are putting too much confidence in this comeliness you have in him; you are looking too much to that: perhaps it is not so well with you; you are going too far; there is perhaps something for you to do after all; don't you be deluded with such a doctrine as that you are complete and perfect in him." You can almost imagine Satan thus at work. But the Savior comes in and confirms the faith of his children; speaking of the church in her corporate capacity, and speaking of her as a woman, "You are all fair, my love; there is no spot in you," let the enemy say what he may; yes, by that perfection you look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. That confirms what the church had before recognized of her perfection that is in Christ. And the author of the 51st Psalm says, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Now we all admit that snow is the whitest thing in nature; but the author of that Psalm goes farther than this; "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." What a sweet expression that is; as though he should say, the whitest object is nature, there is not anything that can really, and truly, and adequately set forth that beauty, that purity, that perfection we have in Christ Jesus the Lord. Here then is the white raiment; here is the perfection we have in him.

I will now show *the essential importance of abiding by this perfection*, and this is suggested in the latter part of our text; "White raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear;" but before I come to that part, I will just have a few remarks upon the importance of abiding by this perfection. Noah felt the essential importance of abiding by the ark in its completeness. He worked by the rule of perfection until he reached that perfection; and the Lord confirmed the matter, for the Lord shut him in. There you see our text illustrated very clearly. I need not remind you of the paschal lamb, their abiding by that just as the Lord instituted it. I need not remind you of the tabernacle built in the wilderness, of Moses making all things according to the pattern shown him in the mount, that God might dwell therein, and dwell with the people, and the people with God. If then, in these typical and mere passing events, it was essential to natural life to abide by that perfection indicated in those circumstances, how much more essential now is it to abide by that completeness that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. Whatever you fail in, in other things, God grant you may never fail in this. Fail in other things you do; I am not going to flatter you, nor to speak of you as though you were faultless in yourselves. I like that beautiful description of the Christian's life, "The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God,

that loved me and gave himself for me;” there it is, that’s the life; filled with all joy and peace in believing. I sometimes get rid of my troubles in a moment. The exercise of faith in what Christ has done, in the perfection of his work, has many times ere I am aware made my soul like the chariots of Aminadab. Now the church of Sardis was dead to this very truth of which I am speaking. They were got, the church of Sardis, the people of that church, were got into such a state that they mingled other religions with the religion of Jesus Christ, contrary to what is commanded in the 19th of Leviticus, “You shalt not sow your field with mingled seed, neither shall a garment mingled of linen and wool come upon you.” And then, in the 22nd of Deuteronomy it says, “You shalt not sow your vineyard with different seeds; lest the fruit of your seed which you have sown, and the fruit of your vineyard, be defiled.” Now the devil’s plan is to sow with mingled seed. Oh, says Satan, don’t have free-grace seed exclusively; let me sow a few pious tares, and let us all grow together comfortably, that’s the best way. And so, Satan in all ages has been for mixing it. But no; if we would get a good clean crop, let us sow wheat, and wheat only; free-grace seed, and free-grace seed only, or else the wheat is defiled; and the object of Satan is to smother the wheat, and poison the wheat, and get rid of the truth and those that love the truth. So at Sardis they had a name to live, but were dead; they had lost sight of that perfection that is in Christ; they did not respect it, they did not regard it, they did not love it. And yet there were some among them that did; there are a few names even in Sardis that have stood out for free grace, that have not defiled their garments by the intermingling of these foreign religions, these free-will and creature inventions. “You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments,” but have stood out by faith in this perfection; “and they shall walk with me in white;” it is what they love, and they shall have it; it is what they have abode by, and they shall enjoy it; it is what they stand out for, and it shall stand out for them.” “They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy;” that is, accounted worthy. “He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.” Have you a name professedly in Zion? My hearer, nothing but Christ’s perfection, can keep your name there. If you think to keep your name there by anything of your own doing, God will blot your name out, he will; and when the names are called over, yours will be left out, and you will be left out consequently. But those who abode by this perfection, that were not dead to it, had a name to live and were alive, and Christ was their life, and they loved and clave unto him. That is the man that overcomes reverses, overcomes all that is hostile to this perfection; “He shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name,” because he has confessed mine, for “Whosoever shall confess me, I will confess, but whosoever shall deny me, him will I deny.” He has confessed my name in the perfection thereof; my name has been to him this perfection; my name has been to him as a strong tower. He has confessed my name, and that is an excellency that covers all his faults in other respects; he has confessed my name, and “I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.” Here then you see at once the solemn importance of being alive to this matter, and of being kept decided for that perfection that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. It is a delightful thing, oh, it has lighted up the valley of the shadow of death to millions; it lights up eternity with boundless and endless glory. Take this away, you take everything away. Let me have this, then I have everything.

But, lastly, “That you may be clothed.” To be found in him is the apostles earnest desire, for it is in the Lord all the seed of Israel are perfect. And so, the apostle, when looking at the Colossians, saw among the Colossians some inclined to glide off into philosophy; some into one thing and some into another, a sort of make-up, to sow mingled seed. Some ground will take one seed better

than it will another seed; everyone knows that. So, says a parson, I am going to preach at so-and-so; do you know whether it is free-will ground? because I have a sermon here with some free-will seed. Is it duty-faith ground? because, if it is, I will sow that. Is it high-doctrine ground? because, if it is so, I must sow free grace. And so he carries mingled seed, determined to have a crop of some sort; that's the way they do it. Whereas, the man that is taught of God, he goes on with a plough, and aims to plough up the dead soil, the hard heart, and thus to make way for the throwing in of free-grace seed. And the man that is sent of God, if nine-tenths of his seed fall upon stony ground, or the wayside, or among thorns, yet he is determined to sow none but good seed, and he that thus "goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Such an honest minister shall not labor in vain. Now, the apostle seeing the Colossians gliding off thus, he says, "Warning every man;" we warn you against the philosophy of the age; we warn you against Judaism; we warn you against all that would, take you away from the completeness that is in Christ; you are complete in him: warning every man against everything which would take you away from that. "Teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." There it is. I can hardly get away from this part of my subject, but I must, because what we have to come all accords with it. "That the shame of your nakedness do not appear." This is a phrase expressive of our state by nature. The fall unrobed us from that innocence in which we stood before the fall; sin unrobed us from that righteousness in which we stood; sin unrobed us from that love to God in which we lived; sin is our shame, so that we thus stand exposed to God's eternal wrath; Jesus Christ is the only way of escape. I will now bring a quotation or two from the sixty fourth of Isaiah to explain this part of our text. There is a sevenfold description there given of our state by nature, and the man that can set his seal to what I am going to say is born of God; the man that can set his seal, from his own personal experience, to what I am going to say, will go to heaven. The man that can say Amen, from his own experience, to what I am going to say, is destined to all the blessedness of eternity, as I will prove presently. First, then, "We are all as an unclean thing." The leper was to cry, "Unclean, unclean." This, then, is one lesson we are to learn, that in the flesh dwells no good thing, "All our righteousness are as filthy rags." Can you say that my hearer? Can you see that by nature all your reformations, and all your morality, though excellent in their place among men, yet when brought before God, and attempted to be worked into a righteousness as a way of acceptance before him, become, when tested by his holy and majestic law, nothing but filthy rags, so that you renounce the whole? "And we all do fade as a leaf." Ah, can you say that your goodness after the flesh has been as a leaf, and that you are no more use in the salvation of your own soul than an autumnal leaf would be of use to quench the conflagration of the universe? "And our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away;" so that we are without Christ, and without hope, and without God in the world. And there is none that calls upon your name, that stirs up himself to take hold of you." No, we never had a true prayer to God till he put the prayer into our soul; we never called upon his name truly until he first called upon us and gave us a sight and sense of what we were.

We regret that for want of space the Authors closing remarks are omitted.