

'They parted my garments among them', John 19. 24.

First, the Bible reading:

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but let us cast lots for it, whose it shall be' ... Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

John 19. 23-25.

As far as we know, our Lord's garments represented the sum total of His earthly goods. Apart from these, all He could properly call His own was His 'cross'. 'He, bearing *His cross*', John had written a few verses before, 'went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha'.¹

It is Paul who, some 30 years later, in his letter to 'the saints ... at Colossae', writes of how He (the Lord Jesus) 'made peace through the blood of *His cross*',² and how He (the Lord Jesus) erased and set aside our bill of debt to God's broken law, 'nailing it', as he put it, 'to *His cross*'.³

As I said, our Lord's garments represented the sum total of His earthly goods. We are told (i) *what His cousin, John the Baptist, wore*: 'John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist',⁴ and we know something of (ii) *what the religious leaders of His day wore*, with enlarged fringes or tassels to their garments.⁵ But we know very little about (iii) *that which the Saviour wore*.⁶

We do know from His public teaching that He felt no great concern about how He was clothed. 'Why are you anxious about clothing?' He asked His disciples. 'Consider the lilies of the field ... they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these'.⁷

And yet our Lord's garments were not the grubby rags of a beggar. Clearly, from what we have read, His clothing was deemed by the soldiers to be very worthwhile spoil.

It seems likely that, by custom, the garments of an executed man were forfeit, automatically becoming the property of the soldiers on duty at the time,⁸ and that for this reason it was these men (and not 'His mother', who 'stood by the cross') who effectively 'inherited' our Lord's clothing.

We read in Acts 12 that, having had the apostle Peter arrested, Herod Agrippa 'put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him'⁹ (a 'quaternion' being a group of four soldiers). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, together with their centurion, it was four soldiers who were made responsible for our Lord's crucifixion.¹⁰

And therefore, in marked contrast to the **four women** who '*stood* by the cross of Jesus¹¹ ... looking on',¹² we read of the **four men** who '*sat down* and kept watch over Him there'¹³—presumably to prevent anyone from attempting to rescue Him.¹⁴

And it is these same four men who, as we read, '**took** His garments',¹⁵ who removed from Him the very garments which, not long before, having risen from the couch on which He had been reclining,¹⁶ He had willingly '**laid aside**' that He might perform the menial (slave-like) task of washing His disciples' feet.¹⁷

Scholars are generally satisfied that, apart from the seamless inner tunic, the four pieces which the soldiers distributed and apportioned among themselves by casting lots,¹⁸ consisted of (i) His sandals, (ii) His outer cloak-like garment, (iii) His head-gear, and (iv) His girdle¹⁹—which would each be similar in value.²⁰

And it was the same four men who then proceeded, by again casting lots, to decide which of them would secure for himself the star prize (that which was worth by far the most), our Lord's seamless inner tunic²¹

And **what breathtaking associations each of these garments had!**

In all likelihood these were the very same garments which had, less than a year before, shone ablaze with glory on the so-called 'Mount of Transfiguration', becoming:

(i) according to Matthew's account, as 'white as *the light*';²²

(ii) according to Mark's account, 'exceedingly white as *snow*, such as no launderer on earth could whiten them';²³

(iii) according to Luke's account, '*dazzling* white'²⁴ (the word rendered 'dazzling' being a strengthened form of the word used elsewhere to describe the blinding flash of lightning²⁵).

Yet now those garments became the property of four unnamed soldiers.

Just imagine. One of these soldiers left the scene carrying **a pair of sandals**, which the very greatest of Israel's prophets (John the Baptist)²⁶ had once confessed himself unworthy to *carry*,²⁷ and the strap of which he had confessed himself unworthy to *unloose*.²⁸

I wonder how many miles those sandals had covered, (i) as, at least three times each year,²⁹ the Saviour had walked the 65 miles from Galilee to Jerusalem and back and (ii) as He made His way, among a hundred other places, to Sychar's well,³⁰ Gadara's tombs³¹ and Bethesda's porches.³²

And how many eyes, I ask, had beheld those sandals as men and women were cast at His feet,³³ fell at His feet,³⁴ stood at His feet³⁵ or simply sat at His feet?³⁶

What I know, is that, although my Lord had been wearing those sandals when Mary of Bethany fell 'at His feet' on the way to *Lazarus's tomb* in John 11,³⁷ He was most certainly not wearing them when the women 'who had followed Jesus from Galilee³⁸ ... took hold of His feet' on the way from *our Lord's own tomb* in Matthew 28!³⁹

And this for the simple reason that, barely two days before, *a Roman soldier had carried them away from Golgotha*.

But, if one of the soldiers walked away with a pair of sandals, the second soldier took with him **a cloak-like garment**, the border, fringe or tassel⁴⁰ of which had once played an all-important role in the healing of a hopeless medical case, of a woman with a hemorrhage which she had failed to staunch over twelve long years.⁴¹

And we can hardly miss noticing that Doctor Luke intertwines his casebook account of this poor woman's healing with that of the raising of Jairus' daughter⁴² ... drawing attention, on the one hand, to a man who would gladly have given all that he had to hold on to something he had enjoyed for twelve years (namely, his 'only daughter'⁴³) and, on the other hand, to a woman who had 'already spent all that she had' in an attempt to rid herself of something she had endured for twelve years.⁴⁴

But it is most unlikely that soldier number two had ever heard of how that chronically ill woman from Capernaum was once healed by touching⁴⁵ an outer part of the cloak-like garment which he carried away that day.

The third soldier took away with him our Lord's **head-gear**, which may well have still exuded the sweet fragrance of the expensive pure nard with which Mary of Bethany had anointed His head only a matter of days before,⁴⁶ the fragrance of which had filled the whole house at the time.⁴⁷

You may, or may not, be aware but last Wednesday marked the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Sir Edmond Hillary, on 11 January 2008. As is well known, back on 29 May 1953, Sir Edmond and Tenzing Norgay became the first climbers to reach the summit of Mount Everest in the Himalaya mountain range. I understand that it is at least possible that the 'pure nard' which Mary expended on our Lord at Bethany had itself come from the high pastureland of the Himalayas.⁴⁸

But of the cause of any lingering sweet fragrance, of course, soldier number three knew nothing.

The fourth soldier took our Lord's **girdle**, little suspecting that the man on the central cross would soon wear, in the symbolic language of Revelation chapter 1, a girdle ('sash') of gold about His breast.⁴⁹

The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, tells us that the priest's sash was 'girded to the breast a little above the elbows'.⁵⁰ He also assures us that the girdle ('sash') of Israel's High Priest was distinguished from those of the ordinary priests by 'a mixture of gold interwoven'.⁵¹

By way of contrast, you and I have, not just a *High Priest* but a Great High Priest,⁵² and the whole of His girdle is gold!

But of such matters, soldier number four was, of course, wholly oblivious.

And then, finally, in all likelihood by the toss of some knuckle-bone dice,⁵³ one of the four won himself the star prize, and, together with his other item, took away with him our Lord's ***inner tunic***.⁵⁴

In that this tunic was both woven and seamless,⁵⁵ this tunic resembled that of Israel's High Priest.⁵⁶ But, unlike the garments worn by Caiaphas, who (when declaring our Lord guilty of blasphemy at His so-called trial and possibly⁵⁷ in direct disobedience to the Law of God⁵⁸) 'rent his garments',⁵⁹ our Lord's inner tunic had never been – and was not then – torn.⁶⁰

To conclude, in the context of a passage applied by the writer to the Hebrews to our Lord Jesus,⁶¹ the psalmist speaks metaphorically of 'all' the garments of our Lord Jesus as fragrant with⁶² 'myrrh and aloes and cassia'.⁶³

Based on a gospel message which focused on those words, in 1915 a young pianist, Henry Barraclough, penned the words of a song entitled 'Ivory Places'.⁶⁴ The first verse and refrain of that song read:

My Lord has garments so wondrous fine,
And myrrh their texture fills;
Its fragrance reached to this heart of mine,
With joy my being thrills.

Out of the ivory palaces,
Into a world of woe,
Only His great eternal love
Made my Saviour go.

And we can all say 'Amen' to that!

Notes

¹ John 19. 17. Simon of Cyrene could 'bear His cross' for Him, Matt. 27. 32, but he most certainly could not 'bear our sins' on that cross ('tree') for us, 1 Pet. 2. 24.

² Col. 1. 20.

³ Col. 2. 14.

⁴ Matt. 3. 4.

⁵ Matt. 23. 5.

⁶ We do know that:

(i) as a babe, He was wrapped in 'swaddling clothes', Luke 2. 7;

(ii) in the upper room, shortly before His death, He girded Himself 'with a linen towel', John 13. 4-5;

(iii) during the mockery at the time of His passion, He was arrayed, separately, (a) in 'a splendid robe' (possibly out the wardrobe of Herod Antipas), Luke 23. 11, and (b) in a scarlet/ purple cloak, Matt. 27. 28; Mark 15. 17;

(iv) when He was buried, His body was (courtesy of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus) 'bound in linen cloths', John 19. 40;

(v) when glorified, He is seen by John, 'in the Spirit', as 'clothed with a garment reaching to the feet, and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle ('sash')', Rev. 1. 13; and

(vi) at His second advent, He is seen by John, 'in the Spirit', as 'clothed with a garment dipped in blood', on which garment is written the name, 'King of kings and Lord of lords', Rev. 19. 13, 16; cf. Isa. 63. 1-6.

⁷ Matt. 6. 28-29.

⁸ 'The victim's clothes customarily became the perquisite of the executioners', D. A. Carson, *'Matthew: Expositor's Bible Commentary'*, on Matt. 27. 35. 'By custom the clothes of an executed person were the property of his executioners, since they were viewed as "spoil"', G. R. Beasley-Murray, *'John: Word Biblical Commentary'*, page 347.

So too, Thomas Constable, *'Expository Notes on the Bible'*, comments on John 19. 21-22.

⁹ Acts 12. 4.

¹⁰ 'Four parts, to each soldier a part', John 19. 23.

¹¹ John 19. 25.

¹² Mark 15. 40.

¹³ Matt. 27. 36.

¹⁴ 'Fearing lest a rescue should be attempted by the friends of Jesus', A. Carr, *'Matthew: Cambridge Bible'*, page 220.

¹⁵ This was the second occasion that the soldiers had removed our Lord's own clothes from Him; cf. Matt. 27. 28. Cf. 'they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing', Psa. 22. 18, which was literally fulfilled at the crucifixion, John 19. 24.

¹⁶ A. T. Robertson, *'Word Pictures in the New Testament'*, comments on John 13. 4.

¹⁷ John 13. 4. That the washing of somebody else's feet was an action often performed by a slave is clear from the words of the recently-bereaved Abigail in the Old Testament, when David proposed marriage to her: 'Let your handmaid', she replied, 'be a bondswoman to wash the feet of the servants of my lord', 1 Sam. 25. 40-41.

This was something a Gentile slave was expected to do, but not a Jewish slave. 'The washing of a master's feet was a menial task which was not required of a Jewish slave', C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to John, an Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, page 366.

'Scripture says, "you shall not make him serve as a slave", Lev. 25. 39. Hence the sages said, "A Hebrew slave must not wash the feet of his master, nor put his shoes on him, nor carry his things before him when going to the bathhouse ... for it is said, 'But over your brethren the children of Israel you shall not rule, one over another, with rigour', Lev. 25. 46', Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Nezikin, Babylonian Talmud, on Exodus 21. 2.

¹⁸ 'And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments among them, casting lots for them, to determine what every man should take', Mark 15. 24; cf. Matt. 27. 35; Luke 23. 34.

¹⁹ For example, 'Jesus will have had an outer garment (i.e., a robe), a tunic, a belt, sandals, and presumably a head covering', G. R. Beasley-Murray, *loc. cit.*

²⁰ See, for example, 'of nearly the same value', A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, volume II, page 592. Also Thomas Constable, *op. cit.*, comments on John 19. 23-24.

²¹ A. Edersheim, *loc. cit.*

²² Matt. 17. 2.

²³ Mark 9. 3.

²⁴ Luke 9. 29.

²⁵ This (*ἐξαστραπτῶν*) is a strengthened form of the word used by our Lord, when He said, 'as *the lightning (ἀστραπή)* which lightens (*ἀστραπτουσα*) one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of man will be in His day', Luke 17. 24.

²⁶ 'I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist', Luke 7. 28.

²⁷ 'I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to *carry*', Matt. 3. 11.

²⁸ 'One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap ('thong') I am not worthy to *loose*', Luke 3. 16.

²⁹ Deut. 16. 16.

³⁰ John 4. 5-6.

³¹ Luke 8. 26-27.

³² John 5. 2.

³³ Matt. 15. 30.

³⁴ Mark 5. 22; 7. 25; Luke 17. 16.

³⁵ Luke 7. 38.

³⁶ Luke 8. 35; 10. 39.

³⁷ John 11. 32.

³⁸ Matt. 27. 55-56.

³⁹ Matt. 28. 1, 9.

⁴⁰ 'Tassels were sewn on the four corners of every Israelite's cloak (Num. 15. 37-41; Deut. 22. 12) as reminders to obey God's commands. While the tassels could easily become mere showpieces (Matt. 23. 5), Jesus Himself, like any male Jew, doubtless wore them', .D. A. Carson, *ibid.*, comments on Matt. 9. 20-21.

⁴¹ Luke 8. 44; Matt. 9. 20; cf. Num. 15. 38; Matt. 23. 5, and, for separate reasons, (hyperbolically) Luke 6. 19.

⁴² Luke 8. 40-56.

⁴³ 'He had one only daughter, about twelve years of age', Luke 8. 42

⁴⁴ 'A woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any', Luke 8. 42-43; cf. 'A certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse', Mark 5. 25-26.

⁴⁵ Such is the wonder of the incarnation that this desperate woman was able to 'touch the hem' of the *earthly* garment of Him whose *heavenly* robe no seraph would ever have dared touch, Isa. 6. 1-2.

⁴⁶ In a passage applied in the New Testament to our Lord Jesus (Psa. 45. 6-7 with Heb. 1. 8-9), the psalmist speaks metaphorically of the garments of our Lord Jesus as 'fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia', Psa. 45. 8.

⁴⁷ Matt. 26. 7; Mark 14. 3; John 12. 3.

⁴⁸ 'The essence of this ointment was derived from pure nard, which is an aromatic herb grown in the high pasture-land of the Himilayas between Tibet and India', W. Hendriksen, '*New Testament Commentary*', comments on John 12. 3; 'Spikenard, nard: A costly perennial herb (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), with an aromatic root, native to E India ... cultivated on the Himilayas', '*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*', page 1151.

⁴⁹ Rev. 1. 13. John informs us in his gospel that he was known personally to the High Priest, and that, as such, he had access to the High Priest's palace (or court), to which he was also able to secure access for Peter, John 18. 15-16. I assume, therefore, that John was familiar with the High Priest's garments as described by Flavius Josephus and it is at least possible that John may have interpreted both the Saviour's garment to the foot and the golden sash in terms of His priesthood.

⁵⁰ Flavius Josephus, '*The Antiquities of the Jews*', Book III, Chapter VII, Paragraph 2. Cf. 'A long robe reaching to the feet, was an oriental mark of dignity ... denoting high rank or office such as that of Parthian kings or of the Jewish high priest who wore a purple one. High girding was another mark of lofty position, usually reserved for Jewish priests', J. Moffatt, '*The Revelation of St. John: The Expositor's Greek Testament*', page 344.

⁵¹ Flavius Josephus, *ibid.*, Book III, Chapter VII, Paragraph 4.

⁵² Heb. 4. 14.

⁵³ J. F. Drinkard Jr, '*The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, Revised Edition*', page 362; cf. Paul Maier, '*The Genuine Jesus*', page 234.

⁵⁴ John 19. 24.

⁵⁵ John 19. 23.

⁵⁶ Exod. 28. 32: 'In order that the (garment) might not be torn when it was put on, the opening for the head was to be made with a strong hem, which was to be of weavers' work; from which it follows as a matter of course that the robe was woven in one piece, and not made in several pieces and then sewed together', C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, '*Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*', Volume II, page 200.

⁵⁷ Contrary to John Gill, '*Exposition of the New Testament*', comments on Matt. 26. 65; but see W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, '*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*', Volume III, page 256.

⁵⁸ 'You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue ... it may not be torn', Exod. 28. 32; 'the high priest ... shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes', Lev. 21. 10; cf. Lev. 10. 6.

⁵⁹ Matt. 26. 65; Mark 14. 63.

⁶⁰ John 19. 24.

⁶¹ Psa. 45. 6-7 with Heb. 1. 8-9.

⁶² Possibly signifying, 'woven or impregnated with'.

⁶³ Psa. 45. 8; 'the myrrh at His birth and both myrrh and aloes at His burial (Matt. 2. 11; John 19. 39)', J. M. Flanigan, *'Psalms: What the Bible Teaches'*, page 205.

⁶⁴ Billy Graham told the story as follows:

'The famous gospel song "Ivory Palaces" was written very near to my home in the mountains of North Carolina. In the summer of 1915, the famous evangelist Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman was preaching at the Presbyterian Conference Grounds at Montreat. With him were the song-leader Charles M. Alexander, soloist Albert Brown, and their pianist, Henry Barraclough. Barraclough, the author of this hymn, was a twenty-four-year-old Britisher; he had met Chapman the previous year during a preaching mission in England.

'During the conference, the evangelist spoke one evening on the forty-fifth Psalm. He believed, as I do, that this is a prophetic, "Messianic" psalm which speaks of the relationship of Christ, the bridegroom, to His bride, the Church

'After the evening service, "Charlie" Alexander and Henry Barraclough drove some friends to the Blue Ridge YMCA Hostel a few miles away. Sitting in the front seat of the car, young Barraclough thought about the message and the four short phrases of the refrain began to take shape in his mind. When they stopped at a little village store, he quickly wrote them down on a "visiting card"—the only paper that was available. Returning to the conference hotel, he worked out the first three stanzas, using the outline of Chapman's message. The following morning Mrs. Alexander and Mr. Brown sang the new hymn in the Montreat conference session'

'Henry Barraclough was not a prolific song writer. "Ivory Palaces" was his only masterpiece, but it has been sung around the world'.

Quoted in *'Crusader Hymns and Hymn Stories: compiled and edited by Cliff Barrows and Donald Hustad'*, pages 25-26.

For those interested, a recording of George Beverley Shea singing three verses and the refrain of the song can be freely accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BErZafdqBcU>.