

ALL SAINTS DAY

November 1, 2015

*Revelation 7:9-17: **“Clothed in White Robes”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is a saying in our society with which you are probably familiar. "Dress for success: you are what you wear." In other words, the clothing you wear will at least give you the appearance of success. Imagine for a moment what that might mean if it were literally true. You take an uneducated and inexperienced man and dress him up in the finest suit possible, a nice white button-down shirt, a power tie, shoes to fit, and tell him that he has just become qualified to be the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of the largest most lucrative corporation in the world. Even more, he goes to work each day so dressed, and he actually becomes competent and highly successful. Is that ridiculous?

Most of us would think it is ridiculous. And yet, this is true of our life in Christ. Steven A. Hein, in his book titled *The Christian Life Cross or Glory?* writes:

We incompetent and disqualified sinners are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, a constantly worn garment that gives us saintly status and life as God's children. With His righteousness, we are outfitted - made totally fit - for sainthood and citizenship in His Kingdom. And then miraculously, the robe of righteousness also creates and develops us on the inside into a mature image of the righteous Son of Man.

The Scripture supports this. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah writes: "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, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isaiah 61:10)." And in the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27)."

To put on Christ means to clothe oneself with the righteousness, wisdom, power, life and the Spirit of Christ. By nature we were clothed in the clothing of fallen Adam. Paul calls this outfit, "the old man." Before we can become the children of God, this old outfit must come off like soiled clothes. Then, God clothes us with the righteousness of Christ by means of Baptism, as Paul writes. He washes our sins away and makes us clean. Luther says: "with this change of garments a new birth, a new life stirs in us. New affections toward God spring up in the heart. New determinations affect our will. All this is to put on Christ according to the Gospel. Needless to say, when we have put on the robe of the righteousness of our Lord and Savior we must not forget to put on also the mantle of the imitation of Christ."

Indeed, the holy clothing of Jesus has a powerful, renewing effect on us. We are regenerated into a righteous reflection of what we wear by faith in our Baptism. As faith grows and matures, Christ's righteousness develops a new creation into a mature likeness of His human nature. As Jesus according to His human nature grew in wisdom and stature, so also does the new creation that has come forth in Baptism. The more we grow in Christ, the more daily living can take on a reflection of His righteousness and the fruit of faithfulness increasingly accents our life [Steven A. Hein, pg. 74]. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 13:14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the [sinful] flesh, to gratify its desires."

To put on Christ means to be declared righteous in the sight of God. We have been declared to be holy (without sin) because Jesus is holy (without sin). We are considered saints (holy people) in the kingdom of grace (the church on earth). Through the washing of Baptism we poor, miserable sinners, who are by nature sinful and unclean, are captured by Christ - participating in his death and resurrection - raised up in faith as a new creation. The whole Christian life is a living of Baptism where the child of God continually dies and rises with Jesus on a daily basis until one day, at the end, the sinful nature dies and is eradicated. In the words of Steven A. Hein, "Christians can actually say: *I was baptized, I am baptized, and I will be baptized.* Baptism is simultaneously a dying and rising work that is accomplished at the beginning (as the gateway to God); it is a work that God continually accomplishes in the Christian life; and, it is what He promises to accomplish in the end."

As Baptism is the washing and renewal in the blood of Jesus Christ, it continues to wash us whenever we are immersed in the teachings of the law and gospel. The law kills and the gospel gives life. We make no provision for the sinful flesh. Rather, our sinful desires die with Jesus and in the gospel of forgiveness, we are strengthened in his life to live. It is in this way that we saints (holy people) are growing in the faith. And, we look forward to the day when the sinful nature will die and disappear, and we will be saints (holy people) in the kingdom of glory forever.

Today we are celebrating All Saints Day. There are saints down here, and there are saints in heaven. The saints down here are all those who believe in Jesus Christ and are struggling and overcoming sin in this messed up world. The saints above have left their sinful flesh behind and are looking forward to a new body that will never be subject to sin again. Our first reading for this morning captures the final objective. It says, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-10)!'"

Salvation is always the objective. As it says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9). Salvation belongs to God and He gives it to us through his one and only Son. All saints are only saints because Jesus lived a holy life and died for all unholiness. All saints are described as being clothed in white robes, which means to be clothed in Christ. In this life, the white robes that cover us are only seen by faith. In the kingdom of glory, the white robes of Jesus Christ will be seen with our own two eyes. The saints who have gone on before us have fought the fight, run the race, and have kept the faith. For us, we are fighting, running, and keeping the faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.

With that, we are brought to another Scripture passage. In Revelation 7, we hear some words that help us to keep things in perspective: "Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?' I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'"

You will notice in this passage that those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb are also the ones coming out of the great tribulation. The tribulation is everything that wages war against faith in Jesus Christ. It is everything that would distract us from dying and rising in Jesus. The great tribulation is the worse it will get and how bad it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. The only thing that is going to preserve us in the great tribulation, or any tribulation, is the pardon of Christ's righteousness that renews and matures us into the stature of Christ. This happens as we are continually caught by him in his unconditional grace and empowered by his Holy Spirit. It only happens as long as we are using the means of grace.

Paul says in II Corinthians 5:17-18, 21, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ . . . God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Here Paul says it in a very easy to understand way. As the children of God and citizens of his kingdom (whether in the kingdom of grace or the kingdom of glory) we are what we wear! Dressed by faith in the robe of Christ, we are reckoned righteous by God and we have become a new creation in Christ - fashioned in His image that grows and matures into an image of the full stature of Christ. These are the "wedding clothes" that must be worn to the wedding feast, as it says in the parable found in Matthew 22. Only let us be certain that this portion of the parable does *not* pertain to us:

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 (Matthew 22:11-14).

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott